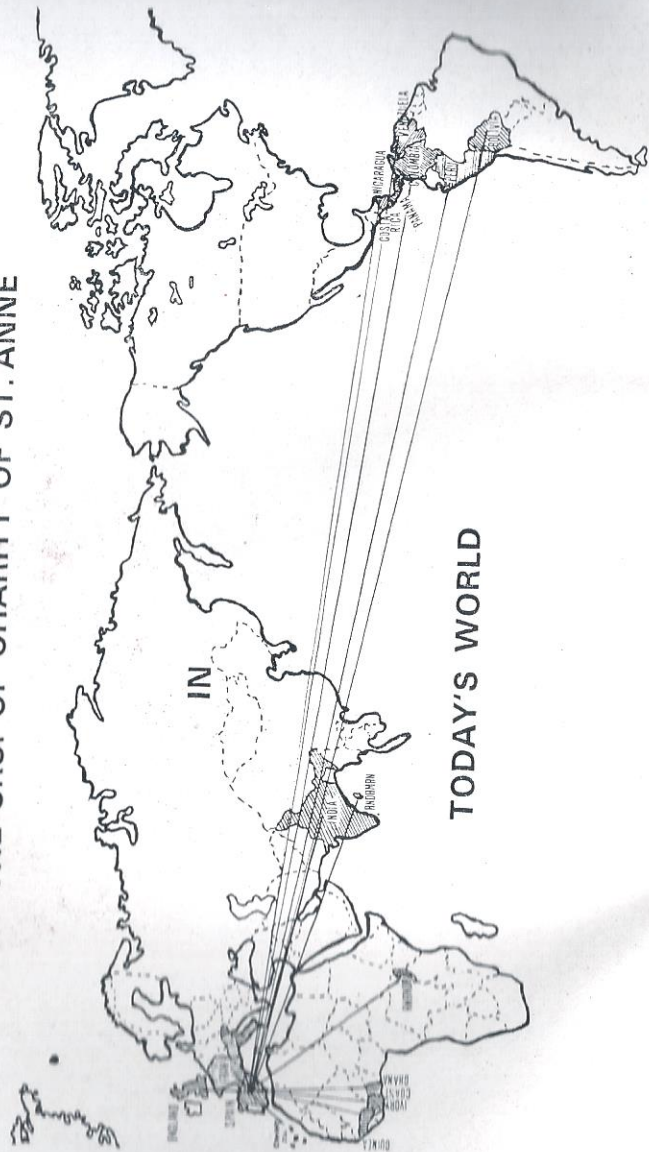


# Pabla Bescos Espierrez

A Sister of Charity of St. Anne

ANAND PRESS, GAMDI-ANAND

THE SRS. OF CHARITY OF ST. ANNE



PABLA BESCOS ESPIERREZ

A Sister of Charity of St. Anne

## PREFACE

The Saints are presented to us as people who served God and the world with a total dedication.

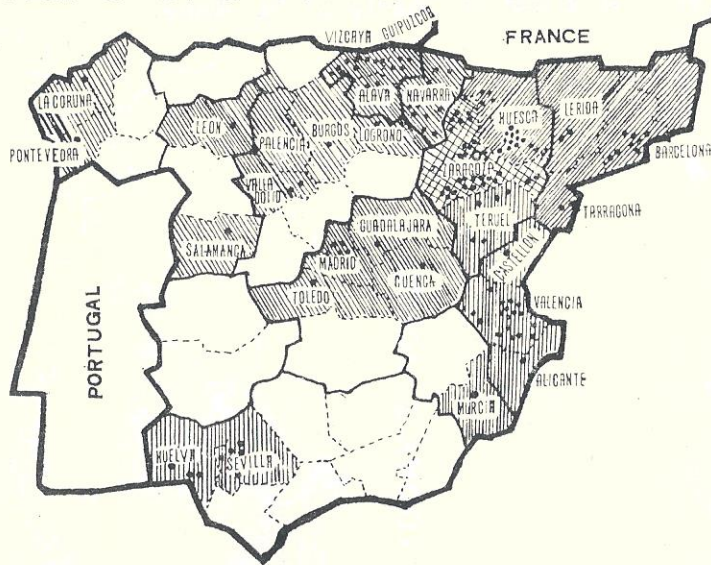
Mother Pabla Bescos Espierrez is another model in that line. She loved and served God and her neighbour with a charity to a heroic degree.

In a world where different people follow different ideals, it becomes difficult to present the life of a saint. It was common in the times before Vatican II, to picture a saint as a person who was born holy, of holy parents and managed to remain so, away from the world of sin and corruption, till the end of his or her life.

Another fashion prevailed soon after Vatican II: popular saints were those who began as ordinary or even spoiled children and lived in an unhealthy or unholy atmosphere, but then changed themselves totally under the influence of grace. It is not clear whether that fashion still continues to be popular. Take, for instance, the case of the candidates for priestly and religious life. Not only the life of the candidates, but also the moral and human standards of their parents are now being carefully scrutinized at the time of their admission. And the reason is that people nowadays do not believe in too many miracles of nature and grace. If people who did not grow in a healthy atmosphere are less encouraged now to become priests or religious, such people may again become less popular as model saints.

Be what it may, this book has been written neither to fit into a Pre-Vatican nor a post-Vatican mould. This is not the adaptation of a drama. It is a collection of impressions of the sisters, priests and other people who lived with or came in close contact with Mother Pabla during her life.

## THE SRS. OF CHARITY OF ST. ANNE



TODAY IN SPAIN

Every life incident of a saint cannot be a norm for everybody and for any situation. Besides, all that holds good for a particular century or era cannot be equally good for other times. Certain values, however, remain valid for all seasons.

Pabla did her best to live as a perfect religious sister, in spite of her poor health and her penances had no limits. She practised the religious vows according to the best traditions of the religious life of her time; her spirit of obedience and poverty was heroic, her union with God and love of purity are almost angelic. The people of our age of technology may not be able to follow every step of her life. An adaptation of the principles to the changed circumstances of our time is also required.

Born and brought up in an obscure village of North-East of Spain in the second half of XIX century, Pabla, during her prolonged life of a sister, nurse, teacher, superior and General, had to deal with royal officers and high-ranking ecclesiastics as well as farmers and country people, with whom she was perfectly at home. She loved and served all, whole heartedly and cheerfully, finding solace only in a life of intense prayer and union with God.

The people of our generation may not be enthusiastic about fasting on bread and water and doing penance with ropes and hair-shirts, but it would be wrong to conclude that people today are against the ideals of challenge and hardships. Pabla, who combined joyful love with a hard life, stands as a model for us modern people. In her endeavour to lead a life of intense prayer and union with God she had to struggle continually with her nature.

Mother Pabla is rightly considered the second Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne.

This Congregation was founded in 1804 by Mother Maria Rafols at Zaragoza in Spain. The latter imparted the charism to her daughters. The former shaped and developed that charism into a flourishing modern congregation. I myself feel very happy to know and appreciate closely, the missionary zeal of the daughters of Mother Pabla, and, as we introduce this life to the English medium world, I pray that this book, written by one of her beloved daughters, Mother Maria Leona, may inspire many young girls to embrace the religious ideal set by Mother Pabla.

Before I conclude, I express my deep gratitude to Frs. Pierre Fallon S.J. and Lawrence Rodrigues S.J., both of Calcutta Jesuit Province, who patiently went through the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions on the language and style of the book.

Port Blair,  
Andaman & Nicobar Islands,  
India

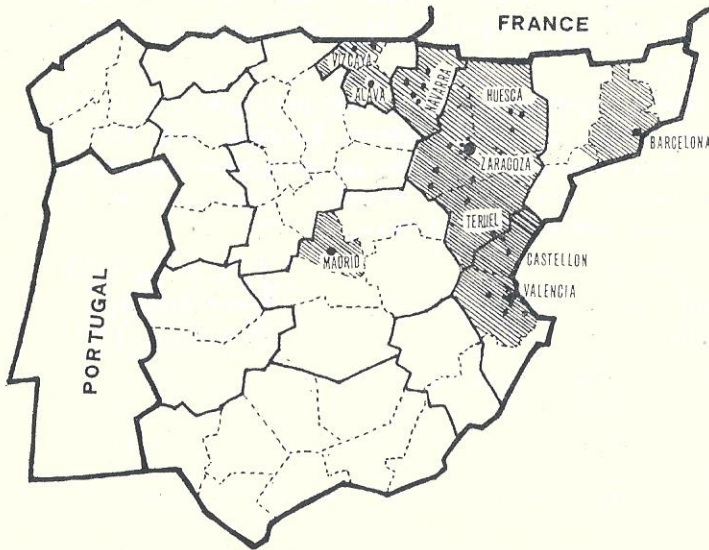
J. ALMEIDA S.F.X.  
Easter Sunday  
19th April, 1981.

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## THE SRS. OF CHARITY OF ST. ANNE



## IN M. PABLA'S TIME IN SPAIN

## BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

One of the most beautiful spurs of the Pyrenees Mountains, in the north-east of Spain is the Mount Guara in Upper Aragon, Province of Huesca, noted for its deep ravines and numerous clefts. Small villages scattered all over its slopes offer charming scenic beauty. Panzano, where we start the life story of Pabla Bescos Espierrez, the protagonist of this book is one of them, a typical village of rural Spain, cut across by two rivulets Hormiga and Calcon and covered by olives, vineyards and extensive fields of wheat cultivation.

Going back to as early as 1640, Panzano is dominated by a single street which ends on a square, where a huge cross at the centre was the source of faith and inspiration to the simple inhabitants of the village, all absorbed in their field work.

A few steps away from the square, the curious visitor observes an impressive building bearing in its front the coat-of-arms of one quarter in a golden background. A heart at its centre, projecting a red cross with two staffs at the side. The heart and the cross is the coat of arms of the Bescos and it appears first on their ancestral house of Bastaras from where all the Bescos of the province of Huesca take their origin.

In 1640 we find Pascual Bescos, as the owner of the house and all the titles and properties of the Bescos of Bastaras. He was succeeded by his son Pascual Bescos Servise. Another son, Antonio Bescos moved to a village next to Panzano and married Teresa



Mother Pabla in prayer

Fantova, the daughter and heir of an ancient nobleman of Panzano. Thus starts the origin of Bescos at Panzano. Pabla is a descendant of the family of Antonio and Teresa. At the time of her birth, the parents did not live in the beautiful home of Fantova, but in a house which is up to this day called the "Villa House", and is perfectly similar to the present type of the old houses of the farmers of Upper Aragon.

Pabla was the 7th child in a family of eight, born to Jose Bescos Pascual and Maria Francisca Espierrez, a typical devout and austere christian couple who inculcated a deep faith, piety and honesty in the heart of their children. Their house belonged to the poor, who could never step in and return empty handed.

Born on the 24th January, 1848, Pabla, according to a tradition in the family, was baptized on the following day. Jose, Maria, Ventura, Antonio, Tomasa and Miguel were born before her and Sebastiana was the last child.

Pabla had a happy childhood in the company of her parents and brothers and sisters, though it was also marked by some crosses. One of these was her grand-mother who was a mental patient. At times it became necessary to keep her closed in a separate house, but Pabla without any fear would remain with the old lady to clean and feed her and thus maintain her very calm. Till her death, Pabla constantly took care of her and gave her sweet company. Her grand-father too had gone blind; Pabla was patiently accompanying him to the church. Thus God was preparing in his own way this prodigious child for the great work of charity that she would later on do for the disabled, the poor and the suffering humanity.

## Love For The Poor

She had a particular attraction for the poor. At once she would run to clean them and provide clean clothes.

It is narrated that once a sweet but ragged woman dropped in their house; Pabla, without asking anyone in the house, took out the best dress of her mother and joyfully dressed her up. The woman kissed Pabla and said, "My child, may God repay you for your kindness" and she disappeared. Pabla experienced such a great joy in her heart at that moment that she went running to tell her mother about the incident. The mother came to see the woman but she was not to be found anywhere in the village. It was believed that she could have been the Blessed Virgin Mary; moreover after a few days, the dress offered by Pabla was again found in her mother's trunk.

## HER FIRST COMMUNION AND SIGNS OF A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Pabla was initiated, when she was eleven, into the preparations of her first Holy Communion, a date to be remembered in the life of any christian child and much more in the life of the saints.

Peace and tranquility is the common characteristic of the farmers engaged fully in their field work. These christian virtues make these simple folk at once so lovable and attractive. The women, in particular, besides the innumerable chores which are inherent to their sex, have also to make themselves available to the innumerable jobs in the field like carrying the food, watering the plants, etc. The roles and jobs are probably changed now with the advent of technology, but it is easy to imagine that over a hundred years ago, when Pabla was a growing child, the day's duties in a farmer's family must have been the same as those of the present day's farmer in a backward rural area. Francisca Espierrez knew to keep her five daughters busy for the whole day. She wanted to mould them into strong and hard-working women as the one whose praises we hear in the Book of Wisdom of the Old Testament. She did not exempt Pabla from any of these duties in the house, but probably due to her delicate health, Mrs. Francisca would not send her to work in the field.

### Schooling

It was not common in those days to send girls to school. There was only one school and a mixed one at

Panzano at the time. Pabla indicated to her mother her strong desire to study. And the mother, against the tradition, agreed to her wish.

Manuel Gros, who was in charge of the school of Panzano, accepted Pabla happily and took a tender care of her, keeping her always close to him, apart from the boys. With her sharp mind, prodigious memory and hard work, she made quick progress in studies. She was frequently presented as a model student and Mr. Manuel Gros, as it is typical of a good teacher, watched her progress with a great satisfaction. He never ceased to admire her brilliant mind allied to a capacity for sustained work. Love for order and precision, which would later on characterize her life, enabled her to achieve a lot without much effort.

The routine of the school did not change her life in any way. As she returned from school, she fulfilled first her school work and then joined her sisters, who, impressed more and more by her humility and exceptional qualities, always sought her company. In her turn, she too would always strive to please and help them. Two of the five sisters came to occupy a place of preference in her heart. Tomasa, who soon became her close confidante and her youngest sister, Sebastina on whom she will soon have a motherly hold. Later on, Sebastiana became her first spiritual daughter. Pabla guided and formed her first steps towards the religious life when she was still at home.

### Pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of SS. Cosmas and Damian

Since time immemorial, the people of nine villages with Panzano in the leadership, had a pious custom



of going in the month of May on a pilgrimage to the famous sanctuary of the Patrons of the District, SS. Cosmas and Damian, situated on one of the most beautiful slopes of the mountain. It was an interesting break in the monotonous village life and an eloquent proof of the old Spanish faith. Hectic preparations preceded the pilgrimage. The mothers would relate to their children the life story of the saints.

The pious people of those days did not consider pilgrimage as we would do today. It was not a time for entertainment and dissipation of the mind, but rather an occasion for rest from their field work in order to allow one's soul to relish the spiritual food. A certain amount of mortification would always accompany the acts of devotion. And the last portion of the route was covered on foot.

Pabla was very fond of this pilgrimage. It was very much to her taste and affection and she too would go barefoot like the elders and thus offer to the Lord that suffering. The devotion of SS. Cosmas and Damian was so much engraved in her mind that she maintained it till her death. Among the articles which belonged to her and are kept as precious relics, there is a frame of the holy doctors, which she used to keep in her cell.

Josefa Naya, one of her closest friends, gives an account of another excursion which Pabla joined in her childhood and it goes to prove her thirst for penance and mortification. It was a year of severe drought. The problem of hunger reached a frightful stage in the whole district. Those people of strong faith organized special prayers. On the other side of the hill there is a famous sanctuary of St. Urbez. It

was decided to take up a pilgrimage to the sanctuary, but, as the route was too long and difficult, only the menfolk would participate in it. Pabla and her friend Josefa Naya offered to join and asked permission from their parents who agreed to it. They completed it barefoot and in silence and on hungry stomach.

In such an atmosphere of work, order and devotion, Pabla's childhood was rolling on, she was now looking forward impatiently to the day of her first holy communion: although the details of her preparation are not available, it is likely that she often meditated on the passion of Our Lord. The meditation on the sufferings of God Incarnate was the favourite topic of her piety and fervour. When her sisters Tomasa and Ventura often found her in tears and asked the reason she would say: "I am crying for the ingratitude of man, for so much love and mercy."

It was also discovered during this period of her preparation for the first holy communion that Pabla manifested an increased zeal for the sanctification of her sisters and friends, an earnest desire of doing good and an insatiable desire to listen to the Word of God.

She felt sad that her sisters and friends were going to the park and during the games they often mixed with the boys. She pleaded with them to join her at the game of billiards. After entertaining them for a long time and winning them over fully, she would make them sit around her and narrate innocent stories. On other occasions she proposed to play the game of virgins and play the role of the church. She brought two dolls and adorned them with flowers which they collected from the neighbouring fields.

She also wove crowns of flowers and adorned the other children and made them pray on their knees and sing for a long time to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The same zeal had moved her to initiate herself into the practice of mortification. Conquering her natural shame, her earnest desire for mortification and zeal, prevailed over her reservation which forced her to hide that desire. She asked companions to discipline her and they would oblige her.

She also availed very diligently of all the occasions to practice the little acts of charity. If she came across an elderly person on the road, she stopped to wish respectfully and kiss the hand and offered to carry a bag or parcel, if any. She requested and obtained from her mother the pleasure of accompanying her when she visited the sick people of the village. It was her pleasure to console them and offer any service.

Every Sunday she attended mass with her home people. It was usually a sung mass. She listened with great attention to the homily which she would later on explain to her sisters. On the same evening she liked to go to the parish priest asking him to explain what she had not understood fully. The holy priest, Fr. Juan Monclus, did it with a great pleasure admiring at the same time her great innocence and devotion. On his advice she joined the catechism classes of the First Holy Communion. At catechism as well as at the school, Pabla was the most proficient of all children. She also helped the priest to prepare the other children until they were fully instructed.

### **First Holy Communion**

She received her First Holy Communion at the age

of thirteen. Her parent and her brothers and sisters have preserved the remembrance of that memorable day to the minute detail. She woke up very early and recollected herself in prayer. She kissed the hand of her father and embraced her mother and set out for the church. It was her resolution of this day to become a religious, as she told her mother when she returned home; on the day of her first encounter with Jesus, she offered herself to Him forever. Since the day of her First Holy Communion she never left the house except to go to the church. There she would remain as long as her duties would allow. The place of her preference was a chapel of the Holy Rosary. Her family had been entrusted with decoration and maintenance of this chapel since time immemorial.

### **The Call of God**

Her sisters used to participate in all the games of their age which were honest and innocent, but they never managed to get Pabla to accompany them. Her main distraction was prayer, the reading of pious books and the company of her good mother. This excellent lady never objected to Pabla's desire to become a religious and with her advice and blessing Pabla started taking some tuitions in latin from the Parish Priest. She was, however, too small to seek admission in any convent. For the time being she could only prepare herself in all the ways for the new state of life which she was intending to embrace.

Her wish was immediately known in the family and not a single voice rose against it, as it often happens even among exemplary christian families. It only helped to increase love among all the members of the family, particularly the five sisters.

In the evenings they would all sit together and ask Pabla to narrate holy stories to them. Once she spoke to them with such an unction and she was so full of God that her sister Tomasa rose to say: "All four of us should also become religious with Pabla". And all agreed. But the young Pabla, undoubtedly inspired by God, remarked to them that the vocation for religious life is not the effect of a passing enthusiasm, but a real and certain call from Heaven. The same evening her two elder sisters met Josefa Naya, their intimate friend, and expressed their desire to join Pabla in the religious life. Josefa, also a pious girl, was also taken up by their enthusiasm and all of them went to see Pabla, who said: "I do not believe that the Lord is calling you all for the religious life. You can also sanctify yourselves living in the world and it may be that in the course of time the Lord will accept the sacrifice which you want to offer, through your children".

Truly, God saw complacently their desire and her two sisters, Ventura and Tomasa, and their friend Josefa offered each one of them a daughter to the Lord. Mother Pabla herself admitted them in the Institute as Mother general of the Congregation.

### **The Cloister of Casbas**

The years were passing on and time was approaching for Pabla to knock at the doors of a congregation.

It had been decided in principle that she would become a cloistered sister. It now remained to choose the congregation. She sought admission in the cloister of Casbas, while still very young, and was admitted without difficulty.

## **HER CONTACT WITH THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF ST. ANNE**

### **Struggles and Contradictions**

An apparently insignificant fact worked a radical change in the orientation of the life of Pabla. She had been already admitted in the cloister of Casbas. Preparations were going on at home for her departure and the entire Panzano became aware of it.

As it happens often in such cases, each and every one wanted to give his or her opinion on the matter. A small village with no great events to divert the attention of its inhabitants from their ordinary occupations, it found sufficient material to issue comments on the young Pabla's decision to opt for cloistered life. The decision, which had found no opposition at home, was opposed by the people of the village. It was commonly remarked that Pabla was becoming a cloistered nun to run away from work. When Pabla heard repeatedly those words "to run away from work", she was terribly hurt and a period of uncertainties cropped up in her mind which was a real torture of her life for a long time.

Candid as she always was, she exposed the state of her soul to the priest who was her spiritual director. The prudent and wise priest saw in this sudden development something more than a passing phase. Thinking that God might have his own plan for Pabla, he consoled and guided her; and her departure for the cloister was put off for some time.

The priest had a sister who had joined the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity and was now posted at the Mercy House of Huesca. He advised Pabla to visit once this Institution and watch with her own eyes their ministries and form her opinion on this new type of life which is equally heroic and acceptable to the Lord, as was the vocation to the cloister. Pabla went to see the Mercy House of Huesca accompanied by her sister, Tomasa.

The Congregation which was entrusted with the Hospital and the Mercy House of Huesca was the one, of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, founded by Mother Maria Rafols. At the time of Pabla's first visit to Huesca there still lived in that community Sr. Esperanza, Sr. Manuela, Sr. Tomasa, Sr. Pabla, Sr. Dolores, Sr. Maria, Sr. Rosa and Sr. Engracia who had lived with the foundress during her exile, received her education and a powerful stimulus for heroic virtues and were following generously a life of perfection, as they were taught by the holy Mother.

The way they received Pabla was most touching, frank and cordial. But she was surprised that they did not utter a word to invite her to join their Congregation, on the contrary, they described vividly the hardships of their life and said that theirs was the smallest and most humble among all the congregations of Holy Mother the Church. All those aspects focussed by the sisters, the hardships, continuous work and prayer, the absolute immolation of one's life, were the most secret aspirations of Pabla's soul.

The fact is that her visit to Huesca cleared all her doubts and showed her clearly that God was calling her to this Congregation. With a great simplicity she

exposed to the sisters her desire to remain with them and humbly requested to be admitted by them. The sisters, however, gave her faint hopes because her sickly appearance made them think that she would not be able to stand such a vocation which required a robust health. They also did not reject her totally for the modest, angelic and simple attitude of the candidate had indeed captivated them.

### **Her indomitable resistance**

The two sisters returned to Panzano: Pabla, struggling between fear and hope, her sister Tomasa making hers, the cause of her beloved Pabla, praying for and suffering with her; from that day onwards she became her confidante and her consoling angel. It is easy to understand with what anxiety Pabla would recollect herself in prayer to release all the feelings that were overflowing her soul. The more she prayed, the firmer she became in her conviction. Once she saw the will of God, she never turned back. Neither the tests nor the contradictions would shake her confident hope. She was now sure that the word of God could not fail.

The confessor, to whom Pabla gave the account of her absolute determination of becoming a Sister of Charity, confirmed her in her resolution. The parents never opposed her wish. One thing, however, was lacking: the admission in the congregation.

Time passed and there was no ray of light from any side. There was no word from the sisters of Huesca nor did she dare to insist lest she might get another refusal. But she suffered so terribly that her sister Tomasa decided to visit Huesca again: unfortunately,

this time the refusal was stronger still. The sisters said that it was impossible to admit her on account of poor health and she would not be able to face any test, they said.

In spite of this, Pable was firm in her mind. Modest in her humility and totally abandoning herself to God's designs, she cried, suffered and prayed hoping against all hopes.

In such circumstances and in the face of two refusals, the holy priest, Fr. Juan Monclus felt that it was his duty to intervene in the case. He wrote to the sisters and described that the candidate was a real treasure of all the virtues and requested them to accept the girl just for a few days in their company. The sisters agreed and the young Pabla hastened her departure as much as possible, a journey which was decisive for her.

Fr. Monclus proved right. The sisters believed that heaven had sent them an angel; her modest and angelic behaviour, the sweetness of her face, her few but prudent words, her readiness to work, her recollected mind and, most of all, her attitude during the community prayers did surprise the community. So much perfection in a young candidate was found incredible and thus did they write to Fr. Juan Monclus.

### **Admission in the congregation**

Pabla, on her part, thought that she had been transferred to paradise. The pre-test lasted a little over a month. The sisters decided to admit her and sent her home to make all the preparations for her final admission into the congregation.

The entire family rejoiced with Pabla. They had accompanied her in her hours of trial, it was but proper now to share her joys. During four years, since her preparations to join the convent of Casbas at the age of 16 till now when all her difficulties vanished from the horizon, it had been a life of continuous anguish.

The last days that she spent in her paternal house were marked by an incident, similar to which many more would occur in her subsequent life: When a child was born to her sister Ventura, Pabla held the child in her hands and told the happy mother: "This child will become a religious". And in fact she did.

Finally, the day arrived for her to leave the house. It was a big event in the village. People all over had very expressive feelings of gratitude to Pabla. They showered their blessings upon her recalling her modesty, fervour and charity; particularly the poor, so much loved by her, thanked her profusely. And if such was the sorrow of the village, one can imagine what would have been the feelings of her parents, brothers and sisters. The void created in the house by her departure could never be filled. Her sisters hurried to collect all that belonged to her to preserve those things with veneration: a counterpane which she had prepared on crotchet, a firepan where she roasted delicious food for her mother, her dresses and her beautiful plaited hair. As the family scattered in the course of years with the marriage of the sisters, her plaited hair was given as a precious gift to Tomasa who had so closely shared her struggles and difficulties. She always kept it as a great treasure and on solemn occasions she would take it out and make her two

daughters kiss it and would never cease to describe to them the virtues of her beloved Pabla.

This plaited hair is now preserved in the Congregation as a precious relic. And not only the members of her family but the entire Panzano maintains fresh and alive its remembrance.



Entrance of the House of Bescos family  
where Mother Pabla was born

A NOVICE IN THE HOSPITAL OF OUR  
LADY OF GRACE, ZARAGOZA

**Her entrance**

On a piece of paper found in one of her devotional books and which she probably used as a remembrance of continuous gratitude to the Lord for all the favours and graces received, are noted the important dates of her life: The paper reads: "I donned the holy habit on the 5th May, 1869." As the time of postulancy was six months in those days, it can be concluded that she arrived at the Hospital in the second half of October or the beginning of November, 1868. Her beloved mother certainly must have accompanied her when Pabla entered the imposing precincts of that institution built for the suffering humanity. She must have left her beloved Pabla, the most precious fruit of her marriage at the portals of the hospital amidst feelings of joy and sorrow. Henceforth Pabla would live in this hospital where the atmosphere was totally different from that of the peaceful surroundings of her home and her village, Panzano. We have no account of how Maria Francisca Espierrez bade farewell to Pabla, but she must have shed abundant tears at the time of that painful separation.

**The Hospital of Our Lady of Grace**

The Hospital of Our Lady of Grace had been founded by King Alphonsus V of Spain under the title URBIS ET ORBIS (Hospital of the City and of the World) for, to be admitted into it, no other title was



Church of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. Mother Pabla prayed everyday in one of the galleries above the Side Altars

required than that of poverty, sickness and abandonment. Kings and Popes unanimously poured on this institution all kinds of favours and privileges so that it became one of the most famous institutions of charity in Spain.

Its fabric was grandiose and its organization complete with sections for all kinds of diseases, including the contagious diseases.

The War of the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, had completely razed the one-time magnificent building and left it extremely impoverished. But the extraordinary charity of the sons of Aragon sustained it with great sacrifices after its transfer, to what was called the Hospital of Convalescents which, though smaller than the one which was destroyed by the French troops, could accommodate all the suffering population and with the repairs and extensions taken up since 1808, it is as it exists today.

As regards the years that Pabla spent in this hospital, we have the details of her life and the spiritual characters of those venerable sisters who admitted her and of some of her holy companions who left an indelible mark on her spirit. As Pabla herself relates it, they were competing with each other in the practice of the most solid virtues.

### **Her Novitiate**

Mother Antonia Piñon, of holy memory, was the Novice Mistress to whom Pabla's religious formation was entrusted.

Very practical to initiate people into the mysteries of interior life, her novices were happy to join around

her and to listen to her conversation about God. She always followed them while they were taking care of the patients and her attitude was so dignified and recollected that her mere presence would edify the novices as much as her talk and instructions.

Later on the same traits will characterize Mother Pabla who never forgot her Novice Mistress, when she herself was appointed for this very delicate job. Towards the evening at the end of their duty they would anxiously meet in the Hall of the Noviciate to consult her about their doubts and to listen to her words full of wisdom.

### **Her first ministries and the practice of heroic virtues**

They had to rise at 4 o'clock in the morning and prepare themselves as if they prepared themselves for a feast, to attend God's call near the beds of their dear patients. They would move to the wards and the spiritual conversations which they had heard on the previous evening from the Novice Mistress would be consolidated and fortified with the example of those venerable sisters. There were among them Sisters Josefa Codina and Teresa Domenech of the time of Mother Rafols, whose image was engraved on their hearts and they would avail of all the opportunities to instill the spirit which they had inherited from the holy foundress into the minds of the young novices. The heroic Sr. Vicenta Salameno, always united with the Lord, who obtained from Him all that she asked and took away from the devil even the most hardened souls; Sr. Juana Bainat extremely patient with the mental patients and Sr. Antonia Montaner, excep-



tionally charitable towards the poor and the unfortunate, who has left an undelible memory in the Institute. Perhaps, as a reward for her extraordinary charity, God had given her the gift of peace to such a high degree that Fr. Juan, who was her confessor for 15 years, gave witness that never once during all those years did she lose her peace of mind.

Those sisters performed their hospital duties in an atmosphere of silence and union with God and the cloister of the Hospital helped them as a means towards their interior progress. The recreations which followed the work were not a source of dissipation to them, they were rather means to grow in fervour and links of charity.

Mother Pabla later on always stressed the importance of an atmosphere of joy and respect which should characterize all the communities. She carefully advised against vulgarity and too much familiarity which is the ruin of true confidence. She gave due importance to the family feasts: Christmas, Holy Innocents, Easter, the feasts of St. Joachim and St. Anne. During her tenure she strove hard to propagate these typical expressions of a family spirit to the entire congregation, so that on the wake of the expansion of the congregation, this intimate joy among the sisters might not be lost with the increase of the members and distances.

Pabla found the older sisters so lovable. The austerity of their customs was even more rigorous than the rules: For breakfast they were getting a plate of soup, which seasoned by an excellent appetite tasted better than the most delicious foods. The example of the sisters inspired them to grow in the spirit of mortification, little comfort regarding the food or drink or sleep.

The poverty was extreme and when it was once proposed to Mother Magdalena Hecho, the then Superior General, to buy chairs which were little more delicate than those which they used, she answered: "I shall not touch the inheritance of poverty left to us by our Foundress."

The earthen ware jugs with the initials H.P. perfectly similar to those of the poor patients have been preserved even now, so also the poor cots with straw mattresses and a chair equally poor. The utensils of the table more conducive, to grow in the spirit of mortification than the well-being to which our nature is so prone. Such was their furniture.

This was the formation which Pabla received from her early years in the Congregation. If we take into account the spirit of austerity and fervour which guided her from the early years, we can easily understand the progress that she made when she came under the direction of so spiritual, holy and austere people.

All the accounts given by her contemporaries mention invariably her attractive personality. Her steps were regular; a genteel figure, her attitude was majestic but humble which manifested a noble soul always ready to share the treasures which God has entrusted to her. Her voice was always moderate but it dominated the souls with the power of her virtues and kindness.

In the morning she went quickly to do the most humble duties in the infirmaries, which she performed with an admirable solicitude and care.

If she approached the poor with great respect and love even as a little child, how much more now as a religious and sister of charity?

She was second to none to take care of the poor patients. With utmost care she would cut their nails and hair, wash their feet, with her patience and love she alleviated their diseases and consoled their souls. But let it not be believed that she did it without effort. She practised all these virtues with a great violence to her nature. She put up a stiff fight against the repugnance of nature and punished her own nature.

Sr. Jeronima Molerés, her companion, tells the following heroic incident: "We both were in charge of a patient who was suffering from a stinking wound. We had to make such a violent effort to approach that miserable creature. Once Pabla told me — Sister, in order to conquer our repugnance, shall we touch the wound of this patient with our lips? I answered that I did not have strength for such an action. When the time came to dress the patient, Pabla quickly applied her lips to the wound and sucked the pus."

She also liked very much to clean and sterilize by herself a bed soon after the death of a patient. She did it for the love of God and also that the other patients of the same ward, seeing that dedication, might remain calm and without repugnance in the hospital.

These ministries of charity did not disturb in the least her spirit of recollection and union with God. On the contrary, they rather served her as a ladder to climb up to God. Sr. Cecilia Frances, a holy sister, described how, when she happened to pass through the wards, the young novice Pabla appeared to her like an incarnation of the spirit of prayer and recollection. Her eyes always on the ground, she would

never stop to talk to anyone and was always ready to obey blindly the lightest orders of her superiors.

Her heroic fidelity to the duty carried her beyond the capacity of her poor health.

Once she arrived in the ward totally exhausted. At dawn she had no strength left in her, with a temperature of 40° and she was removed to her cell. When later on, she was asked why she was so careless about her health, she answered that, as long as she was able to stand, she did not think that she was exempted from the duty to the patients. She was so lovable that the sisters always sought her company and enjoyed a lot to keep watch in her company. In that fervent community, all kinds of mortifications were in use and Pabla always took the lead. It is known beyond doubt that the only preoccupation of her superiors was to check her spirit of penance and Pabla was always presented as an extraordinary model.

## HER FIRST VOWS. TRIALS AND APOSTOLATE

### The First Vows

The fervent novice prepared herself very diligently for her first vows, which she emitted on the 8th of May, 1870. She offered herself to the Lord without reservations and He, who knew the sincerity of her dedication, cut one by one the ties which linked her to this earth.

### Death of her mother

Shortly after the ceremony of her first vows, in July 1870, the Lord called her beloved mother to her reward. It was the first great sacrifice which Our Lord demanded from her consecration. No doubt, the holy and edifying death of her mother was a great consolation to her. Nevertheless, it created an immense void in her life, for more than a mother in natural order, Maria Francisca Espierrez had been also her spiritual mother. Moreover, her death created a terrible loneliness for the good old father.

Her youngest sister Sebastiana was still in the house but she too had been already admitted in the congregation. Sr. Pabla, who knew the faith and fortitude of her father, did not have the least doubt that her father, in spite of this hard blow, would allow Sebastiana to follow her vocation and join the Institute on the date which had been already fixed earlier. And so it happened.

## Trials and difficulties

She had hardly recovered from this trial when the Lord exposed her to another test of a different order, but not less painful and terrible.

Her health had never been strong. To this must be added her extraordinary penances, the sorrow of her mother's death and the hard routine of the hospital. All these factors put together hit her tender health and she fell sick.

No medicine proved useful and it was felt that the air of her native land would restore her health. She was told that it would be convenient to go home for a change. It cost her immensely to accept this order from the superiors. She cried but still her conformity to the will of God and of the superiors was complete.

In this crucial situation, Mother Martina Balaguer appears on the scene as a consoling angel to Sr. Pabla. The mere thought that her poor health could be an obstacle for her continuation in the congregation made her suffer terribly, but Mother Martina spoke to her so tactfully that Sr. Pabla was completely in peace. From that time onwards a great love united these two great souls made very much for each other.

She went to her native village, but, though she was going in order to recover from her ill-health, she did not consider herself exempted from her rules and the customary austerities so that obedience had to intervene to stop her from her penance.

All kinds of affections were showered on her at home and the hilly weather restored her health pretty fast.

She was going out only to attend the church and to the house of her sister Tomasa who gently scolded her on account of the little care that she took of her health. She was so timid to ask any food of her taste that her sister mildly reproached her saying: "You will rather die in a corner instead of asking for any help."

Truly, during all the time that she spent at home they could never make out which food would agree or disagree with her more. She would go down to the garden of her house with her sister and recall all the past stories, always talking of God and spiritual matters. She did not know to talk of anything else.

On her part, she availed of this opportunity to spend ample time in solitude which she loved so much. She enjoyed fully to retire herself in her room and in the little church of Panzano.

No matter how much she loved this life of prayer and retreat, she had a great nostalgia for her beloved hospital. The Lord was kind to hear the clamours of her resigned heart and, satisfied with the fidelity of her servant, returned her notably improved to her sisters in religion who were impatiently waiting for her and received her back with utmost happiness.

#### **In charge of Our Lady of Pilar ward**

She returned full of life to resume her usual occupations, but the superiors seeing her zeal, charity, her reservation and patience, in spite of her young age, put her in charge of the section of Our Lady of Pilar in the hospital, when she was just 23. This fact alone is sufficient to indicate that her superiors held her in a very high esteem. And time showed that Sr. Pabla

was young only in age, but her prudence and maturity were highly advanced.

From the moment the superiors entrusted to her a job of such a big responsibility i.e. the supervision of a section, she devoted herself more and more to prayer. She used to get up at night and visit the Blessed Sacrament and spend there as much time as possible.

The women's section occupied the entire first floor of the building which is formed by two large passages which are entitled "Our Lady of Grace" and "St. Joseph" joined by a smaller one at the end of which are situated the sections of "Carmel" and "Pilar"; this last one was entrusted to Sr. Pabla. Her section was a few steps away from the church. Thus, as many times as she passed by the church during the day, she poured out her entire soul to the Lord.

Mr. Hipolito Fairen, Mr. Francisco Arpal and other doctors, who were students of medicine at that time, narrated with great emotion the impression that Sr. Pabla made on them. They recalled her charming modesty. Her eyes were always cast low. They would sometimes jokingly say to her "Sr. Pabla, please raise your face so that we can see the colour of your eyes." Her words were always discreet, very affable in her treatment, and she spoke only what was indispensable.

Mr. Domingo de Palos, who, as a patron of one of the houses of the Institute had to deal with Sr. Pabla very frequently, said to the sisters: "Your Mother General is so discreet. In all the conversations that I had with her, during the negotiations for the foundation, she never said a superfluous word, a few words but full of wisdom and prudence."

Sr. Pabla had learnt this most difficult art through her silence. During those years when she was young, her silence was rarely interrupted; the same doctors mentioned above never ceased to appreciate her recollected attitude. If they would try to distract her by asking her any instruments of work, without failing in her cordial manners, she answered in a very few words. If she could answer in three words, she would not use four. She dominated them with a superiority which they could not explain. Respect for her was slowly growing into a holy veneration.

Mr. Hipolito said again how her strange behaviour attracted and captivated them at the same time. It may appear that the personality which we are describing was serious and stiff: the hospital and its horrors, continuous silence and mortification. Far from all this. She was so peaceful in that valley of tears that in her old age, when she was trying to console a disturbed sister, she made this statement: "during all the years of my religious life, I never lost the peace of my soul because I always sought it in the will of God."

The same reservation which she maintained towards the doctors, she maintained also with the nurses and the servants. Always affable and kind to the nurses, she would, however, talk only what was indispensable. As regards the servants, as a good mother, she advised them against all kinds of dangers and would see to all their needs without too much familiarity or confidence: Above all, she guided them by her good example.

One of the doctors, who wanted to gain her sympathy, bought a beautiful crucifix and thought that the easy way to convey it to Sr. Pabla was to send it

through one of the servant girls. When the girl offered the present to Sr. Pabla, without showing any pleasure or displeasure and without opening the packet, she told the girl to return it to the person who had sent it because she as a religious could not accept any gift. The girl was highly edified and from that day onwards regarded her with a great respect.

### Means to conquer souls

The section of "Pilar" was attending on patients of all kinds of diseases. But it counted high percentage of patients with tuberculosis. There were among them young girls caught prematurely by the disease due to misery and hunger. They were pure souls, resigned to their condition and a spark of the love of God kindled in their hearts could turn them into precious victims before God. She would pour all her affection on them and it was her great joy to exercise apostolate among them.

Along with such patients, she also found others who had contracted this disease by their vices, whose souls were more miserable than their bodies. She would, however, not get discouraged. She talked to them little, but tried to alleviate them in all the possible ways and, most of all, she prayed for them continuously.

During the few hours of rest that she had, she slept on the floor and continued to do so until it came to the notice of the superiors who had to forbid it.

Her active zeal was not limited to such difficult cases alone. She took care of all the patients of her section.

In order to lighten their situation she created an atmosphere of devotion. She prayed faithfully the Holy Rosary, distributed to them books of devotion

and availed the free time to do a short spiritual reading for them. Thus, she gradually guided them to the spiritual life too.

On Sundays she attended a second Mass for those patients who were unable to attend it and advised them to be united with her in spirit. When a patient was nearing death, she would keep a very close watch.

God was blessing her apostolate abundantly. At times, she was internally moved to attend on those patients who were in sin and in danger of death.

Among innumerable cases, we single out one which Sr. Pabla felt happy to narrate:

There was a woman in the ward who was a very difficult patient to all. Sr. Pabla, out of charity, called her a mental patient. The woman was pregnant and her time of delivery was approaching. She had a feeling that the patient would kill the child at the time of birth, therefore, she kept a close watch on her and also told the sisters to do the same.

Once during her evening prayer, she felt a strong impulse that something abnormal was going to happen. She went quickly to see the woman who was just getting into the bed. Sr. Pabla asked her what she had done and, without waiting for an answer, moved by a secret impulse, she went to one of the big vessels in the hall kept to collect the dirty water. She opened the vessel and there was the child. She removed it quickly, and shook it to let it breathe the fresh air until it gave signs of life and began to cry.

She washed the child and dressed it with the best clothes and took it to the church and got it baptised. The child did not survive but Sr. Pabla throughout her life considered this child as her second guardian angel to whom she often prayed.

IN THE HOSPICE OF ZARAGOZA

The Honourable Board of the Hospital started negotiations in early 1872 to hand over the Hospice of Zaragoza to the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne and all terms were finalized for this purpose in April of the same year. While choosing the personnel for the new Foundation, the Superior thought of Sr. Pabla. Sr. Martina Balaguer was appointed superior who, while making the distribution of the jobs, entrusted Sr. Pabla, with the office as the custodian of men's wardrobe.

On her arrival to the new house and as soon as she took charge of her job, all the lights that illumined her soul disappeared and an interior dryness made any work of charity unbearable. She tried to pray but in vain. An interior tempest was raging violently against the boat of her soul. During the entire period of this spiritual combat she did not allow herself to be carried away by sentiment and none of the sisters could guess the anguish of her soul. She continued to be the first for the acts of the community, for the work, she did everything with her usual zeal and diligence, with the same peaceful, sweet and pleasant face, the same moderate joy during the recreations.

It took years until she came to instruct her young sisters in similar circumstances when she disclosed that she too had walked valiantly through narrow precipices. In such an agonizing situation, the Lord did not fail to send her a consoling angel, the director of the community, Fr. Antonio Ochoa, later on appointed Bishop of Siguenza.

The wise director could restore joy and tranquility to that soul, without great efforts for she was extremely humble and docile, never trusting her own judgement and following the dictates of those whom God had placed in His place to guide and direct her.

Sr. Carmen Zueco, a conceptionist sister who had been a sister of charity of St. Anne for many years, gives an extensive account of the extraordinary virtues which she had observed in Sr. Pabla's life.

At the time of the spiritual exercises on the occasion of her profession for the cloistered life she found herself for the first time in a doubt whether Our Lord really wanted her in a cloistered convent. When she went to expose the state of her soul to Sr. Pabla, after consoling and comforting her to persevere in the place which she had chosen, Sr. Pabla added: "I myself too, as a young sister, when they entrusted me with the wardrobe of men in the hospital was strongly tempted to retire to a cloistered life and Fr. Ochoa, who was then my director, cleared my doubts and told me that so much good can be done in our beloved Institute."

### **New trials**

While the Lord continued to purify her internally in the fire of tribulation, He also sent her the most painful diseases which made her life a real Calvary. She had an eruption all over the body which put her life in danger.

Since they had just arrived in the Hospice, work was not duly organized. There was no separate infirmary for the sisters with the necessary isolation in order to avoid contagion. It was decided to shift her to the hospital though, in view of the condition of her health,

it was not quite prudent to do so. She was put on one of the cots of the patients. She felt an awful repugnance when she lay on the mattress of the cot but she abandoned herself totally to the will of God, and disclosed it only when she was asked. She loved always to be a silent sufferer. This was not as yet the end of the torments. The pharmacist, out of his carelessness, exchanged the medicine given to her and applied a different ointment on her which placed her into such a miserable condition and caused her such intolerable pains. In spite of her great spirit of control, the poor soul was yelling and crying in that miserable condition.

The sisters disturbed at her condition sent quickly for Dr. Liborio Los Huertos, the dean of the Hospital. When he arrived and saw the condition of her health, he asked the sister infirmarian: "What did you give her?" And when he saw that a wrong ointment had been applied, he realized the grave mistake done by the pharmacist and still more surprised was he at the resigned spirit of the patient and the moderation of her crying for according to him, it was beyond the capacity of a human being to bear such pain.

Sr. Pabla herself, otherwise always sickly in her life, would relate later on that never in her life had she suffered so much as on that occasion.

She continued in that state of suffering for a long time, struggling between life and death. She recovered finally, but was so weak and in such a condition of prostration that they had to take great care of her life. It was decided, therefore, that she should go home a second time for rest. All these trials and the extraordinary charity and the expensive medicines

which the Congregation, in spite of its precarious financial condition, provided for her, remained engraved on her mind and moved her heart to the extreme gratitude towards the Institute. Thus, later on, when she became General she never spared any kind of expenses for the cure of her sick sisters.

A sister fell sick in her young age and was crying without consolation thinking that she would be sent home due to her sickness. The venerable Mother Pabla called and told her very affectionately: "Do not cry and do not be afflicted, my child. I too fell sick when I was young and had to be sent home twice and several times for baths at Panticosa and I am already old and still here by the mercy of God and through the charity of my sisters. Be alright and do not get worried. Leave everything in the hands of God and see what He wants from you now." "And she said it to me," the sister continues, "with such a love that I was fully assured that I would not be sent away and fully consoled and encouraged."

Sr. Pabla stayed at home for a short time for there she did not improve much and as she returned to Zaragoza the doctors advised her the baths at Panticosa, which she did at the orders of Mother Martina, staggering between life and death. However, she came back much improved, though still far from being totally recovered.

Relieved from the charge of the wardrobe of men she was shifted to the section of boys, which left her completely free in the evening period. She could take rest during this time, but she used this time by doing works of decoration, which she had learnt at home. A frame which had been embroidered by Sr. Pabla,

while she was at the Hospice, has been preserved up to this day. She was a real artist and would imprint her good taste in whatever she did.

"The Lord has led me always," she would say later on, "through the ways which were against my inclinations. You do not imagine how much I liked to embroider, make flowers and work on things which were used for cult. Except for that short time in the Hospice, the Lord, did not want me to work with the needle."

The time of her profession was nearing. The closer it came the greater seemed to be the obstacles which the Lord put in her way. On medical advice and after her first trip to Panticosa, she was ordered to go for some sulphuric baths. She was accompanied by Sr. Cecilia Frances. On their way back they had to halt at Tudela for some work connected with the community. Due to a confusion of the time-table they missed the coach. They thought that it had not arrived, while it had already departed. When they realized the mistake, the cart which had dropped them on the road had already left them. Perplexed in such a situation, as no human solution occurred to their mind, they prayed fervently to the Glorious Patriarch St. Joseph. They had hardly finished the prayer when a cart driven by an elderly and sympathetic man approached them. The sisters did not say a word, but the man stopped and asked amiably: "What is the trouble, sisters?" They told him the whole story. "Come in, sisters. I shall reach you myself."

The sisters did not delay and thanking the Lord for such a lucky lift, they arrived at the Charity House of Tudela. The whole community was waiting for them. They asked the good man to wait a little and



went to fetch a refreshment. It happened in the nick of time. When they came to the gate neither the man nor the cart was to be found. Sr. Pabla always considered this episode of her life as a special favour of the Blessed Patriarch, for whom she had a great devotion.

We may think that her continuous sickness might relent her eagerness for penance. On the contrary, the moment she felt better she would resume it.

### Final Vows

She tried to hide these austerities which would be taken as acts of imprudence. When it was detected, Mother Martina prohibited her from them. She managed to pull on with her very precarious health always making progress in perfection. As the years passed and the time came, the sisters had no objection, they were rather all too happy to admit her for the profession. After completing her spiritual exercises which she did very fervently, she pronounced her Final Vows on the 15th May, 1874, and thus remained forever united to the Lord and to the destinies of her congregation. The events which had appeared to be an obstacle proved to be a blessing. That is always the case with the souls who trust in God fully. Without her continuous diseases, interior sufferings and contradictions of all kinds, her soul would not have been disposed so perfectly for her final consecration

Confidence in the love and mercy of God, after such a great experience will be unshakable and one of the most characteristic traits of her spiritual life.

## CHAPTER VII

### A MOTHER AND IDEAL TEACHER FOR THE ORPHANS

During the time that Sr. Pabla spent at the Hospice, Mother Martina Balaguer entrusted to her another delicate job which entailed a great responsibility: The care of the children outside the classes, which is normally called the guardianship.

There is no doubt, it was an added burden for her poor health, but Mother Martina did not doubt for a moment that a person with Sr. Pabla's prudence, tact and piety was necessary in the difficult situation in which the hospice found itself at that juncture.

The girls did not receive well the change of the community ordered by the Hospital Board. In the course of years, due to the bad education of some elements, which are normally found in large groups, the sisters had at the beginning a very difficult time. They could not approach them without being offended, at times even manhandled.

It was a challenge to the authority and only a person with exceptional virtue could control such a situation. Time proved that Mother Martina was right in choosing Sr. Pabla to handle such a crisis.

This was the first opportunity for Sr. Pabla to come in contact with the youth, a decisive moment in her life and of an enormous significance to the congregation for there she realized the importance of a truly christian education for the youth. Thus, when she is appointed superior of the Hospital of Alcaniz and later on when God will put her at the helm of the

Her teaching was one of love. Only love is productive because love is life and education is, more than anything else, not a question of methods nor science but life. She would treat the students with a truly maternal care. She did it not only during the time of her stay at the Hospice, but for her whole life.

On one occasion when she had already been the General of the congregation for 23 years, an old woman from the asylum of the Hospice who had been her student in the famous Institution came to see her. Her name was Maria Pamplona. The woman was at the beginning of a nose cancer which gave her a very repulsive appearance. Mother Pabla, as usual, came to receive her with great joy and love. In her conversation Maria Pamplona told her that she was going to complete 50 years in the Hospice. "This date has to be celebrated," said Mother Pabla, "and today you will have your meal with us here in the novitiate." Immediately she gave orders to the cook and Sr. Eloisa Gracia, who used to look after the guests, is the one who related the incident. The Mother was very active and nothing, not even the slightest detail, would escape her sharp observation. She prepared the table as if she were dealing with an important guest. When she came, Mother Pabla treated her with great honour. When Sr. Eloisa was going to serve the lady, Mother Pabla said: "No, I shall serve her myself." In fact, she served the poor woman with great pleasure and love, and she with tears in her eyes did not have words to express her gratitude. When she took leave of her, Mother Pabla said: "I felt so happy as if I had been serving Christ himself."

Her teaching had a distinguished mark of respect for the girls. She would excite and move and guide

them, not with pressure or violence but through her sweet and attractive virtue. Her extraordinary virtue made things amiable and easy. She made discreet use of the confidence which the girls placed in her. She did not go one step farther than what the girls spontaneously disclosed to her.

Her teaching was optimistic. She believed in the efficacy of education and in particular, she had absolute faith in the great power of grace.

She was teaching with patience. To work and work always without rest: perhaps when we least expect comes out a spark which can consume in an instant, all the dross which appeared to have no end.

Out of this patience, out of this quality of waiting for the right moment came out another precious virtue which was her inalterable meekness and benevolence. Her meekness was astonishing, her face was modest and candid like that of a child. She captivated the hearts of all the inmates of the asylum. Due to her amiable character, the harsh attitude that the girls showed towards the other sisters, was rarely noticed in their relations with Sr. Pabla.

Her teaching was individual. She attended to the needs of each soul as if she had only one person to look after. Her time and availability had no limits as also there was no limit to her love and when she left the Hospice she kept in touch with them through her prayers and remembrance and correspondence.

Her teaching was deeply social. She instilled in her students the true feelings of a true christian fraternity. According to the accounts which are strictly historical, in those days the hospice was a real family with all the

charms of a family life which is experienced only where God becomes the real king of the house.

Her teaching was preventive. Prevention is better than cure, a clear principle which is often forgotten. A maternal vigilance which is constant and loving can avoid a lot of punishment. Finally, her teaching was selfless. She had no other ambition than that of pleasing the Lord and of leading to Him the souls entrusted to her.

Her soul was pure and free from any interest, God blessed her apostolate in a visible way. Her short stay of six years in the Hospice was marked by a moral stamina, her flourishing christian virtues, by peace and joy which were so beneficial that, even after the lapse of so many years, have lasted up to this day.

## CHAPTER VIII

### APPOINTED SUPERIOR OF THE HOSPITAL OF ALCANIZ. A REAL MOTHER TO HER DAUGHTERS

Sr. Pabla had hardly completed four years after her final vows when in July 1878, Mother Dolores Marin, the General, appoints her superior of a foundation which was just finalized at Alcaniz: The Municipal Hospital. This period of 11 years was one of the most interesting and memorable of her life. Here begins to be delineated the magnificent plan which God had for her. To become an apostle, she prepares herself for great campaigns and conquests.

The small group of sisters which would make up the community, accompanied by Mother Dolores Marin and Fr. Ochoa left Zaragoza on the 2nd July, feast of the Visitation of Our Lady. The short account of the incident, preserved in the archives of the mother house adds that they arrived at Alcaniz on the 3rd at 4.00 in the morning and were received by the clergy and the city corporation and then they went from the coach to the collegiate church where they attended mass celebrated by Fr. Ochoa and then entered their residence. On the 4th they took charge of the Hospital after the customary formalities. We can imagine that Mother Pabla was anxious to finish the official formalities and be alone with her sisters to devote herself fully to the ministries of their holy vocation.

The new house was very much according to her taste. The hospital was an old Franciscan Monastery situated at one end of the village where one can breathe

the perfume of that religious antiquity, so conducive for a soul to recollect and raise itself to the regions of light and love. It had an austere appearance. The small portal preserves still the door-plates on which its old inhabitants engraved the maxims and sentences from the Holy Scripture. The old maxims had been replaced by the timings of the visits, but this change has in no way altered the unearthly outlook which one experiences while entering this holy asylum.

### Work at Alcaniz

When the sisters arrived at the hospital it was really in a very lamentable condition and Mother Pabla, who was so little attached to exaggerations, said always that the works done at Alcaniz were very great. The recollection of this work which was overwhelming, obscure and humble filled her with consolation.

Divine Providence entrusted to her only four sisters at the beginning. The beginnings of the great task which she would fulfil later on could not be more humble and modest. With this tiny group she made her first experiments and she succeeded wonderfully. In the formation of these first daughters she did not change the method which she had followed with the girls at the Hospice: the same affability and meekness, the same energy, but here with her daughters she was more frank, less timid, with a shade of greater maternal touch and tenderness. She thought that among her daughters she did not have to hide so much the secrets of her interior life.

### Testimonies

Mother Rufina Manzana relates that on some Fridays

of Lent, she called her with great reservation to the room of penances and asked her to tie her to a column from the shoulders to the waist. And after three hours called her to loosen her. The same sister describes how she used to do the Way of the Cross. She was going from one station to the other with a heavy cross crowned with thorns and a rope tied to the waist. The sisters watched her with commotion and the pious exercise ended always with all the sisters shedding plenty of tears. During Lent they did it along the Calvary which was close to the Hospital, for two hours from 2 to 4 o'clock in the morning.

These practices of austere and constant mortification, exercised a fruitful influence on the souls of the young religious who watched her so closely. In fact, the exemplary superior surprised them, now in prayer with the hands raised in a cross, now in very inconvenient postures, now mixing with bitter things the little food that she had, etc.

Sr. Concepcion Los Arcos, asked by Mother Martina to watch her closely, fearing her excesses, observed on many nights that she got up quietly and went to the church to pray or shut herself in to practice the penances. It was also verified that she was not sleeping on bed but on some branches which she placed on the hard soil.

Although she imposed on herself such austere mortifications, she treated her sisters with a real maternal care. Sr. Rufina was still very young and it was so painful to Mother Pabla to see her working continuously at such a tender age. When this young sister had to keep watch at night in the hospital, when the community was sleeping, Mother Pabla would wake up quietly

and go to her saying: "Go, Sr. Rufina, because the young have to sleep. I shall take care of the patients and call you a little before the community rises so that they do not come to know about it." She would frequently do the same towards the other sisters too. And thus a large burden of the night watch fell on Mother Pabla.

During the night she cleaned the toilets, filled the jars of water, swept and washed the staircases to alleviate the sisters from their burdens; she prepared the fire and made chocolate. When the sisters got up and saw the toilets cleaned and the house tidy, they would be surprised and edified.

Very often she also shared with them her dessert and if they offered her any tasty dish, on account of her poor health, she would keep it to share with them in the middle of poverty in which they lived. Needless to say, such actions on her part produced a great respect, love and veneration in the heart of the sisters.

She rang the bell for the community to rise at four in the morning and started the act of the offering of the works with an expression of such a devotion that one could feel that she was truly present before the majesty of God. She observed the same fidelity in the other matters of religious discipline. She kept the silence strictly and punished firmly any infraction of this essential rule but all her punishments were tempered with a discreet charity which always showed that she did not want to hurt, but to cure.

Under such a direction which was so soft as well as strong, so wise and motherly, one can guess to what heights of perfection the sisters would reach. They could bear the extreme poverty in which they lived with a great peace and joy.

Mother Pabla herself says that they did not have chairs to sit and work, but they were so happy that, in spite of all the hard work, they did not want to ask more sisters to relieve their burden. It was their glory to sacrifice themselves continually following the footsteps of Mother Pabla. God rewarded such generosity by granting them the most extraordinary charisms and peace and joy and serenity which could not be changed by anything else.

That constant example of immolation and that motherly heart to support them was so necessary to the poor sisters in those primitive times: Every fourth night they had to keep the watch and the following day was surely not sufficient to recover with a moderate rest. How often, Mother Pabla said, while filling water in the toilets we were caught by the cold, but we used to suffer with joy.

The village entrusted to them successively more jobs, among them, one was of distributing food to the poor. Mother Pabla used to say: "we were forced to cook in the open air with such a glacial cold that we could be frozen."

She thought, therefore, that it was necessary to ask more personnel from Zaragoza. During her time, the convent of Alcaniz flourished in such outstanding virtues that it was considered a model for the others. She used all means to help the sisters to advance in perfection. The sisters were compelled to follow her example and there is no pen to describe what a poor and exemplary life that group of angels used to lead.

Though she was a person of few words, her duty of a superior moved her not to deny her daughters

the consolation and the light of her advices. She would repeat: "My daughters, I would not like to see you too busy with the external works. Give to each duty the time it deserves without suffocating the spirit and let everything be done for God, all the rest is worth nothing." It was a mother's heart which helped them to do any sacrifice and to bear any inconvenience. When there were no sufficient cots to sleep, she would tell them smilingly: "How convenient, my daughters, to sleep without the trouble of climbing up and down and without danger of falling down!"

To get them used to work for the motives of faith and in order not to lose the merits of a life which was so full of sacrifices, she made use of little practices which gave excellent results. For instance, on the day of recollection, following the custom of the community, they made the exercise of death. They would go to the room of discipline, put a black cloth and candles on the ground and one of the sisters, quite often Mother Pabla herself would lie down. The prayer for the dying would be recited, together with a prayer on 'death', which all of us have to undergo sooner or later, pondering over our life and its value. She had also accustomed the sisters for public correction and for the public discipline.

With such a spirit of firmness and bounty, austerity and love, of recollection and joy, she ruled that first and small family. Her motherly heart had only the good of her daughters in her mind. She took care of them, watched and stimulated them, alleviated them from their burdens without regarding her own troubles and her condition of health. Therefore the effect of her action was deep and fruitful because she was moved by charity of Christ alone.

## IN THE HOSPITAL OF ALCANIZ

**The Superior**

Having considered the servant of God in her functions as a superior of the community, let us glance at her external relations with the patients, the "Board" of the hospital and the village of Alcaniz.

Soon after the establishment of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne at Alcaniz, the transformation of the hospital was deep and radical. The order, the cleanliness and a notable improvement in the economy in spite of the extension of the services attracted the attention, of the Board and all those involved in the administration, towards the sisters.

Mother Pabla revealed for the first time her practical talent and administrative tact. Not only did she see the needs, but she also knew how to fulfil them. And her overflowing charity also knew to safeguard the interests of justice. When the means are sufficient or in plenty a waste is natural and even then, the economic management does not seem difficult. The difficulty is to manage when the sources are insufficient. To see that everybody gets the necessary in such conditions, is a great secret of good administration.

**A mother to the patients**

What gave life and warmth to her administrative qualities was her tender and evangelical charity which she knew to instill into her sisters. For those patients the hospital was not a hospital but their home. They

found there the warmth of an ideal family, the tenderness of the lovable sisters: such were the daughters of Mother Pabla towards the patients.

Mother Pabla treated the patients as if they were her bosses, in fact she served them always as she would serve Christ Our Lord himself.

In her instructions to the sisters, while appreciating their heroic virtues, she would not cease to repeat: "My sisters, do not take your work as a routine. Put your life into the work in a spirit of great faith. For example: A sister takes a glass of water to a patient as her routine duty. She neither enjoys it nor gains merit. But if she takes it, thinking that she is going to serve Christ himself in that poor patient, what a difference. She gains plenty of merits because even a glass of water given for the love of God will not remain unrewarded. And she will feel happy and will love more and more her vocation."

This impulse of charity moved her for a greater activity. When the whole world saw in her only virtues, she found herself full of defects and corrected herself with a constant tenacity. At Alcaniz, she will say later on, "I was perhaps too active. Fr. Faustino made me examine myself so that I could be more moderate."

The sisters, however, were too far from noticing anything incorrect in a life of a continuous sacrifice. They believed that only her interior fire enabled her to take up such an extra-ordinary activity and that only heroic works could temper her anxiety for self immolation.

### **Her influence on the whole village**

She had hardly organized the hospital when her

great heart planned another project which would be the source of renewal of the village. As we said, the hospital was situated in a corner of the village. She realized that a school would do immense good to the people of the neighbourhood, the majority of whom were labourers.

There were serious difficulties to implement the project: the place, the sisters, finances, all this was to be obtained. She overcame the difficulties gradually. All the people, who in connection with their duty, came in close contact with her, the "Board" of the hospital the doctors, etc. were all fascinated by her immense bounty.

The school was started in one of the sections of the hospital, the place was spacious and it was provided with an independent staircase which was completely separate from the rest of the building. Charitable souls contributed generously for the initial installations. Zaragoza sent a small group of sisters and on the 8th December, 1880 was solemnly inaugurated this free school, placed under the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin. This was the beginning of a long series of foundations which she would take up for the rest of her whole life and the aim of extending the benefits to the poor was the characteristic of her life.

God endows each saint and each congregation with a special charism. Mother Pabla, following the footsteps of the Holy Foundress, went first of all to the villages, to the poor, to the suffering members of the mystical body of Christ. She was fulfilling marvellously the aim and the objective to which the congregation was destined. And she left to those who came after her this precious inheritance: "To be a relief and shelter to His Sacred Heart."

No matter how many the benefits of a school are, they are not complete if the families also are not influenced through the children. That is what Mother Pabla did. She tried to find out the urgent needs which burdened the homes of her children and sought ways of helping them. She visited the families doing good and the renewal of the village was visible.

Where did she get sources for the continuous financial aid? Where do the saints get them from? From the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He gives them a special grace to move the hearts and open the doors of mercy. Gradually and unconsciously she exercised a great influence on the nobility of the country. Quickly she was honoured by the friendship of selected souls who came forward to help her in works of charity, whom she recalled always with a deep gratitude.

People did not take time to observe her great spirit of selflessness. They saw in what kind of poverty her community was living. And seeing that Mother Pabla was distributing generously everything to the poor, they admired and respected her all the more.

The school drew great benefits, not only to the children but also to the families, thus raising visibly the moral and religious standard of the surrounding area. Many benefactors came forward to help her. One of them was Mrs. Vicenta Avinaja. This kind hearted lady was not only a prominent benefactor of the school, but, crossing all the social barriers, sent her own daughter to this school and later on edified by the great services being done by the sisters, offered one floor of her own house to open a school for the little children.

Mother Pabla was attracted by the children in a

special way. Among so many foundations started by her, there is hardly any which did not start with a school for the little ones. They were a source of great joy to her motherly heart. When she had to face very difficult problems, she sought refuge in prayer. She never forgot also to ask the prayers of her beloved little ones.

On the 8th December, 1883, three years after the opening of the free school, she opened a school for the girls on Mayor Road, completing thus the cycle of her foundations at Alcaniz. Her great benefactor, Mrs. Victoriana Forcada, gave her for this purpose a house from her property, which she placed under the protection of the Immaculate Conception.

The number of students was growing fast and so it became a model Institution for education. Without neglecting her work in the hospital, she took great pains in the organization of the school and her students of those days recall unanimously that she was their true spiritual mother and confess that whatever noble things they learnt in their lives they owed it to the Holy Mother. It was a solid and lasting formation and her disciples distinguished themselves by an exemplary christian life, of whom, as Bossuet says, "the cross does not bring surprises."

After reading all the accounts, what surprises us most is the way she found time to fulfil her multiple duties in spite of her very precarious health, during the eleven years that she spent in that city, which she loved with a special affection.

Nothing came to her notice, whether it was a personal or public affair, in which she did not seek refuge



through prayer. On the occasion of a terrible drought which afflicted the city of Alcaniz, it was believed that they received the benefit of rain through the prayers of Mother Pabla.

The world owes a lot to these souls whom it does not know, but who have such a power over the heart of Our Lord that, as the Holy Scripture says, they obtain whatever they ask for. The greatest blessing that one can ask for a village or a country is the one which St. Francis asked for Assisi on his deathbed: "That it may be a dwelling of saints."

## CHAPTER X

### INTERIOR PROGRESS

What has been exposed in the last two chapters, her life as Mother and Superior of the Hospital of Alcaniz is the external aspect of her great soul, but the virtues that we have admired are acquired at the cost of painful efforts and sacrifices.

The years which Mother Pabla spent in Alcaniz are marked by an evident progress which she achieved with long hours of tribulation. The seal of the cross contributes to her sweet personality, that divine stoke which suffering alone can produce, adorning it by that touching majesty, of tears which add to the splendour and the charm of innocence, the austerity of penance and the power of a charity carried upto heroism.

#### The crosses

During this whole period of trial, which she considered as nothing, her health never allowed her to work in peace. Her headaches were acute and frequent and all the sedatives only increased her torture. What was most edifying was her simplicity and fortitude. Asked about her health, she said frankly in what a state of suffering she was, but the pain never upset her and her heroic soul always found strength to control it. To these headaches was added total lack of appetite. It was a real ordeal for her to take any food. She would have preferred to leave the table without any food, but in order not to disedify the sisters, the sister who looked after the food had ordered her to

mix a little vinegar to see if thus she could take in at least some little quantity. Apart from this, there were always some frequent indispositions which forced her to be in bed and from which she recovered very slowly. the most notable fact was, however, that she would bear all these trials not only with a spirit of conformity to the will of God, but she appeared to be longing for them.

How did her life sustain in such conditions? Years after, in an intimate conversation she said: "No one dies unless God will it" and speaking about her innumerable diseases she added: "Thrice I had an attack of meningitis. Humanly speaking I should have died long ago but here am I because God wants it."

Added to these physical diseases, she was suffering from a terrible dryness of the spirit and her spiritual director far from encouraging her showed an indifference towards her of which she did not know the cause. She thought of a means which revealed her soul. When the admonitions of the director reached a limit she asked him to hear her general confession, to which he agreed. She prepared herself carefully and with a total sincerity and candour, opened the secrets of her soul. The confessor was totally surprised and realized what a profound humility and faith she possessed. He was delighted by the purity and rectitude of her life and from that day onwards he changed his opinion and attitude towards her and devoted himself wholeheartedly to the direction of that privileged soul.

This comfort sent to her by the Lord at such a critical moment was very timely. To all these crosses was added the irregular conduct of her two young

sisters, a great torture for her heart which was living only for the glory of God.

Her contemporaries describe Mother Pabla during this period with an air of peaceful suffering and sweet melancholy in spite of her angelical smile. But the secret of her hidden pains was known only to a few and even they did not know to describe the intensity of her pains, for one would have to know the degree of the love of God which she possessed.

It is from this period that we have the first reports of how the devil used to vex her. The struggle against the evil spirit was not an isolated fact in her life but it went on for years. The devil tried to disturb the peace of her soul but never succeeded. She had acquired such a command over the malign spirit that she was no more afraid of him than of a mosquito. He presented himself to her in various and terrible shapes to frighten her and to divert her mind from prayer.

She felt his presence, though not visibly. With this abundant variety of trials God was purifying all the faculties of the body and soul of His faithful servant, that the operations of grace might not find the slightest obstacle. Her interior progress was more and more evident. The sisters watched her with a kind of veneration which did not diminish the confidence which they placed in her, but it increased on the contrary. They felt secure under the care of their excellent Mother.

This veneration of her own sisters as well as the lay people was a great torture to her deep humility and precisely when the admiration of her own people and the outsiders rose higher, the Lord submerged her into a burning fire to renew and purify her entirely. The agony that she suffered at this stage is indescribable. In this most painful state, with a very clear

vision and in an excess of light she only saw her deep malice and the ugliness of her vicious nature, the most subtle self-love which darkened the actions which she considered to be holy. She experienced a complete absence of all virtues and saw herself stained by innumerable faults and defects and felt that she was faltering under their killing weight.

The conviction of her lowliness and incapacity of any good reached such a degree that she thought that she was unworthy of appearing in the presence of God and of living with her daughters whom she regarded as angels. She often stopped at the door of the choir and did not dare to enter into the community and prayed from the staircase.

The impression on the community was tremendous and lasting. Her anxiety must have been big and her desolation very high. She did not want to call people's attention to herself but was in this way forced to uncover her internal anguish. Mother Petra Perez, then a novice, tells, in her old age, in a report about her virtues: "I was very young and I was at Alcaniz, when something extraordinary must have passed through her spirit. She called herself a great sinner. She thought that she was unworthy of living with her sisters. She did not dare to enter the church gallery to pray with the others and remained on the staircase of the choir. I do not know how she could remain there on the staircase in a glacial cold. After some time she again joined us."

Her trial was all the more painful because there was no other proof for it than her impression that such a stage of mind was a logical consequence of her many and serious sins. If she had noticed God's hand upon her, her torture would have turned into glory. How-

ever, her pure love was hidden only before her eyes.

This period of great pains lasted for a long time. She experienced at this time a thirst for purification which found relief only in the Holy Communion. She also used to remain in prayer during the night. What her blessed soul experienced during those moments, we shall come to know only in heaven. Her piety, her fervour, her example used to stimulate her sisters. They would ask her to allow them to remain with her to which she often agreed.

### Peace in Christ

There was no need for special occasions. The sisters could contemplate her several times during the day, in prayer, for them it was always a new sight. Her eyes closed, the mouth half open, always on knees, without a slightest movement, one could even doubt whether she was alive. And when she came out of her prayer recollection was noticeable, which would not however, divert her from her duties. On the contrary, the more faithful she was to the prayer, the sweeter, the more attentive and active, the more enterprising, in a word, the more heavenly she became.

This fervour and concentration was more noticeable in several periods of the year, but specially during the Lent and the Novena of the Holy Spirit. From this was concluded that the life of prayer far from diverting us from our faithfulness to our duties, it is for the souls called for the apostolate the only way which saves them from going to one of the two extremes: exaltation or despair. It teaches the soul to seek nothing more than the glory of God which obtains for us true peace.

## IN THE SCHOOL OF THE DIVINE HEART

The source of all her heroic virtues just described and admired was the sweet Heart of Jesus. This was the magnet that continuously attracted her soul, the refuge where she took shelter when the storm raged and the school where she learnt the secret of all the virtues.

Mother Pabla can rightly and for many titles be placed in the splendid gallery of the "Friends of the Sacred Heart." The Sacred Heart was the centre of all her love, the root of all her religious virtues. She exposed to Him all her plans. She abandoned to Him all her projects. She had recourse to Him every moment.

She did not know to talk to her sisters about anything else, she did not guide them to any other school. This was her heavenly refuge, where she lived with utmost joy and peace.

When she arrived in the congregation the last echoes of the voice of the Holy Foundress could still be heard. Mother Maria Rafols was one of the great lovers of the Sacred Heart, who said to her sisters: "Have a great devotion to the Sacred Heart to whom our congregation consecrated itself from the first moment of its foundation and spread this devotion as much as you can."

The impression received by Mother Pabla in her pure and innocent soul with the first contacts with the rays of the Sacred Heart, whose devotion she saw among the sisters, is indescribable.

Therefore, right from her novitiate she entered fully into the solid spirit of this devotion: to respond to the infinite love of that loving heart and make reparation for the indifference and ingratitude of men.

As the first fruit of this devotion we can single out that genuine extraordinary confidence which she had in the Sacred Heart.

When anyone approached her to ask advice and comfort in difficult situations of life, she always repeated with an impressive conviction: "Expect everything from the Sacred Heart." Her fortitude which never failed, her magnanimity, her perseverance in overcoming the strongest instincts of nature, namely, the self-esteem and repugnance for suffering, must all be attributed to the influence of the Sacred Heart.

**Religious virtues***Her humility:*

Humility was so visible in Mother Pabla that it can be considered as her most characteristic virtue. It can be surely assured that all who came to know her did not fail to notice that this virtue was shining in her with particular splendour.

Going through various accounts about her virtues and edifying incidents of her life, there is a common aspect in them, such as: "she was a model religious by her observance of rules, a model to the superiors by her zeal and prudence, most of all she was humble, very humble, always humble." The one who writes this was the illustrious Vicar General of the diocese of Zaragoza, Mgr. Jose Pellicer.

Many other witnesses could be recorded in this matter, but we shall prefer to mention her thoughts, her words and actions in order to bring out the charm which was flowing from her humility. Once she asked a sister to paint a picture on this topic: a spring of water and in one of its borders a violet with its stalk immersed in water. The sister said in surprise: "Mother, I think it will appear a silly picture." "It does not matter," she insisted. "I want it for records." It was easy to understand its meaning. She wanted a presentation of her life.

Her mind always turned around her nothingness. But the fact is that she could not hide the progress of the congregation and the success of all her undertakings, nor did she try to do so, for as St. Teresa says, true humility does not consist in denying one's talents but in accepting that nothing is ours and that everything has been given to us without any merit on our part.

She would say sincerely. "I have done nothing, Everything is the work of the Sacred Heart. I entrusted to Him the congregation when they gave me its charge and see we have had a good Master. Do not worry. Put everything into His most loving Heart."

On other occasions, she looked at her sisters and said with a sense of gratitude: "Everything is due to the prayers of so many holy souls that live in the community."

At the time of her visits to the foundations, it was a real torture for her to listen to all the praises which are customary on such occasions. When tributes were being paid to her, her pain was visible so that they were forced to cut them short.

She was always on guard, not only about herself, but regarding her sisters too, against the subtle poison of vanity. On the 8th February, 1916, she wrote to her sisters in America in connection with a homage paid to Mother Antonia Pardo for the good services, by the Board of the mental hospital: "I rejoice because they have thanked you for the sacrifices that you did for God on behalf of the suffering humanity in those distant lands. Offer everything to God that nothing may be lost. The human praises are easily carried away by the winds."

Let us now glance through her actions to see whether her words were sincere. She had been thrice elected superior general of her congregation and the chapter had been convened again and she could see that she would not be relieved. One morning she called a sister in whom she had great confidence and said: "Let us go out, please come along." And they went. On the way, the sister said, she looked happy but did not say a word, as usual. When we arrived at St. Gil Avenue she said: "We are going to the Archbishop's House, but I request you to keep complete silence over what you hear or see."

At that time the Most Rev. Juan Soldevila Romero was the Archbishop of Zaragoza, who had a high regard for Mother Pabla. She announced her visit and they were immediately received by the Archbishop. She knelt down in front of him and entreated him to intervene that here reelection might not be effective.

"Mother Pabla," said the Archbishop, "please stand up and be in peace. My daughter, I cannot accept your wish because I see God's wish in the un-

animous interest of the sisters in keeping you at the helm of the congregation. I know their feeling because many superiors have written to me and others came to me to talk personally. For the love of God you have to receive again the burden of the Generalate. I have done a deep study of your Constitution and you can be reelected because the constitution comes in force only after its publication. Consequently, the years of your Generalate prior to the publication of the Constitution are not to be counted. You need not worry about your inability for the post. God will be with you always as He has been until now. Besides, you know that here there is a father in the true sense of the word, who will help you in all your difficulties."

Mother Pabla accepted humbly the opinion of her superior, but she could not hide her pain and sorrow. This incident was given out only after death.

Towards the end of her life, in the year 1927, arrangements were being done to award her the Grand Cross of Beneficence but she opposed to it so resolutely that the idea had to be given up. She said: "I do not want other Cross than that of Christ Our Lord which is the only one which will open to me the gates of heaven."

When the community did its annual retreat, she used to give them an instruction at the end. Her favourite topics were humility, obedience and observance of the rules and finally she would end by an act of practical humility which consisted in kissing piously the feet of her sisters.

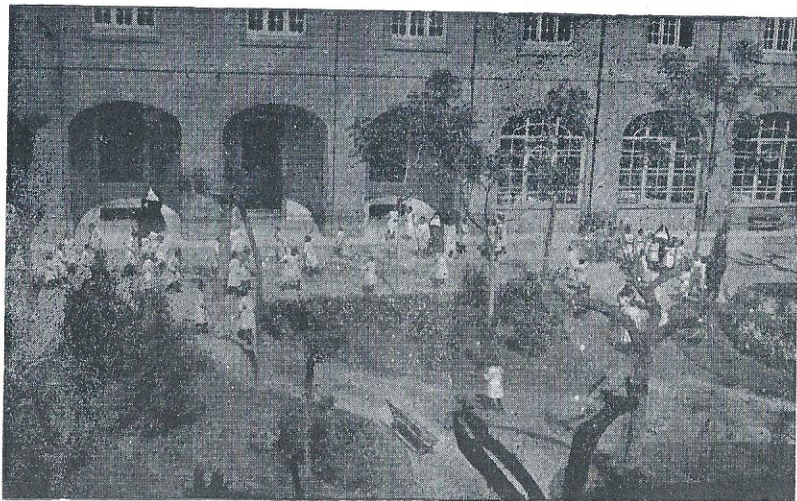
She always used to repeat to the Novice Mistress: "Train them in a solid spirit of humility and in the spirit of sacrifice."



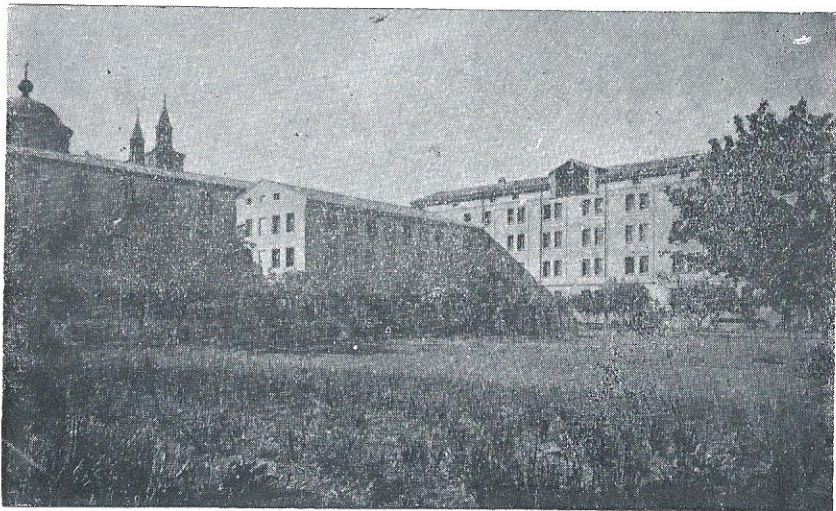
**Our Lady of Pilar Ward in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace Zaragoza.  
Mother Pabla was put in charge of this ward at the age of 23**



**Entrance of the Church — Hospital of Our Lady of Grace**



Orphanage (Hospicio) of Zaragoza, where Mother Pabla was a Mother and Teacher to the children



Rear view of the Novitiate built by Mother Pabla

She received harsh words or rude treatment not only with patience but with joy. Neither the age nor the high posts relented her preference for humble jobs and she would not allow others to serve her.

When she was already old, she saw once a sister carrying a big basket of bread. Quickly she went to help and when the sister showed her surprise at it, she said: "You need not be surprised, sister, we must always be ready to help in any kind of work and the more so when we get old in order to give good example to the younger sisters."

She took the correspondence herself, even if it were only a letter. When asked, "Why don't you call someone, Mother?" She answered, "Don't you see that the sisters are so busy in so many things?"

At every moment of her life people noticed in her that deep humility which made her so lovable and inspired so much confidence.

#### *Her meekness:*

Her continuous habit of interior recollection led her to know her own lowliness which, however, did not discourage her but deepened her humility and served as a ladder to climb up to the meek heart of Jesus. Looking at herself and looking at the heart of Jesus she acquired an immense sense of compassion towards the miseries of her neighbour. Trying to understand all and forgive all, she resembled the meek and humble heart of the Master.

One of the most penetrating sorrows of her heart which loved her sisters so tenderly, and inflamed as she was with the desire for the greater Glory of God, was, when she saw any sister faltering on the way of

fervour by negligence or infidelity. On such occasions her face took on an expression of resigned suffering which often moved the culprit to compunction of heart. But one would not notice in her any trace of anger or disturbance. She prayed, and sacrificed herself that her daughters might return to the right path. Her mercy was always available to those who went wrong and her lips would not utter a harsh word even if there were reasons to do so. She also tried to instill the same meekness into all the superiors of the institute.

"Have charity towards the sisters, she wrote to a superior, because none of us is free from temptations and hasty actions, for which we repent later on. In such cases we have to double our patience and compassion. All the superiors have to possess a mother's heart. And the General and her Vicar twice the same. Forgive them easily and treat them with love that fear may disappear from their hearts." And to another superior: "To produce fruit in the souls the best is to have patience, meekness with humility and much charity, for the Lord takes care of his people, even if they have some imperfections. It is only thus that we shall gain merits before God." Another sister noted: "Once a sister showed lack of respect towards Mother Pabla. And she remained calm and never showed any resentment, on the contrary, was always attentive to her."

This equanimity of mind was a fruit of her intimate union with the Divine Heart to whom, as she said, she was devoted for life and death. In this union with the Lord, we find an explanation for the sudden change that the souls experienced after speaking just a word with her. This was the secret of the efficiency of her obscure and hidden apostolate.

Her authority did not weaken on account of her meekness, on the contrary, it became stronger. Our goodness consists in the communication of our good things to the others. To be good is to place others in our place. Her pardon for the injuries and even calumnies was ample and universal.

A certain person had caused her many disgusts and had offended her notably. It was known later on through the sisters of a foundation that the same person turned from bad to worse and became miserable. She wrote to the superior of that house: "Regarding the poor X, do what you can. I feel so sorry for her." And once again. "Help her with charity without recalling the past for I feel compassion for her."

Her extraordinary meekness was proved in one of the most difficult cases which God permits for the exercise of heroic virtues of her faithful servants.

A superior, the prelate, a very wise and prudent man, wrongly informed in a delicate matter, reprimanded Mother Pabla and even ordered her to ask pardon and kiss the feet of a sister who had seriously offended her and disgusted her in many ways. He did not have to repeat his order. Overcoming her repugnance she immediately followed the order without saying a word in her defence. The prelate was so much edified that from that day onwards had a great regard and love for Mother Pabla and highly appreciated her virtues.

This was the perfection which she taught her sisters, which she learned in the school of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: A solid perfection based on warm and interior humility and meekness, which consisted



specially in the freedom of spirit, in the sweetness and humility of heart.

*Her obedience:*

The motto of her life was that of Christ: "I do always His will." Without explanation, she just did what was ordered to her, leaving to the superiors the prudence in giving an order and reserving to herself the promptness and joy of obedience.

While she was the superior at Alcaniz, she had to go to Barcelona with another sister in connection with some business about the congregation. In Barcelona they received an order from Mother General to start immediately by the first train and halt at Almudevar for an important work. They followed the order but shortly before arrival at Almudevar, they reflected that the sisters would not come to the station to collect them. There had been no time to send the information. The station is far from the village and it was already late in the night. Her companion suggested that they could proceed to Zaragoza and return the next day for it would be difficult for them to go alone at that time. Mother General would understand it and it was only a question of a few hours. It seemed reasonable but Mother Pabla was thinking what would be more perfect. On their arrival to the station she stood up firmly and said. "It is more perfect to obey literally and not to seek explanations. Let us get down and God will provide."

There was not a single soul on the station, but suddenly a man approached them and asked. "Where are you going, sisters?"—"To the convent," they said.—"The sisters did not tell me about you. I came here by chance. I do not know how you would manage to

go." He was the coach-driver of the village who never came to the station except when he was asked.

On her part, her many years of superiority had not changed her attitude; on the contrary, every day she endeavoured to practice this virtue more perfectly, which is the essence of the religious life. She listened with great respect to others' opinion and, when she was the General, to the proposals of her councillors and except in matters of conscience, she would rather prefer the advice of others to her own. In sickness she was very docile to follow the prescription of the doctor or the infirmarian. Like a child, she abandoned herself for the sake of obedience to follow faithfully the medical advice which she took as the will of God.

Her last sickness leaves an admirable example of this virtue. Her lack of appetite had reached such a stage that taking food was near to impossible for her. But when Mother Vicar, who always stood by her bed, said to her.—"Come on Mother, just a little more" without a word and quickly she tried to take her food. She was asking her opinion with such candour and docility that we were highly edified and moved. When she asked for anything she would add invariably: "if the Mothers agree to it."

In her instructions she always stressed obedience. "A blade of grass which we lift for the sake of obedience," she used to say, "has great merit before God, while great works done out of our own wish are worth little."

She wrote to a religious who was sad because she was transferred. "We religious have many ways to feed our spirit and to do away with the obstacles which

the devil puts in our way to disturb and waste our time. Do not think on this any more. Try to do the will of God fulfilling holy obedience which is the shortest way to heaven."

She corrected firmly any mistake in this matter, even if they were superiors. She writes to one of the superiors on the 17th April, 1928: "Sister, reached safely, but I am surprised that you did not send her on the 14th, as others did. You are responsible for not having sent her on the appointed day. You say that you were not informed, this annoys me still more. I told you in my office verbally. You said that you needed two postulants to substitute the sister, which I did. What else do you require, sister? We the superiors must go ahead of the others that others may see and imitate us and that all may be obedient."

Her eagerness for penance was always subject to the orders of her superiors and her confessor. Humility and obedience are the foundations of the Institute and in these two virtues she was a perfect model.

*Love of poverty:*

There is no saint who has not loved this virtue, going sometimes to extremes which seem rather impracticable. Mother Pabla too learned in the school of the Sacred Heart this lesson of great wisdom which has struck the world for centuries: Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mother Pabla enjoyed poverty as people enjoy riches and properties, it was her treasure. She felt honoured to describe the poor conditions in which the congregation lived from the beginning till the time when the reins fell into her hands. Those days when they

were not only short of what is convenient but even what is necessary, when having occasionally a refreshment in the evening was considered a rare pleasure, when they did not have sufficient number of chairs to sit, the crockery at the table was strictly within the limits of poverty. The same is to be said about the cells and the visitor's room. In those days everything was wanting in the house except peace and joy, which the Lord granted to them abundantly, both in the novitiate and all the convents.

Her dislike for earthly goods was absolute. She sought the kingdom of God and His justice, and God gave her everything in addition. Money multiplied in her hands but she did not know to explain how. Far from cheering her up, it was rather disturbing her. Those were the years of World War I. The whole world was in financial crisis due to this calamity, but in the Institute the sources were increasing. Once a sister found her in her office in a rather sad and pensive mood. "What is the matter, Mother?" She asked, "I am really afraid"—"Afraid of what?"—"Afraid of this abundance, I am afraid that God may not be pleased with us."

She found only one remedy to allay these fears: give alms without minding the quantity. During the war time she gave considerable amounts for the works of St. Peter, Rome, which caused surprise among those who came to know about it because the Congregation had been known as very poor.

When she feared that valuable donations could damage the spirit of the congregation she took decisions which appear to be strange now.

The sisters had assisted a woman who was mentally ill. The family, which was very rich, after the death of the said lady, in sign of gratitude, offered to the congregation a small hotel with its garden which could serve as a rest house for summer time. They laid only one condition that would reserve their right to visit the house for a few days in a year. Mother Pabla thanked for the offer but did not accept it fearing that this clause might establish relations and friendships at the cost of the spirit.

The abundance of sources made her vigilant so that the love for this virtue, which is called the bulwark of the communities might not cool down.

She carefully saw to it that holy poverty flourished in all the foundations that she opened. Her main wealth consisted in cutting down the needs and broadening the heart.

All her decisions and advices did not proceed from a spirit of narrow mindedness but were signs of a high ideal, of the nobility of her thoughts which were satisfied only with the possession of God.

## CHAPTER XII

### CHOLERA OF 1885: HEROIC DEEDS OF MOTHER PABLA AND HER SISTERS

Mother Pabla had been at the helm of the hospital of Alcaniz for more than six years. She ran it with a success without par combining the field of action of the sisters with the other works of zeal and charity, which her great heart idealized and her wonderful foresight and organizing mind turned into stunning realities.

That tiny place which under her influence had changed into a powerful centre of divine life was very dear to her heart. There she had suffered and prayed a lot and received special graces from heaven. She had tasted fully the joys of a family life, being very closely united to those sisters who lived a life of great sacrifices.

In all her foundations of Alcaniz she had exhibited her indomitable energies of spirit and the special virtues of her heart. The work was well established and it seemed that time had come for a little rest after a prolonged struggle, but so different are the plans of God, who develops the beauty and progress of His chosen souls. Precisely when the admiration of the people for the services of the sisters reached a climax and she could trust and rest in the spirit of fervour of her small but ideal community, God sends them an extraordinary trial on the occasion of an epidemic of cholera which left very sad memories for a greater part of the year 1885.

The services rendered by the sisters during that public calamity were great in every sense. The heroic

spirit of abnegation of the sisters and the voice of the people, moved in the face of their defiance of death, their extraordinary zeal and charity, all this erupted into cheers of admiration. The deeds of the sisters which Alcaniz witnessed during those days can be presented to the world as a proof that the Church is living faithfully its mission.

The sisters were competing for the most difficult and dangerous jobs with a spirit of absolute sacrifice. Mother Pabla could be fully satisfied with her daughters and the sisters watching their Mother could contemplate her as a great saint.

That small and insignificant group of sisters will carry on its shoulders not only the burden of providing the material assistance but the one which was much more difficult, of instilling courage and creating an atmosphere of serenity in a situation of great panic.

The hospital which was full of patients was not sufficient for the extent of their zeal. As messengers of God, they ran from early morning to every corner to the city to make themselves available wherever their presence was required. It is difficult to get the correct picture of the devastation of the epidemic through the fields and villages. Not a soul was to be seen on the roads. The disease caught entire families and nobody dared to approach the affected houses. Fear was growing. The isolation of the people increased further their suffering and sorrow.

In such circumstances the person who would fall the last victim to the disease would leave a chair at the entrance of the house. This chair was a guide to the sisters who went from house to house to see to

everything: the cleanliness, the disinfection, whatever was indispensable, very often to attend on them during their last moments by consoling and helping them to die a christian and holy death. This pilgrimage would last for the whole day and quite often throughout the night. With their zeal they did not even have time to take meals nor would it be possible if God, out of his mercy, had not raised charitable souls like Mrs. Victoria Forcada, who through her faithful servant Maria took care of the sisters. Mother Pabla always recalled with veneration that holy soul and said that, but for her charity, all the sisters would have succumbed to the disease.

Mother Pabla said that the worst part of that calamity was not the disease itself but the panic of the people. Many were dying merely out of fear. The situation demanded souls above normal: prevision, organizing spirit and, above all, an extraordinary charity to reach all, to boost the dejected spirits, to console the orphans and at times to take charge of them, all this was required in order to stop the devastating effects of the calamity. Shouts of anguish from the neighbourhood were constantly coming to her compassionate ears. She subdivided her small troop. These wonderful sisters responded with a generous and heroic "yes" to any sacrifices that she asked from them, which consoled her so much. She herself went ahead of these fast excursions, travelled long distances to carry a word of confidence to the poor patients. They were received as messengers from heaven.

Mrs. Maria Josefa Puyo narrates in an account about Mother Pabla: "Our family is very grateful to her for the assistance given to my brother, Mosen

Manuel Puyo, who was at that time the assistant parish priest of Castelseras. She went there with another sister, Sr. Antonia, when he was seriously ill and assisted him in a wonderful way and he survived. Wherever she entered, courage consolation and quite often health too entered with her. "One cannot imagine the magnitude of devastation and panic. The victims would have been many more but for the sisters."

As Superior, Mother Pabla went first as an example. Her activity was extraordinary. It is sufficient to say that besides the work in the hospital of Alcaniz, during those tragic days, the sisters served the patients in their private houses and even visited the neighbouring villages. These long journeys exhausted the sisters. Sr. Antonia fell seriously ill, with multiplied the work of the other sisters. From her distressed soul continuous prayers rose to the Lord to halt the epidemic. The answer from the Sacred Heart could be felt in the peace of mind and physical resistance of the sisters in the face of the calamity. Thus, she could teach on, that our ministries, even in the most critical conditions, are not an obstacle but rather a powerful means to grow in interior life.

Many patients died a holy death due to her assistance. We mention a fact in which, thanks to her intervention, a patient could prepare himself conveniently for a peaceful death. Mother Pabla had just entered the chapel when a sister announced the arrival of more patients and two dead bodies. Mother Pabla came out and said: "You are mistaken, sister. One of the two brought as dead is still living." In fact, her intuition proved to be correct. One of the two

patients was giving signs of life. They put him on a bed and helped him and he still had sufficient time to receive the sacraments with full consciousness.

### **The calamity was over, but not the trials.**

There was an abuse of a delicate nature in the hospital which Mother Pabla, as superior of the hospital, banned with a firm hand, but it was the beginning of a heavy cross that gradually took such proportions which had never been foreseen. The offended party took hold of all kinds of means to take revenge and even went to the extent of issuing a paper to denigrate the name of the Institution.

The people of Alcaniz took it as an injury to themselves what was done to the holy Mother and her community. The political parties came into the scene but the opposing side did not rest until the sisters were expelled from the hospital, which they had honoured so much with their heroic deeds.

### **Gratitude of the Village of Alcaniz**

During the whole period of trial, the patience and magnanimity of Mother Pabla were remarkable. And the Lord, who permitted the solid virtues of her faithful servant to be tested once again, turned eventually everything in her favour. The sisters returned to the hospital amidst great jubilation of the whole city, which had defended and maintained the sisters with subscriptions during that time of their calvary.

During this time, Mother Pabla was appointed Novice Mistress by Mother Martina Balaguer on the fourth of September, 1889. She was transferred to

Zaragoza, where she was installed on the Mayor Road with her novices. She continued, however, to supervise and protect the Institutions of Alcaniz. Her spirit was in Alcaniz through her letters which encouraged and consoled the sisters and at the same time she was pressing heaven through continuous prayers for a satisfactory solution. And God heard her fervent prayers. The day the sisters returned to their beloved hospital was a triumphant day for Alcaniz. The injustice was repaired and everybody was happy.

Mother Pabla always recalled with great love the faithful town which did so much to support and honour the sisters. Alcaniz was one of the dearest remembrances of her heart.

NOVICE MISTRESS

At the beginning of September, 1889, Mother Pabla received at Alcaniz the following official letter: "On this date you are appointed Novice Mistress of our congregation. I pray to the Lord that He may grant you the necessary graces to fulfill such an interesting and difficult post. Zaragoza, fourth September, 1889—The Superior General, Sr. Martina Balaguer.

It is impossible to get a clear idea of the tremendous difficulties faced by the sisters in those days. From the time of its foundation, the Hospital was also the Novitiate. The admission of the sisters was controlled first by the Governing Board, "The Sitiada" and later on by various Boards which used to limit the number of the candidates in a very cruel way, which blocked any kind of autonomy.

When a royal permission was obtained in 1885 to make foundations, the great difficulty was the scarcity of personnel. It was planned to acquire a house at Pilar Square in order to admit a greater number of sisters. From here they shifted to Mayor Road, where they lived when Mother Pabla was appointed Novice Mistress. The increase in the number of new foundations did not allow the novices sufficient time for a solid formation. Needs would arise suddenly and the novices had to be sent, sometimes by shortening their period of formation and at times even exempting them from it when they would remain under a senior and exemplary sister whom they were going to help.

For all these reasons there was need of a Novice

Mistress of an extraordinary caliber so that the shortage of time might be made up by the intensity and quality of formation.

Mother Martina who knew Mother Pabla perfectly well made the right choice by appointing her Novice Mistress at a time when the Novitiate was much reduced.

Mother Pabla did not hold the post for too long. The term of Mother Martina in the General's post was short, though very fruitful. She rendered her beautiful soul to the Lord in 1894 and thereafter Mother Pabla would head the congregation for the rest of her life.

Mother Pabla was Novice Mistress for few years but Providence rendered immense service to the congregation during this time. She saw the need of a solid formation and organized it in a way which has been found suitable up to now. The congregation found a Novice Mistress who would be ideal to form the sisters according to the spirit of the Holy Foundress.

### **Her zeal and prudence as a Novice Mistress**

She started her work with firmness and fervour, which was her characteristic. She stressed on three facets of life: to destroy the evil inclinations which St. Paul calls the old man, to sanctify the actions, even the most ordinary by a right intention and to grow in spiritual life through prayer and fruitful reception of the holy sacraments. And since it is impossible to attain these means without a spirit of sacrifice, she fostered it in every possible way.



Orphanage (Hospicio) of Zaragoza, handed over to the Sisters of Charity in 1872. Mother Pabla worked here from 1872 to 1878



Mother Pabla on her death-bed

One could consider that in view of the hard work to which the community was subjected, she might think that special sacrifices to control the nature and one's inclinations were not necessary: far from it. She thought it absolutely necessary for herself and others too, to practise the law of penance, to win our passions and fallen nature.

When the candidates joined the Novitiate she provided them all the necessary instruments and she herself gave them the example of mortification. Sr. Francisca Royo says: "During the time that I lived in the novitiate Mother Pabla was appointed Novice Mistress and it is there that I had an opportunity to admire her virtues and spirit of penance. Mother Dolores Barduzal, another novice of hers, writes: "Her exterior mortification was extreme. She used daily the instruments of penance, at least the hair-cloth and the small chain, and the discipline twice or thrice a week, to which we are the witnesses because we could hear the sound of strokes in the dormitory after going to bed. And along with the other sisters, among whom Sr. Dolores Ensenat, I saw the walls of a room which she had near the choir smeared with blood from the strokes which she received." Sr. Pilar Adan adds: "Once during the Holy Week when I was a novice many of us asked her permission to take discipline in the room which was near the choir. She denied the permission saying that those who wanted could do in the common dormitory." Thus she inculcated and maintained the spirit of austerity which was typical of the congregation.

Having trodden the path of austerity herself, she also tempered it with obedience. As she put it, the



soul, in order to be fully possessed of God, should not be debarred by flesh which is tenderly taken care of. Besides, by the special vocation of the congregation, those young girls had to be apostles and in order to save souls from the power of the devil they had to join prayer and tears with the blood of expiation. It was, therefore, convenient to initiate into the mysteries of immolation those who had to fight for the Lord with a life that was hard, obscure, hidden and full of sacrifices.

Along with the penances in which she herself took the lead, she taught them in a practical way to control the senses. Sr. Miguela Lafalla, who was in charge of the kitchen, says that once when Mother Pabla was weak, they prepared a little omelette for her meal. By no means would she agree to take it because she thought that the common food was sufficient and later on she gave a very forceful instruction so that never again did they prepare anything special for her.

During the Holy Week from Maundy Thursday, till Saturday she did not take any food and would allow those who had strong health to fast on bread and water on Friday and Saturday.

It is indeed very hard to combine an inflexible spirit of penance with tender love so that the austerity of life does not create tension and curb the cheerful life of the young candidates. But the saints know to strike the balance wonderfully. So did Mother Pabla. As a real mother she took great care of all her daughters paying special attention to their health as well as their spiritual life. She also gave great importance to the modesty, custody of eyes and the gravity of steps which help to control our curiosity which is the ruin of our spiritual life.

Another point which she tried to instil into the minds of the novices was obedience which is essential for the religious life. It kills our pride and leads us to a solid humility. Only the humble are obedient and there is no holiness without true humility. She had a special tact to cut the feelings of vanity. She praised moderately without ever using words which were not essential to encourage people. And that she did only towards those who were timid by nature.

In her corrections and admonitions, she knew to put a soft hand into the wound like a mother who wants to cure, but always with a firmness.

As a Novice Mistress and later on as Mother General, she never hesitated to correct abuses in the Rules. Sr. Ramona Bescos, her niece, relates that there was an abuse in the community where she lived. In order not to pain her heart and fearing that the sisters might suspect that she had given out the information about the abuse, she kept silent about it. But Mother Pabla called her at the end of a visit and said: "It is strange that you say nothing about this abuse"—"Then I confessed my fault and requested her not to bring out the matter because the others would blame her as the author of the information," she said. But Mother Pabla answered: "Neither for you nor for anyone else do I care when I see a duty of my conscience." In fact, she told Mother about the abuse and it was corrected.

She had to face some crosses on the part of a few rebellious minds which pained her heart to a large extent.

On one occasion it was noticed that some fruits kept for Mother Secretary were missing from the chest of the refectory table. She mentioned it in general

and advised them that she would be satisfied if the culprit came and informed her privately. Seeing that nobody was coming forward, on the next day she announced that, if the person concerned did not confess her fault at the time of meal, all would eat a plate of French beans with rice, without bread. When it was time for the meal, she said a few words which would have moved even the stones, nevertheless the culprit did not confess her fault. Then she ordered all of us to kneel down and have the meal in that posture. The reader went on with her reading and we all were crying to see Mother Pabla so much disgusted and we hardly touched our food. She spoke to us again expressing her sorrow because among her novices there was one who was so hard-hearted. After some time she told us that she had come to know the culprit and she had already left the Congregation.

Very rarely was she forced to take such strict measures. Her words were so powerful that normally they were sufficient to move the hearts. Frequently, her instructions were accompanied by tears which were sincere and gave strength to her words.

"When we broke any rule," says Mother Dolores Barduzal, "we could notice that she suffered first and then she corrected us with the tenderness of a mother. On one occasion she corrected a fault which I had committed without knowing its gravity because I was very young; but before she corrected me, she began to cry. When I saw her, I was moved and I cried too. Her prudent words and right advice made such an impression on my mind that they reminded me each time when the occasion arose to commit the same fault. That scene is still alive in my mind, even after so many years."

The fruit of this renunciation and struggle to which she subjected her novices was peace which she tried to convey by all means. To obtain this at times she used the gift that she had of knowing what was going on in the hearts. "I had a big temptation," says one novice. "Before I decided to tell her she came and revealed to me the state of my soul and thus I came out of her presence with a great peace in my soul." "She read our minds," says Sister Pilar Adan, "like an open book and more than once she referred to the thoughts that occupied our minds."

We can also add about the interest that she took to prepare our minds for prayer and a fruitful reception of the sacraments. As one Sister puts it: "Her recollection of mind was such that it instilled in us a sense of respect and veneration. She looked to be so full of God that when I was unable to pray, I just looked at her and united myself with her and that was my prayer." Another Sister says: "Seeing her did me a lot of good and nothing could give me a better idea of the infinite majesty of God like her attitude of deep prayer." Still another Sister says: "While praying she looked like a statue, not a slightest movement, evidently her blessed soul was too far from the earth." The novices did their best to follow her example and to benefit from those precious moments of prayer knowing at the same time that their beloved Mother Pabla would check their progress. Says one novice: "She was never short of time to enquire how we had fared in prayer, and we had to tell her frankly even if we had done it in a wrong way because we knew that she read our minds. I remember that once, before I told her, she guessed that my prayer had consisted in the wandering of my mind over the various pictures

of the choir. She gave me a good scolding, though with great charity which served as a good lesson to be more careful and recollected afterwards. She was inflexible in this matter because she considered prayer as very essential to a religious and in spite of being a loving mother, she would never allow us to sit during the prayer.

There was a general atmosphere of prayer in the novitiate during her tenure. She took pains to form the novices in a constant union with God as a powerful means of sanctification which would preserve them against the spirit of the world where they had to live and which they would sanctify with the scent of their virtues.

#### **Economer General**

Without exempting her from the job of Novice Mistress, the General Chapter of 1892 appointed her Economer General. God wanted her, while accepting the supreme post in the Congregation shortly after, to know the details of that work and consequently to take it as a heroic act, the greatest act of faith of her life, as she herself said it. From the time of this appointment she became the right hand of Mother Martina Balaguer, the Superior General. They shared together the problems and sorrows of lack of resources and personnel, together with other contradictions which were at times very painful. "God has had," Mother Pabla would say later on, "a special Providence towards our humble Institute. People did not take notice of us, except to cause us some humiliation. But when any public calamity arose, they immediately thought of us only to forget us afterwards, although we exhibited on these occasions treasures of abnega-

tion to the point of sacrificing our lives. Thus, there has never been a danger for us, a danger of working for worldly interests because normally we did not receive more than negligence and ingratitude."

One of such occasions of public calamities took place in 1893 on account of the war of Melilla, in Africa. The City Corporation offered Sisters to the Government, which accepted the offer and consequently by order of the Corporation a group of Sisters, among whom Mother Pabla, left for Melilla on the 25th of November, 1893. They remained out of Zaragoza for a short time. It is not clearly known what kind of difficulties they had to face but according to a touching report preserved in the archives of the Congregation, they did not proceed to Melilla but stayed at Malaga in the South of Spain and assisted the wounded soldiers in the hospital. They went through a lot of hardships. They had to sleep in a place which was used as a music room. They had to eat on the ground and although the Delegate Mr. Lamana told them to acquire one floor, they preferred to face this difficulty rather than go out of the house. They returned on the 23rd January, 1894.

This short excursion through the southern regions left a sad impression on the Venerable Mother. Later on, as General, she showed a great repugnance to make foundations in those beautiful places and though many places were offered and in very good conditions, she did not accept any of them. She never gave reasons for this attitude. In a way it is difficult to understand that, being so mortified she did not want to expose her daughters to similar trials. May be she saw danger of a spiritual order to her daughters in that area.

## ON THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

Mother Martina Balager, the Superior General, went to her reward on the 23rd August, 1894. It was a holy death. On her deathbed she emphatically pleaded with Mother Pabla not to refuse the cross of her burden so that she could carry on the projects which both of them had planned for the expansion of the institute and the greater glory of God.

The Sisters who were present did not have any doubt on or objection to the prophetic words of the dying General. At the General Chapter held on the 23rd November of the same year, Mother Pabla Bescos was elected Mother General.

**Her Faith**

She accepted the cross in a spirit of great faith. No less was the faith of the Sisters Capitulars in electing her, because at that time her health was totally ruined and humanly speaking, she could not live much longer. They believed that God's finger was in it and He could reanimate that frail body which was living from moment to moment. Keeping aside human prudence and what their eyes saw, they heard God's voice because her whole life had been a mosaic of the most beautiful virtues. She was dealing with human affairs with her eyes fixed on the Lord. Her answers and decisions proved to be most correct, undoubtedly due to her pure intentions. Many incidents can be quoted to prove that her just and pure soul saw straight the will of God, unmindful of any other interests.

There was an issue of a new foundation. The request came from a most respectable person, to whom the Congregation was very grateful. But there were difficulties. Only three sisters were required. But Mother Pabla was not willing to start a foundation with such a reduced number of Sisters and, therefore, she refused very politely. But the petitioners did not give up. The Councillors too, favoured the proposal because the effects of an absolute negative could be serious. Then Mother Pabla gave a firm answer: "Please do not insist. It is a matter of conscience and I shall not yield. In such conditions, I think I send sisters where they neither have time to pray nor a community life. It is a case of a clear danger of losing the true spirit and faltering in the vocation, which I cannot allow. If the refusal causes us any damage, praised be the Lord. I have no other aim than to please Him in everything and at every moment".

This anxiety in seeking the will of God on great as well as small occasions inspired great respect and veneration in all who were dealing with her. Said Dr. Luis Perez Serrano: "For those of us who had the pleasure and honour of dealing with her, she was an exceptional woman who inspired at the same time great respect and love, veneration and confidence that, while speaking to her, that word, the holy name of 'mother' which symbolizes for men the summary of all the perfections was spontaneously flowing from one's heart to the lips."

"From the first moment she inspired in me confidence and respect," says Mrs. Amparo Fairen De Faci. Her eyes, in particular, called my attention. Her face was so lively, sweet cheerful and angelical,

something so attractive that I often told her: "Mother, your eyes do not fit your age. They look to be of a child".

Her indomitable faith was the fruit of her heart and mind: The clean of heart will see God. She saw God everywhere; in success and in various events, in trials and in joys, she saw Him as He is in Himself, love and mercy. This spirit of faith was the source of all her actions, source of her courage in undertaking works which at times appeared to be too daring.

A respectable person who was closely connected with the affairs of the Congregation related that when Mother Pabla explained her plans for the construction of the Novitiate, everybody was astonished. They asked: "Mother, from where will you get the finances to complete this building?" And when they saw that the construction started and went on uninterruptedly till its completion, they had no words to express their admiration for her. She communicated this spirit of faith to her daughters through her words, example and prayers.

She once sent a sister for some work in an office and the sister felt that she was incapable of that job and began to cry. "My child, Mother Pabla said, in a kind but grave and energetic tone, "Have faith. You are not going out of your own will, you are going for the sake of obedience. The Lord is committed to help you with the necessary grace. Much more difficult is the job which the Sacred Heart has entrusted to me and nobody knows better than myself my inability for it, but I have always trusted Him. Do you the same".

By the same spirit of faith she saw God in all her Superiors and it inspired her to a tender and deep

love towards the Church. When she brought uniformity to the prayers of all the communities, She did not forget to include prayers for Holy Mother the Church, for the Pope, for the entire christian world, for peace and harmony among the christian rulers together with some beautiful prayers which were already being recited from the time of the first sisters.

It is easy to understand that a soul with such a robust faith had to be immersed in an undaunted hope. It was one of the fruits of her devotion to the Sacred Heart. "Expect everything from the Sacred Heart". At difficult and hard times, when any danger threatened the Institute she animated and supported her Councillors by saying: "Have we not entrusted the Congregation to Jesus and Mary? Do not be afraid. They will not lead us in the error". And Indeed it happened so. On more than one occasion the Sacred Heart saved the Institute from dangers which could destroy it.

### **Her Hope**

Through different phases of the Institute those words of the Holy Foundress could be repeated, which she referred to the beginning of the Congregation: "If our foundations had not been laid in a hope in the Sacred Heart and if we had leaned on any human support, I have no doubt that we would have succumbed to the slightest of all those difficulties which we faced at the beginning".

Therefore she fought against despair with these thoughts of faith and inspired her daughters for a holy abandonment which was a characteristic note of her life.

### Her Charity

As regards her charity, it can be stated without any exaggeration that her entire life was a perfect sacrifice for the love of God; her sole aim was to please Him. She always strove to serve him faithfully and could say about herself at the end of her life: "When I was alright, I did all that I could. Now it remains for me to rest in the Lord." She used to feed this fire of charity and God's love with thousand and one devices. The most efficient and frequent among them was her constant and uninterrupted mortification. With a long experience in spiritual matters she knew that the fire of love can be kept alive with the wood of the cross and this sublime virtue lives only by sacrifices. Her recollection was absolute, her control on the eyes was notable, but without neglecting her duties of a Mother and Superior. "How is it, said the sisters, that Mother sees everything and appears to see nothing?"

As regards her mortification in food, even during the convalescence of her serious diseases, she never touched any appetizing food. She graciously covered this desire of mortification by telling the sisters that a few potatoes and boiled egg pleased her most.

Whether she was on knees or sitting, her posture was always edifying. Many sisters observed that during the whole time when she was sitting for meals in the refectory, she never changed her position. The same can be said when she was sitting in her office, always a very edifying attitude; she did not seem to pay attention to offensive words and even grave injuries, a sweet smile was her right answer.

In order to embrace the cross and keep alive the flame of love she would also avail of the carelessness

of the nurses during her sickness. A sister reports that once a painful plaster was applied to her back and it happened that the Sister infirmarian forgot to remove it in time. When she was asked after a long time if she had managed to rest, she answered with a smile: "Sisters, I am happy with this plaster and pleased to lose my rest." The plaster was immediately removed, but her skin was burnt. When the sister infirmarian apologized profusely for her inadvertence, she said: "Sisters, when the Lord allows us sufferings, we must accept them and thank Him because they are great benefits. What appears to be forgetfulness to you was in fact God's wish for my physical and spiritual good".

### Her Devotion to the Passion of Christ

All that has been said above proves her great devotion to the passion of our Lord. She meditated continuously on the sorrows of Christ and she acquired such a great desire to suffer that all her sufferings she took for nothing. In her correspondence there is hardly any letter in which she does not mention the importance of the cross and how little we actually suffer. Let us pick up some passages of her correspondence.

"Let us not be so sorry for the cross. What would our life be without it? Let us collect with pleasure these little thorns which will merit us a big amount of eternal glory". "Well, my dear child, how much do we suffer? Little or nothing at all. What are our insignificant sufferings compared to what our Divine Saviour has suffered?"

From her own words, we know that when any sad or disturbing thought occupied her mind she took refuge in the holy wounds of our Holy Redeemer,

specially the wound of His side. And at the end of the Way of the Cross, after the adoration of the five wounds, she prayed another Our Father to adore all the main wounds of the Saviour.

### **Her Devotion to the Holy Eucharist**

As she loved the Holy Victim so much and having her eyes constantly fixed on Him, it is clear that she was going on to meet Him where He is: the Holy Eucharist. Great was her devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of Mass. In spite of having so many duties, she attended all or nearly all the masses that were being celebrated in the church of the Novitiate. During the mass she remained absorbed in the contemplation of the mysteries, uniting herself with the adorable Victim and offering herself with it.

“During her sickness”, says the infirmarian, “so many times I had to keep watch on her. She hardly said a word, but when it was time of the community mass, she would say: Sister Elisa, let us join ourselves in a special way with the community which is now offering the Mass:” in fact, she followed the Mass with such a devotion that its remembrance has been deeply engraved on my mind. During those moments she became more expansive and explained so beautifully the divine mysteries that it produced a great devotion in me. She told me once: “Since many years I make the intention to unite myself with all the masses being celebrated in the world, and since there is no minute or moment when this Divine Lamb is not offered to the Eternal Father for our salvation, we can all the time receive innumerable graces which flow from this wonderful sacrament.

Nobody could count the number of her actual visits, besides the spiritual visits to the Blessed Sacrament every day. When she suffered, the Blessed Sacrament was her consolation. When she enjoyed, she went there in thanksgiving. When she was afraid she went for comfort. When she doubted she went for enlightenment. In no other place were her steps so firm and measured as in the small passage from her office to one of the tribunes of the same floor. During the night, when a little light was seen around the Eucharist, it was surely Mother Pabla who with her small lamp spent her time near the centre of her love.

Her deep humility did not reveal even to her intimate friends the way how our Lord communicated Himself with her but it is absolutely sure that she solved all her problems and took all her important decisions in front of the Eucharist and a long experience proved that, when Mother Pabla was determined to act, after a long consultation with the Tabernacle, that enterprise, in spite of all the serious obstacles, was successfully accomplished.

This tender and burning devotion was rewarded by extraordinary favours. The greatest among them can be considered the custom implanted at the initiative of Fr. Juan Buj, the Director of the Novitiate, in all the communities, of the daily communion before the decrees of St. Pius X in this matter. The fervour with which she received it and the thanksgiving that followed was a motive of edification to all her daughters, for whom it was sufficient to watch her to know how the Saints received Holy Communion.

During her last sickness the Holy Viaticum was administered to her. The patient was totally absorbed

in thanksgiving which prolonged so much that at last the infirmarian, a little impatient, gently touched her to serve food. Mother Pabla, as if she woke up from a sound sleep, said: "So quickly? I have just eaten the Divine Lamb and I am full". Indeed, she was full of God.

### **Her Devotion to the Blessed Virgin**

It is also worth describing her devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This devotion took origin in her house under the invocation of the Virgin of the Holy Rosary. That was how the family honoured the Blessed Virgin Mary and when she joined the Congregation she was immensely happy to see that the Congregation was propagating unceasingly the Holy Rosary. She also had particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the invocation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. So was also her devotion to Our Lady of Pilar. It is an old custom in the Congregation that the sisters, before their departure to the foundations, visit the Angelic Chapel of the Virgin to invoke her blessing. And the sisters never leave for foreign countries without receiving Holy Communion at the feet of the miraculous statue. The novena and the feast of Pilar is celebrated with solemn cult in all the houses. Many of the foundations which she started, she put under the patronage of this beautiful devotion, but the title which shared her greater love was that of the Immaculate Conception. She used all means to foster the devotion to Our Lady in all houses and it was her great consolation and joy to see with her own eyes during her visits, how the Sisters loved the Most Holy Virgin and how all the communities lived intimately with the Heavenly Mother.

It is recalled that towards the end of her life on three occasions Mother Pabla was seen almost out of herself under the impulse of an extraordinary joy, truly inebriated with love: once on the feastday of the Sacred Heart, on Easter and on her last feast of Immaculate Conception in this world in the year 1928.

She would live only a few days more and her joy was so intense, radiant and extraordinary, her pale face was suddenly shining so brilliantly and spoke such things on the Most Holy Virgin that the sisters who were present were astonished and asked: "Has Our Lady given you special graces today?" "Oh, yes, many" she said. Evidently she was more in heaven now than on earth. And she repeated these words on her deathbed: "To love, bless and glorify you, oh Purest Virgin, for the whole eternity, only this do I desire".



## COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE FROM THE CIVIL AUTHORITY

We enter now the last stage of the history of this great soul who can rightly be called along with Mother Maria Rafols the second Foundress of the Congregation for the Lord entrusted to her the task of its consolidation and rapid development.

Founded at the Hospital of Grace, Zaragoza, the Congregation right from the beginning depended absolutely on the "Sitiada", the Governing Body of that famous hospital.

We would be tempted to lament this absorbing dependence on the Sitiada, had we not recognized God's hand in it, who wanted the Institute to be deeply rooted in humility and its growth and development amidst crosses and encroachments of all kinds.

The Congregation expanded, though slowly, but the situation did not change after the death of Mother Rafols. The right to intervene in the administration of the community and in such vital acts as the election of the Superiors, had been stabilized in course of time and handed down successively and the Board of the Hospital inherited from the Sitiada all the powers over the Institute.

The poor sisters who were so much used to all kinds of interference, which was in fact real servitude, would have accepted it indefinitely, if a serious difficulty had not forced them to throw off this link. Rome would not approve the Constitutions of the Congregation on account of this intervention of civil authorities in the internal administration.

Unfortunately, all efforts for an internal independence from the Corporation had failed. It was in such conditions that Mother Pabla took over as Superior General.

She waits for the occasion of a voting which was due to be held at the Hospital of Tarazona for the appointment of the Superior and Councillors. On the said date she met in Tarazona Mr. Lamana, who had been delegated by the Honourable Corporation to preside over. She had a meeting with him and the voting was suspended. That was the first step with a touch of prudence, intelligence and good sense, but she was still far from winning the decisive battle. Soon after, further negotiations disclosed that the Honourable Corporation was reluctant to yield to the correct reasons exposed by Mother Pabla. Her last argument was that a Congregation which was nearly hundred years old was not obtaining the approbation from Rome only for the sake of the interference of the civil authorities. She said further that they could get a detailed information on the matter from the Archbishop himself.

Her proposal was accepted favourably. Time was precious and the prudent Mother acted quickly. On the following day, strengthened by a prolonged prayer and comforted with the Holy Eucharist, Mother Pabla visited the Archbishops' House before the visiting hours. The time was not suitable. The Archbishop was in bed. The officials would not allow a visit. Mother Pabla did not turn back and requested the archbishop to be informed about her visit. The good Prelate received her immediately. In a few words she presented to him the serious inconveniences of the prevailing

situation which blocked the approval of the Congregation by the Holy See.

The Archbishop expressed his regret over the situation and said: "Be in peace, Mother Pabla. I shall defend your cause energetically".

Soon after she left the Archbishop's House, a Committee of the Corporation also presented the gravity of the case before the ailing Prelate. The Archbishop's reasons nearly convinced them. Further meetings with Mother Pabla cleared all the fears and a problem which had started with so much opposition ended most amicably. Finally, the approbation was obtained which started a new era in the life of the Congregation. The date of approval of this important document can be written in golden letters in the annals of the Congregation, but the memorable day when the battle was won was the one when Mother Pabla had the interview with the Archbishop.

Mother Pabla herself said that her suffering was so intense during those hours that she returned home fully in perspiration.

### **Final Approval of the Congregation by the Holy See**

Once the freedom of action was obtained, quick steps were taken to secure the approval of the institute and its Constitution.

In the same year of 1896 she writes to His Eminence, Cardinal Verga in Rome: "Your Eminency and Rev. Father in Christ: It is nearly two years that His Excellence Mariano Supervia, Auxiliary Bishop of Zaragoza, handed over to this Congregation of the Bishops and Religious, through Fr. Antonio Langa, the informa-

tions of the Bishops of the Communities of this Congregation which are working in their respective dioceses, with the aim of getting final approval of their Constitutions or Rules from His Holiness, with the condition that they will strictly follow the norms of the Sacred Congregation; the decree of praise has already been granted on the 13th of April 1889. Though I am persuaded that matters will follow the customary normal procedure, I would be happy if Your Eminence could see to it that the matter is settled quickly and successfully. I beg you to excuse me if I have been too daring by addressing myself to such a respectable person. I remain subject to the orders of Your Eminence. Your most obedient and respectful daughter—Sister Pabla Bescos."

The decree of approval of the Congregation is dated the 14th January, 1898 and on the 18th of the same month and year, His Holiness Pope Leo XIII granted the Congregation a protector in the person of His Eminence, Card. Segna. On the 3rd August, 1901 was signed the decree of approval of the Constitutions for a period of 3 years and finally on the 11th March, 1904, was signed the decree of definitive approval. It was an immense joy for Mother Pabla and the whole Congregation.

Hundred years of a laborious process had rolled by since the foundation of the Congregation, during which the Lord, without hurry, knowing that all the hours are His, had worked through the living spirit of the Institute, stabilizing the character of its apostolate, whose efficiency consisted specially in the sweetness, the humility, prayer, sacrifice and abnegation. He does not want splendour. He is satisfied with faith, adoration and love.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE NOVITIATE

Once the freedom of action was secured, nothing stopped Mother Pabla from developing gradually the plans that she had for the Congregation. She was most preoccupied with a solid formation of the novices. The place which they occupied at Mayor Road was not sufficient. And due to the lack of space, in order to admit the new candidates, the novices had to be shifted before completing the stipulated time. The construction of a house for the novitiate was, therefore, urgent. The implementation of this plan did not appear to be possible because the financial resources of the Institute were so limited that such a project looked like a dream. But Mother Pabla had a firm faith that the Novitiate would be built.

The first gift of the Sacred Heart for the Novitiate which she had in mind and even more in her heart was the appointment of the Director of the same in the person of Fr. Juan Buj by the end of 1896. How much the Congregation owes to him, what an impulse it received under his direction, the spirit, the fervour, the encouragement and the devotion to the Sacred Heart for nearly forty years, will be fully known only in heaven.

Mother Pabla who knew better than anyone else the providential help that heaven sent her through this servant of God, referred to him specially on her deathbed. She did not call anyone else's name so frequently: "Never forget," she said, "What Fr. Juan, this holy man has done for the Congregation and the

selflessness with which he did it." This recommendation was one of her dominant thoughts. In fact, the good Father deserved that tender remembrance of her grateful heart. Probably Mother Pabla recalled during those moments the distant times of the beginning of his work in the Novitiate of the Mayor Road when, under his initiative the vigorous spirit of the sisters and the young novices was being kindled. Perhaps the solemn inauguration of the First Fridays in January 1897 came to her mind with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, a solemnity which may be equalled but never surpassed.

Those who did not hear Fr. Juan will not figure out the fire that he kindled in the small group of novices and sisters for the preparation of these solemn feasts.

As the Sacred Heart of Jesus was being honoured with such a fervour, numerous petitions for new foundations kept coming in from the sisters. The hour had come when the Sacred Heart was fulfilling the promise made to the Holy Foundress: "The Congregation will be very small and ignored for a long time. But He would see to it that it expanded and spread out later on".

Mother Pabla did not have personnel to fulfil all these petitions. Then a crusade of prayers was started, asking on First Fridays from the Sacred Heart many and solid vocations and a new Novitiate. The Sacred Heart responded to this faith and confidence marvelously. In July of 1898 Mother Pabla went on visitation to the North. At the Carmel College of Portugalete, she had the consolation of seeing Mrs. Sotera de la Mier, a very gifted and virtuous lady. The illustrious lady was very anxious to meet Mother Pabla and had

requested her to spend some time in that college, founded through her inexhaustible charity, so that she could talk to her on holy and spiritual matters.

Mother Pabla accepted her request and during her conversation she spoke of the need of a new Novitiate. The noble lady immediately offered her 3,000 duros (a spanish coin) for that purpose. That amount was too little for the project, still, she saw God's will in it and with full confidence in Him she started the work.

Since the complete scarcity of resources was well known in the Congregation, the novices themselves proposed to her that they could skip the chocolate which they had every morning at breakfast. Mother Pabla hesitated, but the novices insisted to such an extent that she agreed and said: "The sacrifice of chocolate will be the foundation of the new Novitiate". And it proved to be so to the great surprise of the people in the house and the outsiders. She would say: "The walls of this novitiate are mixed with the miracles".

Along with the Novitiate the Sacred Heart answered the second petition, the one of many and solid vocations. In the year 1898 itself the Novitiate was overflowing with the novices and the number went on increasing thereafter.

While the construction of the building was going on, the plan of the formation of the novices was also being framed. The new director, a zealous apostle needed no other source of inspiration than the love of the Sacred Heart which urged him to devote himself increasingly for the health and perfection of the souls.

The origin of the well known conferences which inflamed so many souls under the inspiration of the

fiery words of the saintly Fr. Juan could not be more touching and humble. In that small hall of the Novitiate of Majoy Road, so poorly furnished, the novices were sitting on the floor, because there were no chairs, around Fr. Juan and the Novice Mistress, at the time Mother Felippa Beragua. There Fr. Juan in an intimate atmosphere, expressed in his burning words the feelings of his zealous heart. About 40 years in this obscure ministry, which had been so efficient that one of the leading authorities said on the occasion of his death: "What will immortalize Fr. Juan is not precisely his triumphs at the pulpit not his magazine "The Echo", but the Novitiate of the sistres of charity of St. Anne, his wonderful work in the formation of the novices".

How anxiously did the novices await his instructions on Thursday! His presence alone, the way he made the sign of the cross, the accent of his invocations to the Sacred Heart were more effective than a beautiful sermon. The novices came out inflamed, touched and decided for any kind of sacrifices and the most generous offerings were done immediately at the feet of the altar. Jesus heard them and quite often accepting the sincerity of those present, He approached that garden to pick up some of the most fragrant flowers.

### General Chapter 1900

In the year 1900 Mother Pabla was re-elected for the first time for a second sexennial. The first act after her re-election was to establish uniformity of prayers in all the houses of the Congregation.

Two remarkable events of the year 1904 are: the completion of the Novitiate and the approval of the

constitution by the Holy See. She hurried to get them printed and to promulgate them, she called an extraordinary general chapter which began on the 22nd October 1904. A great joy and a deep gratitude to the Lord rose up from the huge assembly. None of the superiors were absent, thus, she saw gathered around her all her daughters and shared the joy of their hearts. It was an occasion to sing the "Te Deum" in thanksgiving. God had heard the prayers and satisfied the burning desire of all. They had been approved by the Church. At that moment they felt fully rewarded. A hundred years of expectations, full of crosses and distresses, but also crowned by God's fatherly providence, who miraculously saved them on various occasions from the danger or extinction and conducted them finally to that hour of glory and gave stability to the years of insecurity that had preceded.

Mother Pabla, after the first act of thanksgiving to the Sacred Heart availed of the meeting to establish certain norms and principles of conduct, to clarify some doubts, in a word, to complete the legislation which was given in the book of the rules with the explanation of its spirit.

### **Promulgation of the Constitution**

In fact, the important part of a law is not precisely its words but the spirit which keeps it alive. This was the main objective of that famous Chapter, one of the most important convoked so far. According to the chronicles of the Institute, important agreements were reached and some austere customs regarding the vow of poverty, practiced by the older sisters, acquired the strength of a law. They could not dispose of a stamp,

or a medal or a needle and thread nor decide by themselves if they could dispose of a dress or object, no matter how old it was. It was also decided that they could not go home or have meals outside the community. It was also settled about the manner of conducting the chapter of faults to which Mother Pabla attached great importance provided that it were held in the right way. It was decided that a sister would not be admitted for the vows without a written recommendation of the superior under whom she had worked. It was determined about the prayers to be offered on the occasion of the death of a Pope, a Bishop in whose diocese there was a foundation or any prominent benefactor and the manner of circulating the list of fraternity for the information of prayers and other good works. Finally, they worked out the details of the programme of the functions to be celebrated on the occasion of the centenary of the foundation of the Congregation and the memorable events which coincided with it: the approval of the constitutions and the completion of the novitiate.

### **Gifts from the Heart of Jesus**

Since these events coincided with the jubilee year of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother Pabla believed that Our Lady had obtained these special favours from her Divine Son and therefore she ordered that the jubilee years be celebrated in all the houses most solemnly.

In Zaragoza the Corporation expressed on this occasion its great appreciation towards the Congregation and its services in the Houses of Beneficence by spending large sums on the celebrations and leaving

the whole compound of the Hospital at the disposal of Mother Pabla. The Most Rev. Archbishop too proved very clearly on this occasion his great love for the Institute and his special regard for Mother Pabla.

The last day of celebrations was of an extraordinary solemnity; not only the Corporation and the Archbishop were present to honour the humble institute but the entire population of Zaragoza flocked to the church of the hospital, the governor, the mayor and the committee of all the communities and departments and a huge crowd split from the church to the roads.

These imposing functions were a prelude for those which Zaragoza was preparing with a delirious rejoicing on the occasion of the centenary of the Sieges four years after.

Mother Pabla returned to her daily work in the corner of her office, consolidating the congregation, securing precious favours and privileges and exercising with her zeal a beneficial influence even on lay people with whom she was dealing. They were caught by her charming personality and derived from her conversation, strength to improve their lives or proceed with a new vigour on the way to perfection. And it is no wonder because one's total dedication to God, as St. Francis de Sales says, is the expression of charity, the scent of humility, the merit of patience and the fruit of perseverance.

In connection with her office she had to deal with a renowned gentleman who belonged to a very noble family; due to the political situation he had been forced to be away from Spain for many years and when he

returned he was accompanied by a distinguished lady whom he introduced as his legitimate wife.

Mother Pabla, with her fine sense of intuition, understood very clearly that the devil had entangled those two souls and due to a social pressure they were unable to break their sinful relations.

She decided to face the devil with great prudence and by her usual energy and sense of superiority, she attempted to tackle the man alone. She knew that, once she convinced the man, the lady would not hesitate but rather wish to come out from that abnormal situation and gain peace with her conscience and with God. With a few words from Mother Pabla, the man was touched by grace and without any difficulty he opened his conscience and accepted that she was right and said that he himself was anxious to regularise the situation; but he would do it only if Mother Pabla arranged the matter under complete secrecy—"Do not be afraid she said, I take the responsibility of arranging the matter with total secrecy." And she did it. She handled the matter with such tact and discretion that she saved the two souls, the prestige of the gentleman who was considered a good christian and the honour of the lady who from then onwards nurtured a great regard for Mother Pabla. The gentleman, on his part, from that day onwards became a great protector of the Congregation and the Congregation counts him among the most outstanding benefactors.

## EXPANSION OF THE CONGREGATION FOUNDATION OF THIS PERIOD

Maintaining a steady hand on the internal organisation of the communities and preserving the spirit of austerity and charity, Mother Pabla was also taking steps to extend the field of action of the Institute.

The scent of the virtues of the sisters of the small Congregation was spreading far and wide and requests were pouring in to open new foundations. Two incidents contributed specially for this expansion: the civil war and the cholera of 1885.

In November 1893, Mother Martina sought permission from the Ministry of Mercy and Justice to start foundations all over Spain. The permission was obtained but, for reasons which are not known, it was not published in the official gazette and thus it was almost impossible to start new foundations.

Elected General in 1894, one of the first acts of Mother Pabla was to seek from the Ministry of Mercy and Justice the publication of the permission on the gazette, which she secured, after long negotiations, on the 1st March, 1897.

A few foundations had been started in some provinces since 1885 with private permission, before the publication on the gazette.

We shall mention only the foundations which are more famous either on account of the virtues which flourished in them or persecutions which were faced in them by the sisters. Two in Valencia (Institute of

Ophthalmology at Algemesi and the Institute of Dr. Candelas in Valencia); a school for children at Monzon and a college in Trujillo (Venezuela) all in 1895.

Other foundations would follow soon which were very much according to her spirit and taste, dedicated to the education of the people in villages where the isolation of their lives and their customs made them more receptive to the benefits of a christian education.

The first of these foundations is owed to the generosity of Mr. Francisco Caverro. In the neighbourhood of Zaragoza, he owned a beautiful tower at Garra-pinillos which he donated to Mother Pabla as a residence for the sisters with only one condition that the sisters open school for the children of the inhabitants of that area.

Mother Pabla accepted immediately the condition and the indispensable repairs were taken up, Mr. Francisco himself being the architect. In the archives of the Congregation there is a note of eternal gratitude. of the Institute to Mr. Francisco.

The inauguration was a magnificent function. On the 9th August 1896. the small chapel was full of people. The Archbishop's delegate, Fr. Faustino Camprovin, blessed the house and a solemn mass was sung amidst the people's jubilation.

The small school, which has done immense good to those farmers, bears witness to many sisters who worked there, spent their last days and died a precious death.

Consecrated to the Sacred Heart and extended to serve as a sanatorium to the sick sisters, the house has been a witness of beautiful scenes of edification. From

its humble and devout chapel, Jesus is spreading increasingly graces of fortitude on those patients and attracts all the people of the neighbourhood.

Hardly the function of inauguration at Garrapinillos was over when on the 19th of the same month of August, she set foot for Iglesuela del Cid; she was accompanied by Mother Maria Balaguer, sister of Mother Martina and the sisters who were going to start the new foundation.

From that year onwards, she spent a great part of her life in travelling either by coach or train, covering all the roads of Spain to set up new Tabernacles along with activities which opened the hearts of big and small to the love of Jesus Christ.

During the journeys she completed all her prayers at the time which was set for the community and when they were over she remained silent in an attitude of recollection. Neither the heat nor cold or any other inconvenience could change her attitude or expression. A senior sister relates that during a long journey by coach on a hot day, a burly man almost crushed Mother Pabla who suffered it without the slightest movement to the great surprise and admiration of the other sister who was getting tempted to remind the unreasonable passenger, of the trouble which he was causing to his neighbour. When the man alighted from the coach, the sister felt a great relief, but Mother Pabla said nothing, as if she had not suffered any trouble.

She never slept in the coach where it is almost impossible to sleep because of its shakiness or even in the trains. She would not even lean against anything. In a word, she was following the rules literally which prescribe modesty and silence.

Her journey to Iglesuela was long and inconvenient and they had to do it in three stages. They arrived at Iglesuela on the 22nd of August. The last journey from Morella to Iglesuela was a kind of pilgrimage. They stopped first at the chapel of Cid, dedicated to Our Lady, where they had their meal and some rest, then they went to the Calvary on account of her great devotion to the Way of the Cross and finally they visited the chapel of Loreto, dedicated also to the Blessed Virgin. There they were surprised to see a big crowd of the people that was awaiting to welcome them.

A large number of people had come, not only from Iglesuela but also the neighbouring villages to attend that occasion which was unusual to the people of distant areas. To the joy and the overflowing gratitude of those hearts; nine girls dressed in white approached the sisters to welcome them in the name of the village.

Mother Pabla thanked the children and all the people present and soon after they organised a procession.

The sisters proceeded surrounded by the huge crowd and accompanied by a band which played the tune of "Ave Maris Stella". They first visited the parish church where the parish priest Fr. Manuel Izquierdo, intoned the "Te Deum". As they came out of the church, everybody wanted to watch closely the sisters because they considered that their arrival was the greatest gift received by them from heaven. Thus, they led them to the small school where they sang the "Hail Holy Queen".

After such scenes which repeated so many times during her glorious life, when she remained along with her sisters, the most expressive thanksgiving rose



from her heart, because He was being glorified through His humble servants. She expressed fervent feelings of humility which was laying deeper roots in her soul.

Without any rest, they proceeded to Cantavieja, where another big welcome was awaiting them. Besides Mother Maria Balaguer and Mother Isidora Sangorrin, many ladies and nearly all the priests who attended the function at Iglesuela were present. At Cantavieja it was the foundation of a small hospital paid for by a couple, Mr. Francisco Xavier and Mrs. Agustina Zurita.

### **Her Motherly Foresight**

While starting new foundations, her motherly and foreseeing mind also watched the development of the existing houses. Their development was a motive of preoccupation to a good mother, due to the shortage of resources. In particular, the two clinics of Madrid and Barcelona were a source of continuous torture and only her indomitable faith could bear it. There the sisters did not die of hunger. Their suffering was much more cruel because sometimes they were short of everything except the desire to suffer. The letters coming to Zaragoza brought very painful news for her. She did not mind to suffer herself, but seeing her daughters suffering and being unable to help them really pierced her motherly heart.

There are records of those times which prove how God sent them unexpected help in critical situations. Now it is a donation which comes in time when a sister presents a bill for payment, now it is a permission to carry on the works taken up at the college at Alcaniz, which had been considered impossible to obtain;

Sr. Teresa Galvez, of holy memory, with the audacious confidence of holy souls, took the letter of application for permission to the Tabernacle before sending it to the post and the permission came from Madrid very quickly to everybody's surprise. God had heard the Prayer and the works could be continued. That was the spirit of fervour and confidence of those first daughters of Mother Pabla, trained in her school.

On the 2nd October of the same year, 1896, she took over the government school for children at Alagon and on the 1st April 1897 a hospital was inaugurated in the same building with two reals (a Spanish coin) as a grant for each sister and five when there would be patients.

Wherever there was an urgent need, the poor to attend, children to educate or shelter, in other words whenever there was a need or rendering service to the poor, she felt strongly impelled to accept foundations, even if the conditions were such that the sisters had to live very poorly, because her long experience had shown her that in the big house of God one could always find what is necessary and one can always depend on funds of divine treasury which is inexhaustible.

Before the inauguration of the hospital at Alagon, a college was inaugurated at Utiel on the 10th January 1897. It came into existence at the request of Fr. Calasanz Rabaza, of the Pious Schools, who felt the great need of a religious institution for the christian education of girls. But the conditions were so miserable that, when Mother Pabla informed the Father that she was going to send the sisters, he exclaimed: "This woman is either a fool or a saint". The subsequent

facts proved that she was right when she had accepted what had appeared to be a foolishness, not without hardships and trouble through. And the college of Utiel brought much glory to God and developed into a flourishing institution.

Heaven was blessing abundantly the efforts and the works of Mother Pabla. "The spirit of God, pleased with her works after having enriched her with all kinds of virtues, was Himself interested now to expand them with His omnipotence". But this spectacular success changed in no way her deep humility. She referred all glory to the Lord of the Congregation, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They were not mere words, it was her absolute conviction that He who saw her incapacity, would not allow her to err.

She writes to Mother Vicar of the houses in America: "Do not be disgusted and be in agreement with the superiors so that the Lord may bless all the houses. Let us not get annoyed with things which seem to be contradictory. Deal with the matters with calm and unity and everything will go on well. Offer everything to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who is the Lord of the Congregation. Be sure that He will not allow us to err."

She also depended on the prayers of so many holy souls living in the Congregation. Those who died as victims of charity were her greatest consolation and she carefully entered their names in the archives of the Congregation for the perpetual memory of all the sisters. For instance, she noted in the chronicles: "On the 17th November 1898, Sr. Maria Castel died at Cantavieja of fever which she had contracted while she was assisting the repatriates of Cuba". And again

the following report: "On the 19th November, 1898, the sisters left for the village of Calcena to look after the people attacked by typhoid. Two of them Sr. Valentina Martinez and Sr. Antonia Mora fell seriously sick and only when they were completely unable to stand, they decided to return to Zaragoza. Sr. Antonia Mora died four days after their arrival, on 3rd January, 1899". On the 13th April 1897 the Countess Viuda de Bureta in the name of the Queen proposed to Mother Pabla to take charge of the hospital of St. John of God where the poor women caught in vice were sheltered. Mother Pabla realised the difficulty of the task but her heart burning with love yielded to it. She answered positively by return of post and, while the norms of contract and other preparations were being finalised, she began to choose personnel who would be ready when the call from Her Majesty came.

Many prudent people felt it strange to take charge of a hospital of this nature; it would be better to accommodate them in a hospital where the victims would be completely isolated from the world. They considered it prejudicial to collect them in a hospital where they would remain only for a short time and then go back to follow more actively the path of corruption. These remarks did not please Mother Pabla. The presence and the charity of the sisters, the atmosphere of a religious house would lead them to know Jesus Christ and that was precisely what they needed: to know the Great Unknown. Time has given reason to her feelings: this house of St. John of God in Madrid is one of the legitimate glories of the Congregation. Each year produces glorious statistics of souls redeemed, which had been entrapped by the devil, who with great

efforts come out from their miserable conditions to live an honourable and christian life, at times even fervent and holy lives.

On the 23:d September 1897, the sisters entered the hospital at four in the morning. Mother Pabla went along with them and they were received by the Governor and the Civil Guard. The odd time at which they took charge indicates well that the victims were decided to oppose the new system which the government was trying to impose on them. Such was the clamour and confusion and threats of death, that the authorities felt it prudent at the moment not to send the sisters in the wards to serve.

They were the worries and anxieties of the first day and surprisingly peace and calm followed very soon. "It fell to me", says Mother Dolores Barbuzal, "to start with Mother Pabla the foundation of St. John of God in Madrid, in which she suffered a lot. It was wonderful how she encouraged all the sisters including Mother Veremunda, who was going as superior. She put herself in front of the danger and exhorted us to bear that suffering with patience and resignation telling us to trust in the Sacred Heart. He would help us and soon our problems would be over as it really happened. After eight days there was peace and calm. All felt that it was the effect of Mother Pabla's prayers, who never ceased to pray to the Sacred Heart for her daughters, spending hours in front of the tabernacle, while we moved about to look after the patients and watch those who were cured because otherwise they would go their own way. At the end of 15 days, the disturbance had ceased completely and on the Feast of our Lady of Pilar the chapel was inaugurated, with great jubilation of all.

On the 9th July 1898, she accepted and inaugurated a school for girls at Barbarin, Navarra, and on the following day, the 10th of July a hospital-cum-college at Carinena. The chain of glorious foundations was following without interruption and between two consecutive foundations she hardly had any time to dispose of the workload which was awaiting her in her office at Zaragoza. Fortunately, God had endowed her with an extraordinary capacity for work. On the other hand, her great exactitude multiplied her hours and there was not a single minute in her timetable that was not made use of.

On the 29th October 1899 another foundation was installed at Forcall (Castellon); a school for the girls, whose patrons were Mr. Mariano Guimera and Mrs. Petra Palos. Here Mother Pabla had a great consolation; she had never imagined the fervour that existed in that hidden village. This village had the privilege of having a very zealous priest, a real apostle and under his expert direction a group of youth had been formed, which was quite advanced in interior life. God gave Mother Pabla an opportunity to introduce her Congregation to these young people and prepare many of them who later on joined the novitiate at Zaragoza.

Hardly were these foundations over when she entered into negotiations with Mrs. Nicolasa Claveria who was pleading with her to establish in the village of Albalate del Arzobispo, a school for children and a hospital. Only the shortage of personnel was holding her back. Though the number of admissions went on increasing, still the series of new foundations absorbed them all. Moreover, the development of the clinics

of Madrid and Barcelona pressed her with additional demands. But God did not leave her alone.

In the year 1900, big groups started to join and then she thought of accepting the proposal of Mrs. Nicolasa. They easily reached an agreement and preparations went on both the sides.

The inauguration took place on the 2nd May 1902. Mother Pabla was present to show her Great regard towards the patroness. In no other place had there been such a magnificent reception as in Albalate. The entire village was decorated with carpets. The clergy with the Honourable Regent, the Municipality and the entire village came to receive her. There was such joy and commotion. Glamourous welcome mixed with the bursting of crackers and shooting rockets followed without interruption.

The procession took time to line up as Mother Pabla and the sisters were greeted on the way with thunders applause. Everybody went first to the parish church and there they sang "Te Deum". The Regent considered the homage paid to the sisters an honour to religion and thanked in moving words, the people who knew to thank the Lord for the benefit of giving them those holy sisters for their education and consolation.

From the parish they went to the hospital, set up in an old Capuchin monastery. The director of the novitiate, Fr. Juan Buj was also in their company who was equally surprised at the enthusiastic reception given to the sisters.

On the following day the solemn mass of inauguration was offered. As usual, Fr. Buj preached a magnificent sermon. "It is proper for you to rejoice, he told the people because the sisters are coming to teach the young to live well and the old to die well, the only true wisdom. What should concern us more than anything else is to know to live truly the life which Our Lord has given us"

After the function and the organization of all the services, Mother Pabla returned to Zaragoza to rest for a short time

## GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1906

The General Chapter began on the 25th November, 1906, in which Mother Pabla was reelected General for the second time. Her twelve years of administration had created such an affection and love for her that would go on increasing till her holy death.

Reelected once again for the supreme post in the Congregation, she decided to visit the houses of the Congregation established in Venezuela.

This flourishing province was founded by Mother Martina Balaguer, who happily accepted the task for the Congregation of running a Leper Hospital on the Providence Island, a foundation which fitted perfectly into the spirit of abnegation and heroism of the Congregation.

She had no difficulty to recruit the necessary personnel. The entire Congregation received that foundation, situated in conditions of such exceptional sacrifices and far from the motherland, as a gift from heaven; isolated on an islet with no other company but that of the poor victims of that terrible and repugnant disease.

Mother Martina had no time to see the development of that great institution. God called her for the reward of her great virtues. But Mother Pabla inherited this precious legacy with great love and took special care of it.

The Providence Island is situated on Lake Maracaibo. On its bank rises majestically the beautiful city of the same name.

The Venezuelans were greatly edified by the charity and abnegation of the sisters and petitions for more foundations were soon coming in.

As in Spain, the field of action of the sisters was spreading out with the corresponding good will and help of the people towards the new foundations. Consequently, there was also the problem of shortage of personnel.

In order to help the Spanish Sisters with those of local origin, a novitiate was planned and set up, but this favour and enthusiasm of the people of Venezuela could not meet the great difficulties which always go along with the tasks which are destined to last and bring great benefits. Not the least among them was the civil war of Venezuela and the matters reached such a critical point that the first visitor, Mother Isable Lopez came back so badly impressed that, on her advice, all the sisters were to be repatriated.

Luckily, God did not allow it because this step would have deprived the Institute of one of its richest fields of apostolate. Although many houses were closed, the leading foundations were maintained, among which the Leper Hospital of Providence Island.

It is also to be noted that poverty was the cradle of the houses in America, a great favour for which the Lord is to be thanked always.

### Voyage to America

The Venerable Mother had a great desire to meet those privileged daughters and soon after the Chapter of 1906 she announced her visit to America. The

Sisters of America surely deserved this sign of love from her. They had suffered immensely and the series of their disasters was crowned by the collapse of a beautiful school due to the lack of solidity in foundations, which had been newly built at the cost of huge expenses. When Mother Pabla received this news, she said: "Blessed be God, He knows the spirit with which the sisters went to those lands. He will raise them".

She left Zaragoza along with sister Valentina Sabado on the 6th August for Barcelona, where she would embark. Mother Jeronima Molerés, Superior of the Clinic, Barcelona was impatiently waiting for her at the station of Barcelona. She had willingly offered herself to accompany Mother General in spite of being allergic to the voyage.

They left Barcelona on board the ship "Manuel Calvo" on the 11th August and arrived at Curacao on the 15th September. The sisters were awaiting them at the port and their first embrace itself compensated them for the many distresses suffered during their years of separation. Without wasting any time, they proceeded on their journey to Maracaibo where they arrived on the 18th, which was a providential coincidence with the date of arrival of the first sisters, seventeen years earlier.

Mother General was received with a great enthusiasm. The scene of arrival of the first sisters with the acclamation of huge crowds with the ecclesiastical and civil authorities was repeated on a grand scale.

The fame of Mother Pabla's holiness had already spread out in Maracaibo before her arrival and her humble and touching personality confirmed it further.

Her visit could not be more opportune. In August, 1907 by a Government order, all the lepers living in the Hospitals of Merida, Trujillo and Tachira and all those who lived quietly around the mountains and in families were enclosed at the leper Hospital of the Providence Island. Full boatloads were coming in and in no time there were more than 600 arrivals. It is easy to understand how these huge crowds of patients must have increased the workload of the sisters and precisely in such circumstances they received the Mother General. She was visibly impressed at the sight of those poor patients and gladly would have remained there forever at their service, if duty had not called her elsewhere. She repeatedly thanked God for having inspired the Congregation to accept such a heroic task which required so much charity.

During the long conversations that the sisters had with her they narrated with great joy the hardships which they had endured and how God's hand had maintained almost miraculously that hospital because during their first years a large number of sisters had died victims of fever and to such an extent that it was thought Venezuela was going to become a cemetery of those young sisters.

She had the consolation to witness the spirit of fortitude and sacrifice of her sisters who could firmly face their work day and night and all the happier with the amount of sacrifices demanded from them.

The heroic spirit of the first sisters had not slackened, for which the gratitude to the Sacred Heart was growing in her heart and still more when her vigilant eyes observed that all this extraordinary work

was being done while following punctually the exercises of the community life.

Out of compassion for their work which was above human resistance, she promised to send them more sisters, which in fact she did.

She spoke to all the sisters individually and enkindled in them the desire to spend their lives in their glorious job and left the hospital consolidating fully the ties of charity among all her daughters.

She did the same in the remaining houses. The spirit of fervour and discipline gave her an assurance of prosperity and expansion of that beloved province.

#### **Death of Mother Jeronima Molerés**

On the 4th November, three days before their departure from Venezuela, Mother Jeronima was attacked by fever. On the 6th the fever subsided and the doctor thought that it was a light fever of acclimatization and not the yellow fever as they had feared. But the same night the fever rose to 42° with the fatal symptom of black vomits and all hope was lost. On 7th November, at 9 in the morning when they were due to sail for Spain, she rendered her soul to the Lord with the assistance of the Vicar Capitular and the Augustinian Fathers of Maracaibo amidst copious tears of the sisters.

The funeral did not take place before the departure of Mother Pabla who left with a heavy heart seeing her Sisters disheartened and thinking how the sisters would be shocked in Spain to see Mother General without the one who had offered so generously to accompany her.

They touched the port of Barcelona at ten in the morning on the 19th December to the great joy of the sisters who were at the harbour at the hour of disembarkation. But for the death of Mother Jeronima, what a moment of delight would have been her welcome. This drop of sorrow in the glass of happiness reminded them that joy without sorrow is only the patrimony of heaven.

She left for Zaragoza on the 23rd. On the 2nd January a thanksgiving mass was offered and on the 14th a memorial service was held for the soul of Mother Jeronima.

#### **The Centenary of the Sieges**

The centenary of the Sieges was celebrated in Zaragoza in 1908 with an unprecedented solemnity. The whole town exhibited such splendour and jubilation to honour its heroes who raised Zaragoza to the fame of an immortal city.

Writes Fr. Calansanz Rabaza in his book "Heroism and Holiness", "The glorious centenary associating the bones of heroes and dusting the names of patriots brought to the surface of history along with magnanimous and zealous missionary and priest, Fr. Juan Bonal, the interesting and beautiful figure of Mother Maria Rafols presented for the admiration and cult of the country and placed in the line of glory with the great heroines of the city of the River Ebro, Zaragoza".

THE TASK OF FOUNDATIONS,  
INDIVIDUAL RELATIONS OF MOTHER PABLA  
WITH HER DAUGHTERS

Mother Pabla, while she accomplished such important tasks like the visits to the house in America, in view of the spiritual fruits that followed it, and the efforts to put into prominence the great figure of the holy foundress, pursued relentlessly the splendid work of new foundations.

In the summer of 1906 the foundation of a new hospital was proposed, the Hospital of the Faculty of Medicine in Barcelona, which was under construction in those days. This is the most important foundation carried out by Mother Pabla in view of the number of the sisters which had risen to hundred and five and the abundant spiritual fruits collected from it.

On the 4th September, 1906, the Administrative Board of the Hospital had a meeting and its president, Dr. Morales exposed the conditions proposed by the sisters to those who were present. They were accepted unanimously without discussion and two days later the acceptance was reported to the novitiate.

With the permission obtained from the governor and Cardinal Casamas, bishop of Barcelona, six sisters left on the 1st September at the request of the Members of the Board to acquire the furniture and the provisions and to make the necessary installations and the arrangement of the wards.

On the 5th October they were finally installed, 20 in number, in the hospital and everything was settled

for the inauguration fixed for the 2nd January, 1907. Forty sisters were present on that date. Thus, it was a huge community right from the beginning and Mother Jeronima Molerés was appointed Superior.

Besides the direct assistance to the patients, the sisters served in the operation theatres, X-rays department, pharmacy, etc. and in all these ministries the apostolic spirit of the sisters gained many souls for Christ, saving them from the devil at the critical moment of death, a huge number of souls that would be lost without their assistance.

On the same day, the 2nd January, when the big Hospital of Barcelona was inaugurated, a smaller foundation was started, the Hostel of Our Lady of Pilar, very interesting on account its history and its aim. On the occasion of the great event of the canonical coronation of the Most Blessed Virgin of Pilar at Zaragoza on the 20th May, 1905, among so many people who came to honour Our Lady of Pilar there was the Countess of Arcentales, who usually resided in Madrid.

The pious and zealous lady was extremely moved at the sight of thousands of souls prostrated in front of the blessed pillar and thought of the multitude of patients, who, on account of lack of resources, were unable to come and kiss the holy column. Her noble heart conceived a project: She built at her cost a hostel with 12 beds for poor patients who could occupy them for 3 days to be replaced by others and this would go on every year from January to May. The Countess proposed this foundation to Mother Pabla who gladly welcomed it. Immediately the norms were framed to the satisfaction of both the sides. A house was acquired



on Santiago Road and after framing the norms, the inauguration was performed. The small chapel was blessed by the Archbishop. The patroness and her husband, the Count of Arcentales came expressly for this function, and a selected number of people from Zaragoza was present.

While going through the long list of foundations executed by Mother Pabla and after seeing the peculiar aim of each one of them, one can appreciate her large heart, totally inflamed by the love of God and the neighbour. There was no need to which she could not open the treasures of her heart by sending a group of her daughters to alleviate and fill it.

On the 10th October she inaugurated a hospital at Lerin, a Kindergarten school for children paid for by the City Corporation and a school for girls maintained by the Community.

Mother Pabla came personally for the installation of these institutions along with her secretaries, Mother Clara Nunez, the director of the novitiate, Fr. Juan Buj and the superiors of Estella, Allo and Barbarin. There was a total of seventeen sisters. They took along a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart, a gift from the novitiate.

After the solemn reception when they were alone around the statue, Fr. Buj told them: "You have everything". And it happened so. This house which was showered with so many blessings, was placed right from the beginning under the protection of the Sacred Heart. The house of Lerin is particularly mentioned because it produced the first missionary spark in the Institute. When Spain was awakening for the great work of the missions, Lerin caught the idea enthu-

siastically and cultivated it with love and gave excellent and mature fruits to the Church.

She did not merely start the new houses. She fostered all kinds of apostolic works like retreats in them. She prescribed to suspend the classes sometimes for two or three days that the sisters might be able to prepare themselves to run those activities more efficiently. There is no apostolic work which she did not support, stressing always the love of sacrifice done entirely, quietly and generously for God.

On the 27th December she finalized the inauguration of an asylum for the aged at Estella completing thus the cycle of multiple services of the Institute.

On the 27th March, 1908, the new school of Estella was established. Installed for many years in the hospital at the request of the neighbours, a school was attached to the hospital and both the activities were supervised by a common superior. But very soon the need was felt to install an independent school in view of the growing number of the students. Mother Pabla bought another house with a garden where the teaching sisters were shifted with their independent superior from the 27th March, 1908, Providentially she came across the present beautiful building of the school where it was transferred on the 23rd February, 1914 and the Blessed Sacrament was carried from one house to the other with an extraordinary solemnity.

The grave duties and the multiple cares which the fast expansion of the Congregation brought along, the uninterrupted journeys in connection with these new foundations never prevented her from taking maternal care of all of them. It was the most characteristic trait of her life.

It can be stated with a firm conviction that what attracted most the heart of the sisters towards her was the fine touch of love with which she treated them all, as a real mother, but a mother according to the Heart of God.

That small office where she spent so many hours a day, turned into the centre of the life of the Congregation. The sisters could see her there whenever they needed, alone with God, after returning from her journeys and when sickness left her free to devote herself to the ordinary work. When anyone knocked at her door she would lift her eyes from her work and a sweet expression of love opened the door of confidence. She would listen calmly without any sign of impatience. She always had time to listen and to console her daughters, which she considered as her foremost duty.

In her motherly relations with her sisters, he took pains to mould them into firm characters, insistently reminding them to get rid of those fine threads which detain the soul in its spiritual progress. She wrote to a superior: "Try to detach gradually your heart from the house which you have left and offer the Lord a small sacrifice, because everything looks small if we look at our Divine Master, Christ Jesus. Do not entertain your mind in these trifles because this is not becoming for a superior who has already lived so many years in the religious life. This advice, my child, comes from a mother who is longing to see you holy".

She never hesitated to correct, but though she put the finger on the wound, she cured the patient so gently that it never left any trace of grudge in the heart of her sisters, but on the contrary an unlimited gratitude.

In her correspondence there is always a word of reference to the effort to be done to live with sacrifice. She once wrote to the sisters in America: "Everywhere in our life there are phases of tribulation. The Lord does not want them, but He allows them to increase our merits in heaven" Our Lord and the saints went ahead and showed us the path of the cross, in order to make it attractive for us, so that we carry it till the end of our life. Holy perseverance and courage and go ahead with the cross", these are her words.

She was an excellent formator of characters as well as an incomparable guide who knew what is more convenient to each one according to different circumstances and characters of the sisters. She told a superior who was very much disturbed because of a serious danger prevailing in the community for the spiritual life of the sisters: "You need not be too much worried. If you become old, you will have opportunities to see that the human heart is weak and at times wicked. But the Lord takes care of everything. Be vigilant because this is our obligation, but above all, have faith in the wonderful Providence of God."

Her charity and experience were best known when she gave directives to the young sisters, while sending them to the foundations.

She would never say a word which could disturb their peaceful innocence, nevertheless, she also warned them against the possible dangers, when they opened their heart to her. And due to her supernatural love towards them, she had a divine instinct to know the disturbed soul and a special grace to pacify them. Specially with regard to those who were tempted in

their vocation, she had a patience without limit and many sisters owed their perseverance to her.

She was a lovable mother to all, but never showed an affection which was too human. Nothing escaped her motherly and vigilant eyes. Once, while coming out from the refectory, she remarked to a sister: "What is the matter, why did you not have your dinner, are you sick"—"No, Mother".—"Then do not neglect your food." The sister was greatly surprised that Mother Pabla had watched her with such motherly care from a long distance.

Once a sister arrived from a distant foundation and, as usual, she went to kiss her hand after the meal—"Wait, sister, I have given order to serve you milk, because I find you rather weak". She said.

She often rose from the table to serve the others. When the sisters had to travel she often went personally to the kitchen to see that they carried enough food for the journey. And at the time of departure, she would be ready at the gate to give the kiss of departure. Such little signs of love which make life pleasant would never escape her motherly heart.

She had a custom of writing to the sisters working in America on the day of their profession. As she missed it on one occasion, she wrote to them the following letter to make up for her inadvertence: I understand that the day has passed. And sister Bibiana might have been waiting for my letter for the whole year, but it never went. The good Lord has allowed that I would not write, as I happened to be very busy and thus I forgot about it. You know that it is my pleasure to make you happy when it is possible. Now I write

that you may celebrate the day of your Profession and send my congratulations and, as a remembrance, a picture of the Holy Family who may accompany you in life and death.

This was the unique trait of the heart of Mother Pabla. She used to write such letters to children as a young sister as well as in her old age when her health was broken. Regarding her daughters, everything came under her care. She did not consider as too much all the attention she gave to them, going to the minutest details. She wrote to the Superior of Calatayud: "On Monday five sisters will take the train to go to Valencia on the following day. Among them goes Sr. Carmen Ruiz, the sister of Sr. Julia that they may go together till early Tuesday.

It was a great pleasure to the ageing mother to appear at the window above the garden and throw toffees to the young novices during the recreation. Sometimes she came down for a short stroll and it was a great pleasure for them to know that she knew their names and took interest in each one of them with such a love which they could never imagine. She was admired for her great virtues of penance, prudence, etc., but her little virtues of modesty, sweetness and simplicity led everybody to follow the dictates of her will which was no other than God's will.

With the fast development of the Congregation there was a danger that the atmosphere of unity existing at the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace might cool down. It was truly like one family and the close union produced by persecutions and setbacks made these crosses not only tolerable but sweet, and, were often a source of joy.

**The Novitiate of Zaragoza**  
**The Universal Home of the Congregation**  
**and a Sign of Unity among**  
**All the Foundations**

The dispersion of sisters to distant lands could slacken this bond of unity and sisterly love. She took steps to avoid this danger. The novitiate was not only a school of training for the young novices but thanks to her zeal, it was also turned into a universal home of the Congregation, a model house of an ordered life. She was first of all, a leading example to all, in spite of her poor health. Such a disciplined life of the one who was at the helm was bound to exercise a powerful influence on everybody else. The order and silence prevailing in the house created a serenity of mind which is so necessary to live in union with God. Conscientious of her duties of a superior she not only encouraged the sisters who were slack, with her constant regularity, but also instructed, corrected and at times punished; nevertheless, always with patience, kind firmness and keeping in mind that not every soul can progress at the same pace.

This life of uniformity and silence was also mingled with the joys of the great feasts of Christmas, Easter, etc. On such occasions she joined the solemn functions in the church with intimate and cordial meetings in the community to foster a holy and pleasant atmosphere in the house.

Order, silence and holy joy made of the novitiate a blessed house. Every three months there was rotation of retreats, normally preached by Fr. Juan. There was a unity of teaching which confirmed the unity of

the spirit. These exercises were attended also, besides the professed resident sisters, by the postulants, those in temporary vows and a good number of sisters from the other houses. Though Fr. Juan repeated the same doctrine, his talks also conveyed a fresh message and inspiration to all. When it was Mother Pabla's turn to attend the exercises, she completed the cycle of instructions with an exhortation of hers. She carried on this duty till the end of her life.

When the young sisters were dispersed to various houses, she tried to maintain them in mutual contact. They came from various places for the preparatory exercises, for those of the first vows, which were always taken in the mother house and for the final vows after 5 years, solemnized in the novitiate of Zaragoza. There they met the same Mother who had admitted them in the Congregation, received the comfort and guidance of the same instructions of Fr. Juan and met the Sisters with whom they lived in the Novitiate and finally refreshed their minds with the same interesting recreations, topics which were always started but never exhausted.

She gave the same attention to superiors. They assembled every six years for the election of Mother General and her Councillors, but she also called them three years after the General Chapter to the mother house to have the spiritual exercises together.

## ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS

The supreme ideal of the life of saints is the love of God which takes different aspects according to the adorable plan of God and the special attraction which He imparts to them. In Mother Pabla it was the devotion of the Sacred Heart and the propagation of His cult. Being such a devotee of the Sacred Heart, she shone in one virtue which is the essence of the vocation of a sister of Charity of St. Anne: the zeal for the salvation of all souls and to secure it she availed of the propagation of the cult of the Divine Heart. In her letters and conversations, it was not only her favourite theme but a subject she dealt with almost by instinct: it is impossible to live without breathing and for Mother Pabla breathing was the love of one who loved us so much.

Well experienced in the lasting effects which are produced by this devotion, she endeavoured to communicate them to all who came in contact with her, in particular her sisters.

Fr. Juan Buj had been just appointed Director of the novitiate, himself a great devotee of the Sacred Heart, and he thought of offering a gift to the novices, which would inspire them to the devotion, and remind them of their duties of a sister of charity of St. Anne. He offered a very beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart for the hall of the novitiate. The arrival and the installation of the statue was solemnized in a family function which remained as an unforgettable remembrance. The statue is till preserved with a

great veneration at the entrance of the Novitiate of Zaragoza to protect those who come and go.

Mother Pabla was quite excited by the idea of that function and soon she began to order more statues of the Sacred Heart for the other houses.

The devotion of the holy hour was in practice since the early times but after the solemn inauguration of the First Fridays by Fr. Juan, when the novitiate was still on the Mayor Road, it became an act of the community.

The feast of the Sacred Heart is one of the most solemn functions in all the houses of the Institute. Not only did she enjoy the feast celebrated at the novitiate, but wanted to know the details of the celebrations held in other houses. This was one of her most favourite recreations and the Lord satisfied her desire as the flame of the Sacred Heart spread out to the remotest houses of the institute.

She had the satisfaction of enjoying these consoling fruits because the novices were also instructed on the foundations, graces and privileges of the devotion. This task was carried on by Fr. Juan through his instructions. Thus, the sisters carried the fire of this devotion and each one turned into centres of love of the Sacred Heart. The superior of each community introduced in her house what she had seen and practiced in the mother house. But the greatest thing she did was the implantation of the Apostleship of prayer wherever it was possible. It was already implanted at the school of Zaragoza with notable effects, fervour and piety in the youth and children.

On the 1st July 1926, day of the anniversary of the consecration of the small Institute to the Sacred Heart

held by Mother Rafols, was published the first issue of the magazine "Manantial de Vida", in which Mother Pabla paid a public homage of gratitude for the innumerable favours received from the Sacred Heart and added: "It will be my great pleasure to see the Apostleship of Prayer introduced in all our houses. And in the following year, 1927, when all the superiors met in the Novitiate of Zaragoza for the spiritual exercises, she stressed on its practice in all the schools and houses of beneficence. Thus, she not only satisfied her own devotion and stimulated the interior fire that was burning in her but also fulfilled the mandate given by the venerable foundress to her daughters: "Let all have a special devotion to the Sacred Heart, to whom our Congregation is consecrated from the beginning and let it be propagated as much as possible". She had a consolation to experience how the Sacred Heart fulfills the promise done to St. Margaret: "I shall give them grace to move the most hardened hearts". The number of souls saved by the sisters through this devotion covers one of the most glorious chapters of the Congregation.

Along with the zeal for the salvation of souls, we shall refer to the moral virtues which she practised in a heroic degree, by which she conquered hearts for her Divine Master.

Let it be noted that, as she was growing in age, she was gaining the full possession of these virtues so that during her last years all these virtues were combined in her life in holy charity; and every virtue appeared to be not more than a diverse manifestation of divine charity.

## Her Prudence

In view of the post which she held for so many years, having the opportunity to deal with so many kinds of people and so many types of affairs there was ample chance to observe the exceptional prudence of the servant of God in the most difficult circumstances.

On one occasion, and this was one among the thousand which could be mentioned, she accepted the task of the foundation of a clinic which had been abandoned by another congregation for specific reasons of that community.

Since it was the question of taking over the keys and the charge of other services from those religious, she went personally to meet them and to be present at the act of the hand-over. She did it so tactfully that from that day onwards most cordial relations were established between the two Congregations.

Three qualities characterized her in the handling of the most difficult affairs: mature deliberation, firm decision and successful implementation. Besides, seeking advice was a virtue which she practised as a necessity of her humble heart, but after using all the means which prudence demands and long prayers to the Lord for right judgement, if she felt that she had to go ahead trusting the Lord, she acted with fortitude to implement the project not minding the difficulties, which are always there in such tasks.

An ecclesiastic of Zaragoza said about Mother Pabla: "Those sweet manners and a charming character she joined with a virile attitude when the situation required it. I had an opportunity to intervene in one of those difficult cases which she had to tackle.

Prominent people, including her bishop, were pressing her to yield. There was no other way but to yield. But she said: "I cannot do it in conscience", and that was the end of it. I cannot recall that attitude of hers without admiration.

### Her Justice

Her sense of justice was equally splendid. She would hate not only injustice as such but even any lack of politeness.

During the negotiations of the purchase of one of the houses, the owner, caught in a financial crisis, proposed to the superior of the house such a low price that she wrote to Mother Pabla that it was the most convenient offer which ought to be accepted immediately.

Mother Pabla accepted the offer but also met an architect from Zaragoza to evaluate the property because she felt that they should not avail of the conditions of the seller to offer him a price which would be below the actual rate. In fact, the architect's evaluation was higher than the proposed price and the property was bought at the price, proposed by the architect which caused among all a great admiration for her sense of justice.

Her politeness and fine manners, her patience to bear with violent characters or any other defects which cause disagreements proceeded, no doubt, from her humility and meekness but also from her sense of justice. She would easily find an excuse or pardon for the culprits.

She was extremely careful to keep silent over the faults that the sisters would commit for the mere

reason that everybody in this world has a right to his or her fame and good reputation.

She carried out corrections or transfers when needed to save the person from a danger, with so much discretion that unless the same person gave out her fault, out of repentance, the case would usually remain secret.

She practised the virtue of justice easily because she linked it with an inflexible fortitude.

In a letter to the sisters of a foundation, she encouraged them to do good even at the cost of sacrifices and added: "Do and suffer for the Lord". In these two acts she summarized the virtue of fortitude. To take up difficult tasks when the glory of God demanded it and suffer persecutions and contradictions from friends and enemies if the adorable will of God demanded it.

### Her fortitude and temperance

Her greatest proof of the spirit of fortitude was her devotion to duty, sacrificing herself in a prolonged and real martyrdom by following exactly all the Rules and the Constitutions and everything that was God's will.

There is no need of saying anything more about her practice of the virtue of temperance. It has been repeatedly said that Mother Pabla was not only temperate but mortified in a very high degree throughout her life at every moment of other life. She was the most perfect example of austerity and mortification.

## THE LAST THREE GENERAL CHAPTERS

**Further progress in the task of foundations**

The General Chapter of 1912 was approaching and during its important preparations she followed the glorious and painful task of the expansion of the congregation.

During this year of 1912 were carried out the foundation of a school for the girls, two schools for the K.G. children, two hospitals and the solemn transfer of the school of Alcaniz to the building constructed by the Congregation. She was unable to attend it though that work can be called hers in every sense. The Lord always provided her with small crosses in the middle of purest joys.

She nurtured the hope that finally this Chapter would relieve her of the burden which she carried since 1894 and thus she would be able to work silently in any obscure corner until God called her to her reward. She also took precautions regarding this affair.

As already mentioned above, she failed in this purpose during her secret visit to the Bishop and the will of God was clearly manifested in the vote of electors. Thus, much against her wish, she had to proceed on the thorny path which the Lord had fixed for her.

The consolations to lighten her burden were not wanting. The number of aspirants was growing day by day and fresh promising groups filled her heart with joy.

Until that time the day of vestition used to be held every three months but there was no fixed date for it; seeing that with God's blessing, a considerable number of candidates was coming up to join, it was decided to have a fixed date for the admission of the aspirants. The fifteenth of March, June, September and December were chosen as the days of vestition.

In spite of the fast growing number of the enthusiastic candidates who knocked at the door of the novitiate, the number of the sisters was not sufficient to meet all the requirements. It was painful to her heart to answer negatively to numerous petitions for new foundations in various places throughout the country when she herself had observed the needs of the people. This thought tortured her and opened a wound in her heart which never healed up. She would consistently remind the sisters: "Do all that you can for the good of the souls."

Her health, always very delicate, allowed her to carry on her work almost miraculously. Soon after the Chapter she writes: "I had a bad winter, twice I was hit by influenza, may God's will be done."

A little fever used to reappear constantly and exhausted her completely. During the convalescence she used to retire to a small room called "room for the Mothers" and there totally docile to God's dispositions, very peacefully allowed herself to be consumed by the fire of the disease. These minor indispositions turned to be acute and serious at times. In December 1917 she was hit by one such infirmity. On the Christmas night she was very serious. God helped her through medical science and she recovered against all hopes.



When she felt slightly better she would immediately sit at the table in her office. Whenever she went to open a new house she availed of that opportunity to visit all the sisters on the way who would come to meet her.

The anxiety with which she was expected in each house and the joy of all the sisters at her arrival, is unbelievable. Much against her wish, the days that she spent with the sisters in each house were like the days of a great feast.

It is interesting to record some of the impressions which she left in various foundations at the time of her visits. Similar reports were sent from all the houses in answer to a circular of her successor in the Generalate.

The Superior of Barrica, Mother Magdalena Guembe and the sisters of the same house say: "All of us who had the privilege to know and listen to her during her visits and on other occasions can assure that whatever we saw and heard of such a good Mother inspired us towards a life of mortification and holiness. If we had followed it in our lives, it would be sufficient for us to become saints. I have confidence that from heaven she will help us to attain what she earnestly wished for her daughters." Mother Vincenta and the sisters of the hospital at Jaca write: "Whenever we had an opportunity to talk to Mother Pabla, specially at the time of her holy visits, the time appeared to be too short. It was a pleasure to be near her to contemplate that holiness personified." Mother Clementa Etayo adds: "Her three virtues impressed me in particular: her humility, her simplicity and her charity. They were reflected in all her actions. During her holy visits she recommended specially the observation of the

Rules and in particular those of silence and charity towards the patients and solid education of the children. I have such a devotion for her that in all my difficulties I pray to her." Mother Tomasa Hierro: "Mother Pabla inspired such a respect and at the same time such a great confidence in me, seeing her so modest, humble, mortified, charitable and diligent to answer any question that I entrust myself to her and her remembrance stimulates me to follow her footsteps, the virtues which she practised firmly during all her life". The superior of Molina writes: "Since the death of Mother Pabla I invoke her in my troubles and solve all my problems before her and become calm. I keep her picture near the one of Mother Rafols and they are a source of great consolation and help for me". The sisters say that they all consider her as a saint on account of her great humility and charity; when she made any remark to them, she did it with charity and humility, fostering unity among ourselves and love towards the blessed Sacrament.

It is an unanimous feeling of all the sisters that she is their intercessor in heaven and there is a strong impulse which moves the sisters to invoke her in all their problems and needs.

One of the most notable foundations of her term of 1912 to 1918, is the Hospital College of Mendavia, inaugurated on the 11th December, 1912. Before the inauguration a triduum was held in the parish church. The last day of the triduum was preached by the Bishop of Pamplona who wished to attend the blessing and the inauguration. The institution was started with 200 girls and 280 Kindergarten children and the numbers rose very high in the course of years. It was a free institution.

On the 8th December 1914, she founded a hospital— asylum at Barrica in Vizcaya, to which later on a girls' school was added. Almost at the same time another school was started at Puebla Larga, Valencia; an asylum for the aged at Busturia, Vizcaya to which a school was also added; the Clinics of Drs. Lozano and Serrano in Zaragoza. However, the most important projects of this sexennial were the purchase and extension of the Immaculate Heart Clinic at Valencia, the Leper Hospital of Cabo Blanco and Our Lady of Pilar School in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

There is nothing strange in this fast expansion of the Congregation because she constantly turned her eyes to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A senior sister who knew the difficulties of the first years of Mother Pabla's Generalate and saw the rapid development of the Congregation, told her during a journey: "Mother, how fast has our Congregation prospered!" And the good Mother answered: "Yes, but it is no surprise, it is a work of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Re-elected again in the General Chapter of 1918, this term was marked by several new foundations, among which are the Hospital for the children in Caracas, Venezuela in April, 1919, an asylum at Burbaguena, Terruel, to which a school was attached later on, a school cum hospital at Luesia and the most important of this sexennial was the Park School in Valencia.

Since 1924, the last General Chapter presided by Mother Pabla, which re-elected her again, till the year of her death in 1929, she performed a number of important foundations like the one at Molinuevo

de Vitoia and the permanent Student Colony of Our Lady at Pedernales, Vizcaya. The inauguration of the School at Tardienta, her last foundation, she carried out from her bed, thus, she struggled and fought till the end.

Another promise of the Sacred Heart was being fulfilled in her: "Great blessings reserved to the works of zeal taken up by the apostolic souls who propagate the cult of the Sacred Heart. They will operate great conversions".

### Her Character During This Period

In her own life she tasted plenty of fruits of this most amiable devotion. In what has been said above, we have observed a continuous progress of her virtues. There is no written document which can serve a guide to see and analyse the grade which she attained, but the lack of documents is made up by facts which speak most eloquently.

The splendour of her holiness was growing every year, and during this last stage of her life there was a transformation which inspired veneration. The way she despised herself was wonderful. During her whole life the honours of her post and the appreciation of her personal qualities was a real torture for her. This torture was so visible that the sister, for her relief, had to shorten the tributes being paid to her. All this had disappeared during her last years. Praise or insult made no difference to her, as if she did not live any more or did not see or hear. This change was noticed by all who lived close to her.

On one of the last years of her life, Cardinal Soldvila came as usual, to greet her on the 25th January

and to preside over the function arranged in her honour. She was sitting at the right of His Eminence, but she did not express any sign of disgust, she was smiling, affable and happy. At one moment when she was praised proffusely, she turned to His Eminence and said jokingly: "My God, what a number of lies". But she was not disturbed as in the past. The echoes of the earth did not reach her or did not produce the least sensation in her.

Her complete neglect about herself became more conspicuous in her spiritual life. She became so angelical. No anxiety or immoderate desire ever regarding her own progress. Regarding her interior life, a divine maturity could be noticed in her; no restlessness. As her mind was clear and sincere, she had few doubts and during these years she consulted only on the complicated issues of the Institute. Another trait of her life was her complete surrender into the hands of God. She had exercised herself extensively in the spirit of conformity with the will of God but now she reached a stage where her own wish had totally disappeared. During her dying moments she was repeating: "If He wants me to live, it is all right, if He wants me to die, I cannot wish anything beyond His adorable disposition". She had abandoned her spiritual growth into His hands; no more interested in her own progress, but in the glory of God. She had reached the shores of pure love, her peace was enviable.

During her last sickness, her Vicar, Mother Felisa Guerri of holy memory, who attended on her with the solicitude of a most beloved daughter, said: "What I admire is the effort of the venerable mother to sanctify each moment. I can see, in all truth that, though she

was always busy with the most complicated affairs of the Congregation, she never put any pressure on me on account of them. A child of two years would not have slept more peacefully on the lap of her mother as she rested in the hands of God".

One could observe in her a keen desire to suffer and without restlessness. Her whole life, which was so mortified and so frequently tortured by various diseases besides the worries and crosses of her post, could not manage to curb that desire. The cross was the greatest attraction for her generous heart. During the last years her diseases aggravated and became permanent, but her interior pains disappeared, there was calm and repose in her spirit. The strain of dryness had vanished, a continuous and sweet remembrance of the Lord, an infinite desire to love, praise and glorify Him for the whole eternity consumed her. The zeal for the salvation of souls increased in the course of years; for the love of the Sacred Heart she became a slave of the neighbour and sacrificed her health and time, the solitude which she loved so much: "Souls, souls, she was repeating during her last hours, especially those of the poor sinners". And contemplating her numerous family she repeated: "I pray for you all, the professed sisters the novices and those who will come".

There are other important works which she carried out during this last period of her life, the most memorable among them is the initiation of the process for the exaltation of the venerable foundress to the honours of the altar.

From the time of the centenary of the sieges nothing important had been done to pursue the process of the

beatification of the servant of God, Mother Maria Rafols. It was in the year 1922. An insignificant success removed the apparent delay. God's hour had come. A sister from the foundation of Lerin came to the novitiate and asked the favour to be allowed in, near the crypt where the holy foundress was buried, to kiss her grave and pray there. She had received a great favour from Mother Rafols.

It was a difficult favour to be granted. The entrance to the crypt was under an altar of the church of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. The altar had to be removed for which the permission of the Director of the Houses of Beneficence and the Vicar was to be obtained. The permission was immediately granted and on a memorable day all the sisters residing in Zaragoza had the consolation of going down to the underground to pray before the grave of the Holy foundress.

In September of the same year 1922, Fr. Calasanz Rabaza happened to visit the novitiate. While talking about Mother Rafols, the famous writer said in one of his beautiful expressions to Mother Pabla: If you provide the material, which you will have, going through these God's archives, I undertake to write the life of the holy Mother". A sister had to be chosen for the job and in agreement with her Councillors Sr. Maria Naya Bescos was selected.

On the 14th September, at the end of the community's retreat when she went to meet, as usual, Mother Pabla, the Mother stopped her and said: "Fr. Calasanz wants to write the life of Mother Rafols. You help him and search for all the data which are available in the tradition. The investigations were started but

with little success. Fr. Calasanz happened to be once again at the novitiate on his way to Calatayud. On that evening, the learned Father who was following with interest all that was being said regarding the same topic, in the presence of Mother Pabla and her councillors, spoke to that sister: "Your task is to search all the archives or corners where there are any old papers; go through them one by one not to collect the data but to say: I have searched this almirah carefully and minutely and can assure that here there is no paper which refers to Mother Rafols. You do this and your mission is fulfilled".

The sister followed this instruction and with the data that were collected Fr. Calasanz could write the interesting life of Mother Rafols entitled "Heroism and Holiness".

Two years before the publication of this work, which carries the date of 1925, or in other words, in 1923, at the initiative of the Provincial committee of the Deputation and at its request to the Corporation of Zaragoza, on the 15th October, 1923, the road formally called, "Of Mercy", was renamed "Maria Rafols Street", on which is situated the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, the scene of the heroic deeds of charity of the venerable Mother Rafols. The function of dedication of the road was very solemn. For the first time after the centenary of the sieges, Mother Pabla saw again her holy foundress recalled triumphantly in the hearts of the inhabitants of Zaragoza, her great motherland where she had exhibited her charity and showed the splendour of her rare virtues.

The authorities and the people, the big and the small, bowed in front of her great merits of holiness.

On this happy occasion, as a homage of the Congregation to Mother Rafols, Mother Pabla placed on the door of the entrance of the church of the novitiate a beautiful slab which reads: "To the venerable Mother Maria Rafols Bruna, heroine of charity in the memorable sieges of 1808-1809 superior of the Holy Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne. This commemorative slab was offered and dedicated by her daughters and sisters in religion".

In 1924 a homage to Mother Rafols was paid at Villafranca del Panades. Little did Mother Pabla intervene in this programme, which rose spontaneously from the hearts of the people to honour their illustrious daughter. But she felt very happy to see how the admirable Providence of God was raising the memory of His faithful servant.

It was then felt that time had come to transfer the remains of the venerable foundress from the crypt of the Hospital to the novitiate. To fulfil this idea she ordered two tombs to be built on both the sides of the presbytery of the church of the novitiate and two beautiful coffins of oak with two other of zinc in which the mortal remains would be placed on the day of transference.

On the 19th October, 1925, an official recognition of the venerable remains was witnessed. According to the act signed, the notary was Mr. Luciano Serrano Millan. It was recognized by the professors of Medicine and Surgery, Mr. Luis Fuente Gracia and Mr. Juan Lite Ara. All the formalities over, the remains were laid in the two coffins, kept in the church of the Hospital while the sisters kept vigil and then carried privately

to the church of Our Lady of Pilar and 20th October was fixed for the solemn transference.

Rarely did Zaragoza witness such an occasion. The church of Our Lady of Pilar was overflowing with crowds in the presence of all the civil and military authorities.

After the mass, celebrated by Fr. Ignacio Laborda, Rector of St. Charles Seminary and a brilliant funeral speech by Fr. Calazanz Rabaza, which kept the audience spellbound the procession was organized in which the venerable remains were triumphantly carried on a limber, decked by the national flag of Spain.

The arrival at the novitiate was a very emotional scene. Mother Pabla offered the keys of the urns to the respective authorities: the Archbishop of Zaragoza, President of the Deputation and the Mayor of the city and she kept a fourth key for herself. Then a responsory was sung.

This homage was not the end of Mother Pabla's plan as regards the exaltation of the holy foundress. She wanted the crown of the Blessed to shine on her head with the solemn decision of the Catholic Church.

As she always did while dealing with important affairs, so also on this occasion she sought strength and inspiration in prayer. There is hardly any letter, written by her in the year 1925 in which she does not ask prayers for the success of this Process.

The year 1926 is marked with notable favours. This year the life of the servant of God, written by Fr. Calazanz was published; the Diploma of aggregation to the Pious Union of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, canoni-

cally erected in the Royal Church of the Imperial College of the Society of Jesus, Madrid, was obtained; under the chairmanship of the Archbishop the first session of the ordinary Informative Process of the holy foundress was held and the first issue of the magazine "Manantial de Vida" was edited.

Indeed the tribunal appointed for the process of the beatification of the servant of God took great interest in the work entrusted to it. Except for the first session which was held at the Archbishop's House the remaining ones were held in the novitiate, and the said process was completed on the 28th January, 1927.

A total of forty eight sessions was called and eighty-nine witnesses produced their statements on the virtues and the fame of holiness of the servant of God. The others witnessed about the cures obtained through her intercession. In February 1927 the process was sent to Rome.

In 1928 a deed was signed to take possession of the half of the house where Mother Rafols was born. It was donated by its owner Mrs. Teresa Marimon, inspired by a heavenly grace as she said in her letter. In January, 1929, shortly before Mother Pabla's death, Mrs. Marimon wrote another letter informing that she was also donating the remaining portion of the house to the Congregation. This deed was signed on the 11th January, 1929.

Mother Pabla was already seriously sick by this time but God did not deny this last and great consolation to her.

Mrs. Marimon also proposed the purchase of another field with a house, for which she had many buyers, but it was her wish that the Congregation should buy it.

The Mother Vicar, Mother Felisa Guerri, although she found the proposal quite acceptable, did not take a decision without consulting Mother Pabla. When she returned to Zaragoza, she brought the proposal to the knowledge of Mother Pabla who not only approved it but was extremely happy about it. This was her last purchase and last decision when she was only a few steps away from the grave. As the records say it was one of the purest joys reserved by the Lord for the last days of her life. The sale deed was signed on the 25th May, 1929 when Mother Pabla had already flown to paradise.

## HER PRECIOUS DEATH AND SOLEMN FUNERAL

### Last Sickness

The Christmas Day of 1928 her condition was moderate. An impertinent cold connected with a flu disturbed her continually. But it was her motto to remain in her post as long as she could stand.

Always accustomed to see her sick, at first the Sisters did not take it seriously. On the other hand, the great love of the sisters for her created an illusion in them that they would still have her for some time. Her mental faculties were fresh as ever or rather they gave new signs of vigour. Hence, the fear of her approaching death was far from everybody's mind. And that was how, in spite of her terrible cold and her age of 81, the sisters did not force her to go to bed on that holy night, most suitable for the expressions of love in a family.

She attended the midnight mass and received Holy Communion. She also attended the two masses that followed. She went to lie down around two o'clock in the morning without special fatigue; on the contrary, it appeared that on that memorable night the Infant Jesus had restored her to health.

She was up in the morning again; came down to the gallery and attended several masses. The fervour of her soul and the strength of her indomitable will brightened her spirits, but the progress was delusive not real. Her system was going down. The sisters,

seeing that her cold was not subsiding, sent her to bed. She obeyed promptly and retired to her cell.

She must have gone to bed with a presentiment, says her infirmarian, Sister Elisa Lajusticia, that she would not get up again because she said these words with resignation and joy: "Here am I, Oh Lord. There I leave everything. When I was healthy I did whatever I could. May your will be done. Dispose of me as you want".

Fear rose in the minds of those who served her closely. The rapid decline of her strength, the unceasing progress of her disease and, above all, the maturity of her beautiful soul were evident. Nevertheless, as rightly said Dr. Joaquin Aznar, God wanted her to live longer than the medical science had predicted so that all her spiritual daughters could have the consolation to bid farewell to her on her blessed journey to eternity. Certainly God gave her the necessary time to fulfil wonderfully from her sick bed the roles of Mother and Guide of her daughters. That great heart, as it approached eternity, was receiving torrents of divine life which brought forth the most beautiful expressions which she ever said.

### The Sublimity of Her Virtues

During those last and solemn moments of her life she opened the depth of her heart in all sincerity showing once again her deep humility which consists in disclosing unhesitatingly the riches which God has deposited in us, knowing that they are not ours, but God is glorified through them. In those sparkles of her life she gave a perfect example of all the virtues. May a

few references be recorded here for the edification of all the sisters:

First of all, her resigned or rather joyful acceptance of her suffering; not a single complain was heard from her lips, not the slightest indication to ask any help. A Passionate lover of the cross till the end, she embraced it to taste its sweetness and fruits.

Once a sister asked her when her suffering was very evident: "Is the headache very acute, Mother? She answered immediately: "How acute must have been the pain of the crown of thorns to our Adorable Redeemer?" The thought of the passion of the Most Sweet Jesus absorbed her completely and it was a relief which softened all her pains.

The sisters noticed after several days that her legs were swollen and she could not move them without great difficulty. She never complained about it. The doctor was amazed at her patience, the sisters regretted it extremely when they noticed it, but she would repeat continuously, "Yes, Jesus, all that you want". It was the un-interrupted "fiat" of her generous acceptance. Some told her once: "Oh, how you are suffering, Mother!" And she answered: "It is too much only for the cowards". The pain in the chest was increasing. Her strength was going down. Taking food was an immense torture and still, she never refused it, faithful to the cross till the last moment.

Dr. Perez Serrano, who regarded Mother Pabla as a saint and also visited her several times, after seeing her heroic efforts, so pianful to the patient, sent from his clinic one of those modern beds on which the patient in order to get relief, can be changed in different positions. She accepted the offer without any

resistance. She was so perfectly resigned, physically by accepting all the trouble of her sickness with calm and joy and spiritually by her total readiness to accept all sorts of advice. She left herself into the hands of the sisters, particularly the Mother Vicar, the doctor and the infirmarians with an extraordinary obedience.

It was a pleasure to all to attend on her. She was extremely grateful for the least service that was being done to her, thinking that too much was being done for her and that she was keeping too many people busy with her; even to inflate her cushion was considered by her a trouble to others. "Why so much care for the body?" She would repeat. As the infirmarian said: "On her own she never asked anything nor complained if the food was too hot or cold, with too much or too little salt. She accepted well everything. Having looked after so many patients, I never found one who was so resigned".

Dr. Aznar produced a similar statement: "During the whole period of my medical practice, I did not find a patient who suffered his or her illness with such patience, who accepted the will of God with so much resignation".

Apart from her love for suffering and complete obedience to those who served her, we can also mention her most affectionate charity. The more she overlooked her own needs, the more vigilant was she to the needs of the others.

When the sisters began to keep watch over her she asked Mother Vicar whether it would not be convenient to bring an armchair, a woollen blanket and a heater for the sister on watch. And not satisfied with it, also asked permission to give the sister a glass of



milk before midnight.<sup>1</sup> It was indeed highly edifying to all the sisters to see the venerable Mother, who through her untiring works and sacrifices had built up the Congregation, asking permission with such great humility for a small thing, namely, a glass of milk for her infirmarian. She frequently repeated to the sisters who were looking after her: "Oh sisters! if I live long in this state, you all will be finished". The infirmarian adds: "Those words pierced our hearts like an arrow because all of us would have given our lives in order to save that treasure of virtues". She pleased the sisters who served her by offering them the best of what was being brought for her. And they accepted it because thus she became happy. These acts of charity and the careful observance of the smallest rules characterized her till the last moment of her life. Till the end she did not exempt herself of the community prayers, including the devotion to the Way of the Cross, otherwise so difficult for her condition of health. As Dr. Aznar put it: "That heart which made brilliant history in the practice of charity, was heroic till its last moments".

Her detachment from the world was notable throughout her life and more during the last sickness. However, she made an exception on two occasions: when the sisters returned from Villafranca, Mother Felisa consulted her about the purchase of land adjoining the house of Mother Rafols. And again when the sisters returned after a new foundation at Tardienta. As the sisters related the details of the function, as one for whom the future has no surprises, she said: "I

<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1953 the obligation of the eucharistic fast began right from the preceding mid-night.

am happy, I am happy, but this house will not continue". In fact, it was the first foundation to be suppressed with the new regime in the Congregation.

While her holy conduct was edifying each and every one, her condition was leaving little hope of recovery. She herself knew it better than anyone else; still, she kept quiet in order not to discourage the sisters.

### Holy Viaticum

By the middle of January she requested the administration of Holy Viaticum. This solemn ceremony took place on the 17th January, 1929, at four O'clock in the evening.

The novices were standing with the burning candles along the staircase and the ample passage leading to the Council hall. The Vicar General, Fr. Jose Pillicer was carrying the Blessed Sacrament, assisted by Fr. Rafael and Fr. Pable Gines, chaplains of the novitiate.

Those who were present were the Bishop of Burgo de Osma, Fr. Juan Buj and Fr. Sabino Condon, Director of the novitiate and confessor of Mother Councillors respectively, the confessors of all the houses of the Congregation, the General Councillors, the superior and four sisters of all the houses of Zaragoza and all the resident professed sisters of the Generalate.

Sr. Elisa writes, "Mother Pabla prepared herself with great fervour to receive the Holy Viaticum. We were greatly moved crying because she was going to leave us, but happy at the same time to see her as a saint.

Fr. Jose Pellicer, who administered the Viaticum was extremely touched and with tears in his eyes. To

each question that he asked, she answered with a great calm as she remained conscious till the moment she passed away. After receiving the Lord, she recollected herself in contemplation for more than an hour and would have remained much longer if she had not been interrupted to take food.

Prayers were requested from all the houses, though all the houses were convinced that her hour had come.

Mother Vicar with an obstinate and purest love, was defying inch by inch the death of that precious victim, who offered herself to the Lord as a perfect sacrifice for the salvation of souls.

Finally Mother Elisa gave in, but had a satisfaction that she had done everything possible.

### **The Anointing of the Sick**

On the 21st January evening she said: "I would like to reconcile myself. Immediately the Father was called in and at the end of confession she added: "Now, the anointing of the sick, Father". Preparations were also done for the same. She asked pardon from all the sisters with an edifying humility. Everybody was crying around. She alone was calm. She went on: "Please tell all the sisters of the Congregation that I always wished them well and that I never wanted to mortify them: if I have done unconsciously, may they forgive me". Towards eight O'clock in the evening at her request the indulgences were granted to her, which she received with an edifying piety. Kissing the crucifix and watching with love she said "What a privilege to receive all the sacraments with full consciousness".

Her birthday, 25th January, was approaching and being an exceptional occasion, all the superiors were asked to meet and greet her. Not a single one, even those who were very old or were living very far, missed the opportunity.

All were waiting impatiently for the day in order not to disturb her and when this day arrived all had the consolation to meet her and bid farewell till they would meet in heaven. The superiors returned home hopefully, but their hopes lasted very short.

One evening when she was nearing her end, Fr. Juan came in to see her. How sweet was that interview at the threshold of eternity, a meeting between two great souls who had worked closely for the glory of the Sacred Heart and the welfare of the Institute. During the conversation, Fr. Juan told her: "Mother, even if you leave us, you will always be Mother General to us. From now onwards you will continue to guide the Congregation." With grace and smile, so peculiar to her, she answered: "Let us see what sort of job they give us there".

Three days before her precious death she looked fully possessed of the heavenly joy and remained in this state till the last moment.

The night before her death, says the sister infirmarian, she passed without trouble as if the Lord had freed her from everything. The sweet name of Jesus was continually on her lips and she invoked the Blessed Virgin continually.

The day was comparatively good; towards the evening she prayed "De Profundis" and asked Fr. Juan and Fr. Sabino, her confessor, who had come to see

her: "Please say the penitential psalms for me". Fr. Sabino answered: "Mother General, your soul is not yet separated from your body, there is time still." "No, there is no time, I see death approaching, it is here". During the whole day she had been praying continually to the Sacred Heart for the priests, for the sisters who are in the Congregation, for those who will come, for the poor sinners, for the holy souls in purgatory, for the whole world. And raising her hands she was repeating: "I offer myself to you, in life and in death. I am totally yours, Oh Divine Heart of Jesus".

At 10 O'clock night intra-venous glucose was given to her, when she said: "This is the last one". But she said it so happily that it was difficult to guess that her end was so close.

Sr. Elisa relates further: "When I went a little far for a short time, she called me. When I went close she took my hand as a sign of farewell", and in a festive mood and enthusiasm she said: "Good-bye, Sr. Elisa, goodbye".

Towards eleven thirty Sr. Elisa gave a sound of alarm. She says: "I noticed that the pulse had stopped, but she was not in agony".

### Her Death

The Chaplain was called immediately. The prayers over the dying were recited and with the same beatific smile, calling the sweet Name of Jesus and without any outward sign she slept peacefully in the Lord. The time was approximately between twelve thirty and one o'clock midnight, 20th February, 1929.

The dead body was dressed up and placed in the public hall, prepared in a special way for the occasion.

Such was the blessed and edifying death of the venerable Mother Pabla. Her soul, dedicated to the Lord from a tender age, always enjoyed an undisturbed peace and confidence. Ineffable joys softened her last sufferings. Her soul flew from this world without anguish which normally accompanies a human death. The death of the just is blessed before the eyes of God.

### Funeral

The embalmed body in a sober coffin decorated with violets lay in state on Wednesday morning, the 20th February. Throughout the day people of all ranks filled silently past the dead body, while touching it with rosaries, medals, etc.

It had been pointed out that, as an effect of gas, the body would turn slightly dark and then become normal. It did not happen. It remained white and beautiful for three days that it was exposed till it was lowered to the grave.

During those three days masses were offered without interruption from six to eleven in the morning on three altars of the church and rosaries in the evening with the huge hall filled to capacity.

On the 23rd, at eight in the morning the coffin was carried from the hall to the church for the funeral which appeared to be rather a triumphal procession.

The arrangements done by Mother Vicar General, distributing the sisters so as to reserve the church for the invitees and people, had no effect. The church and the galleries, choir, every place was full well in advance:

magnificent proof of veneration and enthusiasm produced by virtue.

The officers and Representatives of Corporations and Departments, the Parish Priests, numerous priests, representatives of all Orders and congregations of both the sexes were allotted selected places in the presbytery, behind the tomb and by the side of the altar of Our Lady of Pilar were the general Councillors, in the sanctuary her religious nieces and her relatives and the rest of the church was full of a crowd which spilt to the roads.

The solemn mass started at eleven o'clock sharp. It was officiated by the Vicar General, the Very Rev. Jose Pellicer, assisted by Fr. Frederico Minguillon and Fr. Pablo Gines. The choir of Pilar executed marvelously the Requiem Mass and the solemn Responsory of Perosi.

The coffin was carried by the General Councillors and her nieces to the gallery, and she was buried in a grave which had been built days before, with the necessary permissions. At that emotional moment the Benedictus was sung in the presence of all the authorities.

The Beloved Mother Pabla was laid to rest in that gallery where she used to spend so many hours, everyday. She did not leave her novitiate, her most cherished project among all that she carried out during her long and fruitful life.

## CONCLUSION

As the news of Mother Pabla's death spread all over, a chain of telegrams and innumerable letters started pouring in to the novitiate in which people of all ranks expressed appreciation and veneration for her rare virtues.

They do not cease calling her heroic, magnanimous, holy, woman of extra-ordinary virtue and special firmness. All this correspondence witnesses to the fact that her deep humility, her charity and faith did not pass unnoticed, specially to those who closely dealt with her. Her faith often emboldened her to take up projects which appeared to be imprudent but due to her full confidence in God turned into wonderful realities. Her prudence and tact, her gravity, charity and simplicity, all these contributed to her success.

A good many statements on her life have been recorded in the special issue of the magazine of the Congregation "Manantial de vida". Others have been preserved in the archives of the novitiate. It will be proper to end this book with a statement of exceptional value produced by her confessor of the last few years, Fr. Sabino Condon. He calls it "Hermosos rasgos dignos de encomio e imitacion" (beautiful examples worthy of praise and imitation):

"It is not my purpose to deal with each and every virtue and the beautiful qualities which adorned Mother Pabla during her long and edifying religious life. She was an excellent model to the sisters and superiors, glory of the remarkable Congregation of Charity of St. Anne, to which she belonged and which she exalted."

This difficult task would be impossible for me because I lack the required gifts for it. My only purpose in this statement is to dedicate to her a modest witness of deep affection which I always had for her as well as a great veneration which her virtue and charity inspired in me and to point out briefly some examples which distinguish her most and constitute her spiritual personality; these are the examples on account of which, according to me, she was so much loved and appreciated by all who came to know her, she secured that universal respect and love of all the sisters who elected her six times consecutively Superior General for a period of thirty-four years”.

“I think one of these characteristics and perhaps the main example was that humble simplicity which exalted her; extreme simplicity, so natural, which she manifested always and with which she treated all and received all”.

“She created first an admiration and then loving respect in all who met her, an admiration and love which increased gradually with close touch. She appeared an ordinary sister among the most humble ones rather than a superior General of an important Congregation”.

“She hated all that could be distinctive of authority or still more a distinction and wanted to be treated always as the lowest sister. This was seen specially when, in connexion with her duty, she visited the houses of her Congregation, she presented herself without any show and always avoiding honour and distinction which her sisters wished to shower on her”.

“The witnesses of this attractive and tender simplicity are numerous sisters who were called by her when

it was necessary to advise or correct. They entered her office with fear of a sharp scolding or a well deserved penance and left her room happy, totally disarmed by her motherly advice and well disposed to follow her instruction. This wonderful simplicity was in her, not only a sign but a clear proof of her deep interior humility which she cultivated so much and wanted her sisters to practise as root of all holiness, distinctive characteristic of a sister of Charity of St. Anne”.

“Another distinctive quality was her earnest desire and love for the faithful observance of all the rules, even those which she had freely imposed on herself. She was so precise in such matters and when she suspected that, on account of her duty, she would not be able to fulfil them, or would do them hurriedly, she would anticipate them.

“She was first to attend to the acts of Community life and would never miss them though important works attached to her post, or troubles of her health, which accompany the old age would often exempt her. Her desire of strict observance, of good example, of encouragement to others, always prevailed in her. All can recall, as an edifying proof of what I am narrating, her excessive care and effort to rise from the bed at four in the morning, in spite of her delicate health, to wake also sisters at that hour in the morning, ringing the bell, never exempting herself of this duty, in order to start and continue to fulfil faithfully the time-table”.

“Another clear proof of her excessive punctuality and love for the observance of rules was the one which she gave on her confession day, which I always admired and edified me. At least half an hour before the arrival

of the confessor and leaving aside all other work, she came unfailingly to the church and carefully prepared herself for the confession”.

“A great lover of retreat and solitude which saves a Sister of Charity of St. Anne, whose vocation is to practise charity towards others to a heroic degree, she hated going out of the house unnecessarily and those visits which were not demanded by an evident need or great utility. When she had to make visits in view of an urgent need, she did it almost by a violence because she was fully convinced of the profit and good of recollection and the dissipation which is normally caused on the road. The sisters going out even if it was for reasons of sickness or useful purpose, were always a source of worry to her”.

“Although it is not my intention to describe her virtues, in particular, I would not like to omit one which was typical of hers, namely her great patience to bear in silence and perfect conformity the pains, sufferings and all sorts of tribulations which are a partimony of the saints and she had to face all her religious life, specially during the numerous years of her generalate which is necessarily accompanied by difficulties, thorns and contradictions. Anyone who knows even from far the problems attached to the post of a superior, cannot but observe clearly the problems and contradictions of her 34 years of Generalate. And still, one would always see her so peaceful and without anything to complain about as if she had nothing to suffer”.

“Mother Pabla had the patience of saints to a very high degree. She confided all her worries to the Lord alone and expected only from Him the remedy and sanctification of her soul, which she was acquiring

through a continuous exercise of an extraordinary patience. More than on any other occasion, this virtue was shining in her when she faced so gracefully her indispositions and infirmities, particularly during the last years of her life; and in a special way, her heroic patience during her last sickness edified all who had an opportunity to see her”.

“Finally, another outstanding quality of the unforgettable Mother Pabla, which was often required in her to fulfil God’s plans entrusted to her, was her intense love for her Congregation. She was at the helm of her Institute at a very difficult time but she worked so hard, unceasingly and tenaciously, for its development”.

“Let it go recorded that for her the progress and perfection of the Congregation was not the outward show and the spectacular and worldly success which often misguides and imparts little stability to the works of God. Her earnest desire was the growth in religious spirit (humility, simplicity, strictness) of her sisters and the perfect observance of the Constitution and Rule. According to me, this is the greatest tribute one can pay to Mother Pabla”.

“According to her sound principles, these virtues alone could give stability, firmness and splendour to the Congregation and glory to God, who had entrusted to her the Congregation. All the rest would follow as an addition. And here she was not mistaken. The Heavenly Father rewarded her hopes so generously.”

“Her beloved Congregation was the centre of all her pre-occupations, efforts and sacrifices, she devoted to its her constant activities, her exceptional intelligence, her strong will and great heart. But in all humi-

lity, never depending on her own talents and efforts, she expected everything, the success of all her projects, the solution of her most difficult problems from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they never failed her”.

Several times she had to oppose the wishes of influential persons and high authorities in order to defend the interests of her Congregation and the good name of her sisters and she did it with an indomitable fortitude and virile spirit.

On these difficult occasions, she sought refuge in the Lord, full of confidence and faith, redoubling her prayers and sacrifices, because she was fully convinced of the importance of the Constitutions which say in number 109: “Let the principal care of Mother General be to support the Congregation with her prayers, examples and holy desires”. She had this norm always present before her and tried to follow it very faithfully; besides, it was perfectly according to her nature, so humble and totally confident in God.

“The Lord heard her prayers always. With the exceptional qualities of administration which God gave her, though, out of humility she always tried to hide them, she exalted the Congregation prodigiously with a multiplicity of new foundations and more sisters in whom she cultivated and perfected the true religious spirit and the exact observance of rules”.

“These are the beautiful traits which characterize the spiritual personality of the humble and great Mother Pabla, who, as I said in the beginning was a perfect model to the sisters and superiors in all virtues as well as the glory of the Congregation which she loved and developed so much”.

“Thus her daughters who loved her so tenderly and intensely, and venerated her in life, and now with growing love recall and imitate her, will become holier and the Congregation will grow unceasingly in its enviable progress, fulfilling thus with a greater perfection the most holy aims of charity for which it was founded”.

“Thus will be the most perfect way for the Sisters to honour the memory of their holy Mother and to obtain her powerful help and co-operation from heaven, where, we think, she is, loving mote the ones whom she loved so much and for whom she worked and suffered so much on earth” ..SABINO CONDON