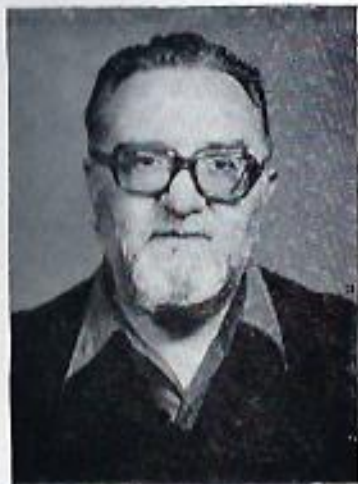


MOTHER MARIA RAFOLS



Henry Pascual Oiz, S.J. Born in Barcelona (SPAIN), on 3rd Sept. 1919 joined the Jesuit Order on 13th October 1939, at Vuela (Zaragoza) There he had the opportunity of serving as a Novice in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace and of coming in contact with the Sisters of St Anne. He gave the holy Crucifix of Mother Rafols to the public to venerate. After his studies of Humanities and Classical Languages and Philosophy at Ona (Burgos), he went back to teach the Classical Languages at Vuela. He was sent to India and arrived in Bombay on 10th January 1951, together with the first Sisters of St Anne who were coming to found in India. He studied Theology at De Nobili College, Pune from 1951 to 1955. Ordained Priest on 25th March 1954, was sent to teach Philosophy to the Bombay Seminary (Parel). He was assigned to Vinayalaya to teach Latin and Greek in the Juniorate of the Jesuits at Andheri.

(to be continued on the right flap)

THE CHARISM OF
VENERABLE MOTHER MARIA
RAFOLS
AND OF HER CONGREGATION

by
JOSE MARIA SANZ ARTIBUCILLA

Translated by Rev. Fr. Henry Pascual Oiz, S.J.

FOREWORD

The inscrutable ways of Divine Providence permit individuals and whole countries to be sometimes shaken by frightful storms. In this way God intends both to purify and exercise them in the practice of solid virtues, which give them an opportunity to show super-human qualities. Zaragoza, besieged by the armies of Napoleon, attained the heights of glory and the well-deserved titles of Heroic and Immortal.

During those epic events the servant of God, Mother Maria Rafols, came out of her obscurity to become an angel of charity. God had painstakingly prepared her for a providential mission, and now He wished her to share in the colossal sufferings of her motherland. He sent her as messenger of His love in those days of hate and selfishness.

She went about bringing a remedy to all miseries, sweetening all pains and upholding the morale of the citizens of Zaragoza, authentic heroes of legend.

Her main field of action was a famous and ancient Hospital. Yet when it became too narrow for the largeness of her love, she converted the martyred city into a huge hospital, setting up field-dressing stations in the streets and scattering everywhere the riches of her spiritual wealth. She became a universal mother, searching diligently for food and shelter for her innumerable sons, begging for bread and lavishly pouring all kind of comfort on the sorely-tired citizens. The bullets sped past skimming over her habit, shells burst into her ears while she advanced towards the enemy's camp in search of help for her poor sick, dying of starvation. Nothing could stop her, for love is stronger than death.

Her zeal was communicated to her daughters who closely followed her steps. She saw nine of them falling in the breach, one by one, victims of charity, yet her large heart

was not dismayed. Her unyielding courage and marvellous love had such power of persuasion that even rough characters surrendered to her, charmed by her affability and kindness, and they finally opened up to God's grace that had been offered to them through her.

Years went by. Impious men with burning torches and criminal daggers, fearing nothing not even sacrilege, set on fire Churches and assassinated defenceless religious men. She was by then a too well-known figure to be spared by their relentless hatred. They aimed at her as the chosen victim of their mean vindictiveness. The mother of the poor, the kind and exemplary sister had to experience imprisonment and banishment. To her many merits was added the crown destined to those who suffer persecution for justice' sake.

Later still, in the peaceful abode of her dear Hospital, she consecrated the remainder of her long life and her activities in establishing and strengthening the Congregation of Sisters of Charity. They were to preserve her charism. They had been trained in her own school and had become heirs of her own spirit. They were ready to continue her mission of heroic charity to the extent of offering, in the years to come, the holocaust of their lives for the neighbour. She died in the same Hospital where she had laboured for more than half a century, yet she lived on. Her mission did not end with her death. When new dangers loom on the horizon of the motherland, when dark clouds cover the blue and bright sky of her country, just when the enemies of the country aim at its destruction, the eyes of the believers turn to Mother Rafols. Her image becomes a rain-bow of peace, "the only ray of hope in the past stormy years," as some one wrote expressively in the album of pilgrims who visit her burial place. His Grace the Archbishop of

Valencia wrote in the same album, "Her example has had a decisive influence in the uplift of the religious spirit on the country."

Soon it was to appear how true this statement was. The civil war came with all its horrors. Young men fell in great numbers. In those hours of agony, as much as in the days of the sieges of Zaragoza, Mother Rafols once more offered light and protection. The young recruits invoked her in moments of greatest danger. They carried her pictures (the number of pictures distributed rose to several millions) on their chest, and gladly proclaimed, with the certainty of evidence, how valuable and efficacious her intercession had been. They nicknamed her "scare-bullets."

Captivated by the charm of her noble character and well-tested virtue, and by the moral beauty and attractiveness of this national figure, whose exemplary life sprung from her unselfishness, we undertook the work of writing her life. We went to study it in the environment in which it had been lived. We wished to see her as her contemporaries saw her.

We had not to go far into the past. She belonged to our own times. She died in the middle of the last century. In the centenary celebrations of the glorious sieges we could still see sisters, venerable by their age, who had lived together with their respected Foundress. We could perceive still, in the reviews and news-papers where her deeds were told, the aroma of her virtues as it reached us for it was not far from our times. We consulted archives, questioning in their calm trustworthiness the facts expressed with ingenuity and transparency and preserved with unflinching accuracy.

Thanks to these intimate confidences we came to know how the character of our heroine developed and was pre-

pared for her task. We discovered the beneficial influence that her exterior behaviour, upright and polite, had on the painful times she had to live.

Yet, the study of these documents was not sufficient to reconstruct the atmosphere which so decisively influenced the soul of the servant of God. We visited places familiar to her, with devotion we contemplated the objects she had used, admiring the great poverty she had chosen as a pillar of her Congregation. We walked along the same corridors of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace to be able to capture the sound and harmony of that delightful and fertile silence so greatly admired by her daughters. We sat on the rough benches as she had done in the hours of her frugal meals. We seemed even to smell the smoking garlic soup of which the acts of the Sistiada speak. We were led to imagine her in the small and secluded stitching-room surrounded by her daughters who were eager to relish the heavenly manna of her instructions, so full of wisdom, ofunction and of charity. We heard, above all, the narratives of her daughters not in the freedom and inaccuracy of a familiar conversation, but in the precise language and seriousness of the Tribunal, concerned with the introduction of the Ordinary Process, set up in Zaragoza in 1926 and transferred to Rome in February 1927.

These accounts were not taken from anonymous documents, but they had been heard, with all vividness of detail, from those who had been eye-witnesses and contemporaries of the servant of God. We perused these precious accounts in the Italian translation of the said Process, printed in Rome.

In this manner we have unearthed secrets that the jealous hand of time was keeping away from publicity. They reveal the main features of the spirituality of Mother Rafols.

Moreover we had the pleasure and spiritual comfort of kneeling in the Church and balconies of the Hospital, of contemplating and venerating the images and framed pictures she loved to venerate, trying while looking at them to penetrate the recesses of her intimate converse with God, the source and inspiration in all her wonderful achievements.

We must warn the reader that this is not a pastime book, not even a devotional book for souls in quest of ideas¹ but a book of historical research for those in quest of authenticity. It may turn out to be arid reading but it has the incomparable advantage of a book which, though stripped of all drapery of imagination and poetry, offers the stark reality of true facts.

In this way we hope to contribute to the greater glory of God, ever wonderful in His saints, and to the service of the motherland, prolific mother of heroes and saints, which had the honour of numbering her among her dear children.

Tarazona, on the Feast of Pentecost, 1948.

¹ See however Translator's Preface.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The original Spanish book was written to satisfy the need for authenticity. Often the lives of saints and heroes are disfigured with accretions and exaggerations, as if to prove the greatness of some historical figures we ought to take them away from history and reality and even from verisimilitude.

The greatness of Mother Rafols rests on what she was, not in what she did. This translation-adaptation of the original work of a learned Chronicler aims at both authenticity (and this has been successfully secured by the author) and edification. The translation contains practically all the narratives and reliable information supplied by the original work, the adaptation aims at pointing out how in the events, actions, words, desires of the protagonist of this epic we have an incarnation of her spirit and charism, of her gifts of nature and of grace, of her virtues and sanctity. Moreover, they reveal the distinctive features of the ideal she conceived and wanted to be perpetuated in the Congregation she founded.

To do full justice to history the historian must show "what is going on in what has happened". Chronicles give the facts, History the facts and their interpretation, intentions, aims. Chronicles aim at authenticity and truth. History aims at truth and edification, instruction and inspiration. Yes, inspiration has been the aim of this adaptation.

I have corrected the style and purged it of its repetitious paragraphs, inflated sentences and triumphalism, characteristic of the times and peoples for whom the author wrote. Expressions which are foreign to the sober Saxon ways of expression and structure have been put in chaste and concise style.

If this adaptation of a valuable book succeeds in presenting Mother Maria Rafols as the incarnation of the charism of HEROIC CHARITY, and the embodiment of the spiritual doctrine of the CONSTITUTIONS, it has achieved its purpose.

I wish that this book should be like a companion book to another one entitled "THE VALUES THAT CONFORM US TO THE IMAGE OF A SISTER OF CHARITY OF ST. ANNE" which contains a summary of the Constitutions. In the written Constitutions we have the letter and prescriptions, in a word, the body of the institution. In the present Biography we wish to capture the animating spirit and driving force that inspired and set in motion the organisation of that remarkable Sisterhood.

Novice and Junior sisters, to whom this book is lovingly dedicated, on going through the pages of the Biography will complete their religious training. The prayers, admonitions, instructions and practices of the novitiate and juniorate, aiming at the understanding of the charism and distinctive features of the Congregation, will acquire a new light and provide an insight when they see that charism and those features incarnate and operative, living and breathing in the eventful life of the Mother Foundress. They become inspiring and effective and can bring to them "an acquisition for ever," which is the purpose of the novitiate and juniorate training.

It is my firm hope that this book will inspire many young girls, novices and juniors to follow the paths of HEROIC CHARITY, for even heroism can be taught, learned and eventually acquired, as something we sincerely and desperately want.

HENRY PASCUAL OIZ, S.J.

MOTHER MARIA RAFOLS

1. The birth of a Congregation

Religious life is a type of Christian life followed by a group of people who wish to show unambiguously that is, in words and in deeds and in the whole orientation of their lives, that GOD IS THEIR ENOUGH. It is a way of expressing love, and the love it expresses is love of God, Who alone is man's "enough".

A religious Congregation is born when the charism of the Founder infuses into a spiritual family some of Christ's own zeal, love and spirit, to be rendered visible in a particular area of apostolate. Its development follows the stages of growth to maturity in Christian life: birth, baptism, confirmation, first communion. A religious Congregation is baptized when it is given its name and acquires status in the local Church where it was born. It is confirmed when that way of life is sealed by papal brief and chartered for the ministry of the universal Church. It receives its first communion when the Congregation shares in the mystery of Christ's suffering and death, and the bond of charity binding the Congregation to the mystical Body of Christ is conspicuously shown in the surrender of the Congregation to ever more universal brotherly love.

We wish to study the life of Mother Maria Rafols in order to find in it the charism that God through her gave to His Church. This is the reason why we begin her life not with her birth but with the first manifestation of her charism at the birth of the Congregation she founded.

It was towards the end of December 1804. A messenger had just arrived at the gates of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace in Zaragoza. He was the bearer of a letter to their Excellencies, the regents of that most famous Institution. The letter carried the signature of Rev. John Bonal, a priest of Catalonia, announcing the arrival of two societies, one of Brothers and the other of Sisters, who were to take charge of the sick of the Hospital. The Body of regents which bore the title of "The illustrious Sitiada" had finally had their wishes fulfilled.

Those excellent men had willingly made themselves fathers to the poor. With sorrow in their heart they had witnessed the wretched manner in which paid servants were looking after the sick. They had been eager to make those dear patients feel the warm and vivifying breath of charity. But only hearts devoted to very high ideals could offer such help.

Transactions on both sides had been slow and difficult. Finally, as if led by divine inspiration, they came upon an apostle of charity, Fr. John Bonal. This man of God came to live for a month in the Hospital and saw with his own eyes how things were developing, and after several meetings with the Sitiada, they agreed upon certain basic conditions. He set out back to Catalonia in search of valuable help.

2. A solemn entrance

They are now on the scene. In that historical evening of December 28th, 1804, the regents with maifest satisfaction gave the final orders, and the many workers of that charitable institution went and came finishing things to the last detail. Yet, in some faces there was

the shadow of an ill-concealed worry¹. Easy going nature shrinks from being ruled by the spirit.

The news had come to the knowledge of the people. The citizens of Zaragoza had great love for that venerable institution. They had seen in it the reflection of their noble and generous soul. They were fully aware of the greatness of that multi-purpose, charitable and secular institution.

They came now in large numbers to fill the imposing Church and the central court of the magnificent building, in order to catch a glimpse of the solemn entrance of those heroes of charity, and attend to their reception. Their joy was indescribable, since the keen perception of the people had discovered that the Sitiada's latest arrangement was the only remedy to stay the deteriorating process of the Hospital which they loved so well and of which they rightly felt proud.

The building was set up opposite to the Cross of the Coso, between the Coso street and the Hospital street, and occupied a full block of buildings.²

¹ Information given by the Sitiada to the visitors of the holy Hospital, dated April 28th 1816. Hospital Archive, bundle no. 626.

² The building was begun under the auspices of the Jurados, who in 1425 bought for 500 florins the houses of Simon of Aguero. King Alphonsus V took this foundation under his protection and enhanced its prestige by granting it the privilege of displaying in a unique blazon the motto "URBIS ET ORBIS" (Hospital OF THE CITY AND OF THE WORLD). (See commendatory letters of the collectors of alms of the holy Hospital. Archive of the St Anne Novitiate.) The same King endowed it with rich gifts, and established a body of regents, keeping the right of nomination for himself. He also reserved to himself the right of visitation, which he granted to the Metropolitan chapter of Canons, the Bishop and the Municipality (Richard del Arco, History of Zaragoza. Ch. XII, p. 141). Kings and Popes unanimously poured on this institution all kinds of favours and privileges. "From Rome it was decorated with the laurel of the horn of the Unicorn, very much coveted in that city by numerous pious institutions. The Hospital had been visited by the famous and virtuous Emperor Charles V, who had admired the charity of the members, their diligence and universal interest shown

After sunset the Honourable Sitiada gathered in the courtyard of the Church. A repressed feeling of eagerness burst out from the multitude when they saw the coaches of the Lords regents and some priests of the House and the Majordomo going forth to meet the pilgrims. The regents and their attendants met the pilgrims on the way along the river Gallego, and the Majordomo ordered "that the Sisters should be seated in the coaches, and the Brothers continue their journey in their carts upto the Angel Gate. They should alight there and proceed to the gate of the Temple of Our Lady of the Pillar, and there wait for the Sisters. The carts with their luggage were to be sent straight to the Hospital.

to sick humanity. He started an Archconfraternity with the title of Our Lady of Grace in order to preserve that Royal institution. (commendatory letters of the collectors of alms of the holy Hospital. Novitiate Archive).

We have a pattern of the innumerable privileges and indulgences, granted to the institution by the Popes, in a Bull of Clement VII, dated March 7th 1525, and in other documents (see History of the Institute by Rev. James Figals, Ch. I, p. 17).

In that Hospital there were wards for men and women, sick of various types of fevers and of scabies and wards for those who had undergone surgery, for the foundling and the mentally deranged, and others. In them there was lodged an ailing population of one thousand five hundred or two thousand people (Augustin Sevil. Novitiate Archive). There were more than 240 people employed in the Hospital, besides the resident priests for the spiritual ministry. Collectors of alms ("pasioneros") and of other contributions were appointed from the villages of Aragon where the devotion to Our Lady of Grace of the Hospital of Zaragoza was popular. The Lenten services in the Church of the Hospital were the most renowned in the whole of Spain, and there was a Lenten sermon preached every day during that season by the most famous preachers of the country ("Heroista and Sanctity" by Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. Ch. V, p. 32).

The Hospital was governed by an Administrator and the regents. The governing body was called the Honourable Sitiada, its members were called regents and their president was the Archbishop of Zaragoza. Two of the regents were chosen from among the chapter Canons of the Metropolitan See, and five from the most noble families of Aragon ("Life of the servant of God, Mother Maria Rafols" by Santiago Guallar. Book II, Ch. III, p. 64).

When both groups of Brothers and Sisters came together, they entered the Holy Shrine, made their prayer and offered thanksgiving to Our Lady for their safe arrival. They asked her protection and patronage in order to accomplish in all charity and fervour the task they had come to fulfil".³

An outburst of enthusiasm came thundering from the multitude when they saw those exceptional pilgrims prostrating themselves before the Queen of Aragon and of Spain. Noble hearts can easily detect the marks of generosity. Unquestionably that group of chosen souls had been the recipients of the gift of divine love, with which they had been able to relinquish their country and parents, a world smiling to them, full of hope and success, and come in search of suffering, sickness and misery. "It was night, and it was raining heavily," says a document of the time; yet the rough weather could not deter the noble citizens of Zaragoza, but became rather the appropriate and majestic setting for the pageant of that glorious reception. "Then they betook themselves to the Hospital, the Sisters being escorted in the same coaches and the Brothers on foot.

The Sitiada was gathered, as it has been said, in the court-yard of the Church. They ordered the main door of the Church to be open to allow the pilgrims to enter. In the court-yard the pilgrims kissed the regents' and priests' hands, and bowed deeply before others. In their own Catalonian language they explained as well as they could the purpose of their arrival. They signified their wish of performing the tasks they had agreed upon, and they hoped with God's grace to bring them to a successful end⁴.

³ Information given by the Sitiada, April 25th 1816. Hospital Archive, bundle 626.

⁴ Ibid.

They had come in time to save that pious institution from an impending ruin, for it was clear to all the insufficient attention the servants gave to the sick, the lack of cleanliness, the scandals given by the servants and those outsiders they were introducing. Anyone entering the Hospital soon met in the wards and in the corridors, specially in the wards of those who had undergone surgery, impudent men and women either conversing in secluded corners, or sitting for a long time on the beds of the women who were less seriously ill. It was hardly possible for a priest to sit by the head of the bed to hear confessions without the risk of soiling his soutane with the dirty water and filth spilt on the ground, or of taking along some parasites from the beds, besides the stench of the beds and wards".⁵

Quarrels were continuous, reasonable and just complaints were constantly raised by the sick, for food was served to them in a disgraceful manner, while those unworthy infirmarians were all the time making business at the expense of the sick, pilfering things here and there, even from their own destitution. All this took place in spite of the most exact supervision.⁶

To this "paradise" the Brothers and Sisters had come. Great courage was needed, indeed, to undertake the work of the moral and material restoration of that House. For it would amount to committing themselves to all possible sufferings and sacrifices for the sake of banishing malpractices sanctioned by inveterate use.

⁵ Information of the directors of St. Charles Seminary to the Count of Santiago, April 1807 (See "Heroism and sanctity" C. Rabaza, Sch. P. p. 81).

⁶ Ibid.

3. The charismatic leader

The life of Mother Maria Rafols will show how she and her Sisters endangered their own lives, and why all the centuries to come will bless those heroines of goodness and angels of charity, who knew how to overcome their natural impulses, and drop by drop pour into the souls of Christ's poor the treasures of their love and goodness, and changed that House, which was then an abode of misery and disorder, into a house of comfort and Christian patience.

The leader of the group of Sisters just arrived was a young religious woman of twenty-three years of age. Her name, well-known now and praised by all, but then altogether unknown was Maria Rafols. She had been chosen president of the Sisterhood by her selfless and loyal companions. Their director in Barcelona had approved that choice, in spite of the young age, and the Sistiada too, had accepted the election. This fact alone tells much of the worth of that chosen soul.

She left the aroma of peace, which is the beauty of all virtues, wherever she went. She had imbibed it during the years spent in the silence of a monastic life. She had developed an unselfishness that had become second nature, and so was fully prepared to exercise a fruitful apostolate in obscurity and bring forth the fruits of total surrender and immolation. The loving and mysterious ways of God had snatched her from the joyful seclusion of the cloister and thrown her into the battle-field. He had endowed her splendidly with all the requisites for the task entrusted to her. Her mere presence was itself a revelation of God. "She was tall and of a most kind disposition, of grave and majestic

stateliness, enhanced by a charming and angelic modesty".⁷

The Lords regents showed great joy, for the reality before their eyes far surpassed the anxieties of the previous labours. "They came up to the sanctuary, and after a short prayer they were escorted through the door that led to the court-yard of the Hospital."

This was the second stop after their arrival in Zaragoza. The first had been in the Temple of Our Lady of the Pillar to salute the most Blessed Mother and offer themselves as their daughters, and request her protection. The second was before the Prisoner of the Tabernacle, in that beautiful Church of the Hospital, the witness of their sorrows and joys, in the years to come, where they always found light and strength for that difficult enterprise.

"The vast crowds, gathered in the Church and in the large courtyard of the ruined Hospital, could hardly make way for the Sisters and the Sitiada to come out and to climb up to the hall upstairs. There the Sisters briefly spoke to them about the journey. From there they were led to the dining room of the priests below where they were offered a cup of cocoa. They took it with signs of great pleasure and to the satisfaction of the regents. These were beaming with joy seeing their wishes fulfilled. They had in front of them two groups one of men and the other of women from whom they could expect the best improvements for the spiritual and bodily assistance of the sick, and for the good administration and economy of the house.

Later they visited the wards of the sick, and we

⁷ Notes from the information of the contemporary sisters.

cannot express by words the kind and consoling expressions with which they comforted the patients. Only by force were they separated from them in order to lead them to the separate lodgings that had been prepared for them. There was a general rejoicing. Yet, to tell the full truth, there was, too, an untoward incident partially revealing to the sisters what was ahead. As the Sisters were climbing the chief staircase, a wicked tongue uttered the following imprecation, "may their legs be broken before they reach upstairs". This was only a sign of the dissatisfaction prevalent among certain groups of servants of both sexes residing in the Hospital. Some of them foreseeing their own inevitable dismissal were not ready to welcome the Sisters, others though they might continue their services did not want to have before their eyes witnesses, nay more, accusers of their deeds which were in contradiction with the life and behaviour of the new arrivals"⁸.

4. The initial charism

Documents are silent about sister President; but we can easily imagine the feelings of the young superior after taking upon herself the great responsibility. We can picture her in her cell, after the deep emotions of that memorable day, kneeling at the foot of the crucifix the Founders brought along⁹. From that moment a colossal task weighed on her shoulders, heavier than she could have imagined at that moment. Frightful days for the city and its Hospital were looming on the hori-

⁸ Information given by the Sitiada, April 25th 1816. Hospital Archive.

⁹ It was wooden Cross on which there was a silver image of Jesus. At the foot was a silver image of Our Lady of the Pillar, Patroness of Aragon. This devout Crucifix is kept as a precious relic in the Novitiate of St. Anne, Zaragoza. It is 650 x 284 mm.

zon. The fate of the Hospital and of the citizens was from now onwards irrevocably bound to hers. That was a stormy century. Political upheavals would endanger royal thrones and even make them vanish together with many other institutions. Revelutions would try to uproot the tender plant of the Sisterhood planted on that happy occasion by the delicate hand of the young Foundress in that holy ground that had been sanctified by the bodily presence of Mary.

The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne had been born. It was a tender shoot at this time; soon it will send its roots deep down and grow magnificently, because the charism of Mother Maria was already at work. In the intuition of her heart, burning with love for God, she gave to the Sisterhood just started the nourishment needed for a healthy and steady growth. She first dug down and planted on bed-rock the tree of the Cross, that is, built her sisterhood on humility, poverty, obscurity, sacrifice and self-immolation. Within the tottering walls of that House there was fabulous number of opportunities to practise and acquire all these virtues. She chose the Blessed daughter of Joaquim and Anne, as protector, and derived the waters of strength and grace from the well of the Saviour, the Tabernacle of the Holy Eucharist.

Mother Maria Rafols could sleep peacefully on that night, in the midst of an unpleasant and rough weather, lulled by the sound of the wind and the rain lashing against the windows. Her Sisterhood had been born. Her charism was revealed in all its distinctive features. It was love what had made her leave her country and her dear ones, her language and her habits. It was love for the poor sick, of whom there were one or two

thousand in that Hospital. It was heroic love—how heroic it was to be it did not appear to her now—that she infused into the Sisterhood. The remark of the servant had been a revelation to her. The squalor of the poor sick, the filthy wards, the stench of the devastated bodies told her that not ordinary but heroic charity was needed. The thick walls of the Hospital would protect her and her Sisterhood from the danger of their names being known to the outside world, fame, recognition, gratitude vanished from that sombre place as much as light and fresh air from the rooms and corridors of the Hospital, and as much as the smile of kindness and consideration from the faces of the domineering Sitiada. Heroic charity was to be the charism of her Sisterhood.

"IF THE ROOT IS HOLY SO ARE
THE BRANCHES" Ro 11,16

1. The protection of a Christian home

Charisms are not planted at random. They develop best in a congenial climate. All charisms are the mature fruits of the Spirit to make Christians fit for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church. They are gifts for the adult Christian. They presuppose, therefore, a growth in a communion between God and man. Before we taste the fruits of the Spirit we need to experience the presence of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. This chapter and the following will show how Maria Rafols began to feel the presence of the Spirit, and how she developed the gifts of the Spirit, maturing spiritually until the moment we have witnessed in the previous chapter when the charism of the Spirit began to be active in her.

The presence of the Spirit of God was felt intensely from her early childhood due to the deeply religious atmosphere of her home. In the prayers with her parents, in the silence she learned so well to love in that peaceful setting of rural life, in her solitude and the liturgical celebrations, in the sacraments, and in the sorrows taken in true Christian spirit, the presence of the Spirit, gradually manifested itself more and more intensely.

Villafranca del Panades is situated in a fertile plain. It lies at the foot of a mountain called La Serreta, on the way towards the blue Mediterranean Sea. At a distance of one kilometre from Villafranca, framed by

a landscape of fields covered with flowers and sown with evergreen pines, surrounded by vineyards and vegetable gardens, crossed by a stream of ever-flowing water, there was towards the end of the 18th century, a typically Catalonian peasant little house called "*El Molí d'en Rovira*." God was pleased to place in this scenery, as in a nestle, the cradle of that privileged girl Maria, a precious pearl in the crown of glory of Villafranca del Panades. Villafranca was "the mistress of that rich and well-watered valley which spreads out towards the broad plains of Barcelona and Tarragona, the most bountiful mother of valiant and renowned heroes, and the favourite resort of the Kings of Aragon and the Counts of Barcelona, loaded with gifts and exemptions, and the abode of the trusteeships and crusaders who ennobled everything they undertook".¹

Christopher Rafols Cunillera was the father of Maria.²

¹ "Heroism and Sanctity" by C. Rabaza, Sch.P. p. II.

² The surname Rafols was already well-known. A certain Joseph Rafols, son of another Christopher Rafols was married to Cecilia Farran in 1700. They established themselves in the house *Rcell de la Costa*, of St Margaret del Panades, known by the popular name of *Monjos* (the Monks). It is now a railway station in the interior line from Barcelona to Tarragona, at about 4 kms. from Villafranca. In the time of Mother Rafols it was a small village of a few houses, very picturesque but infested with a malaria on account of the marshes.

One of the children of Christopher Rafols was the grand-father of the girl Maria. He was Christopher Rafols Farran (1701-1776). He was the miller, owner of the *Abadal Mill*, also located at St Margaret del Panades. In 1728 he married *Madrona Cunillera*. The seventh child of this couple Christopher Rafols Cunillera was the father of Maria. He had been baptized on February 25th 1743 (Parish Register of St Margaret and *Monjos*, Book 2). He married Margaret Bruna Brugal on November 24th 1771. Margaret Bruna had been born on June 30th 1751 (Parish Register of St Margaret and *Monjos*, Book 2), her father was called the inn-keeper of *Monjos*, because he was living in the inn of the *Monjos*, which belonged to the Cistercian monks ("*monjos*" in the Catalonian language) of the famous monastery of *Santes Creus*. Today the inn is the house no. 9 on the road leading to the village, and belongs to the heirs of *Pelegrin Bruna* who live in America ("*Vida documentada de la Madre Maria Rafols*" by John B. Altisent. Unpublished. *Novitiate Archive*).

We have reliable information from Rev. John Badia, Dean of Villafranca, in a document written by his own hand (preserved in the Novitiate Archive), that the Rafols family of the Abadal Mill was very pious and deeply Christian. The mill was located in the neighbourhood of two famous religious houses, one of the Dominicans and the other of the Franciscans. These Friars had a decisive influence on the life of the villagers. They were virtuous and zealous men, all intent on the glory of God and the spiritual good of the inhabitants of Villafranca. With their ministry they helped the villagers in their spiritual as well as in material welfare.

Nurtured with such beneficial influence, the Rafols family grew in the perfection of a Christian and devout life. They were members of the Sodality and Confraternity of the Parish of St. Margaret, and the convent of St. Dominic. The male members of the family were enrolled in the Brotherhood of the convent of St. Francis established to cater for the spiritual and temporal welfare of its associates. All the members of the Rafols family were faithful in the discharge of the duties and tasks, weekly or monthly, entrusted to them by rule. The Confraternity of the Minerva and of the Holy Rosary were at the time at the acme of their popularity, both in the parish of St. Margaret, as well as in the other parishes of El Panades. Devotion to the holy Eucharist and devotion to the holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary were the most firm base of that unshakable faith and sincere devotion shown by those simple hearted people, stripped of all worldly ambition and always leading a fervent spiritual life.

Christopher, the father of Maria, had been trained

in this deeply Christian atmosphere. He had been well educated, both in his studies and in his religious training, in the school of St. Dominic's convent where he learned the practice of virtues. In the mill he used to help his father and brothers in the work of grinding, and in the convent and in the parish he would help the friars and the parish priest, serving the Mass and helping in other religious functions. His wife, Margaret Bruna, was not less pious. She had been educated in that atmosphere of a staunch Christian life prevalent in the surrounding villages under the guidance of those religious men.

God was preparing the ways for His daughter who was to become one day the Foundress of a religious Congregation.

The first child of these pious parents was John, born at St. Margaret del Panades on October 4th 1772. At that time the mill of Rovira, at Villarranca, had no miller, and the owners knowing the personal qualities of Christopher Rafols and his ability and experience in the Abadal mill offered the work of miller to him. Christopher accepted it and moved with his wife and child to Villafranca, in the year 1773.³

In that smiling home, sanctified by prayer and work, on the 5th of November 1781 came to this world Maria, the sixth child of Christopher and Margaret. Most of the other children had died in their young age. On the 7th of November the child was baptized in the

³ The Rovira mill belongs now to the Sisters of Clarity of St Anne. The Sisters preserve its interior, as it was in the times of Christopher Rafols, and the exterior, with some few minor changes in the facade. The owners were the members of the Alcover family of Villafranca, a distinguished family, who possessed also a number of properties and houses in the surrounding villages.

beautiful parish church of St Mary of Villafranca, and she received the name, Maria Josefa Rosa.⁴

On the right side of a lateral gate of this Church, today Minor Basilica, there is a marble slab, placed on August 30th 1908 commemorating this baptism. The inscription translated from the Catalan language reads:

IN THIS CHURCH OF ST MARY OF VILAFRANCA, ON THE 7TH OF NOVEMBER 1781 WAS BAPTIZED SISTER MARIA RAFOLS, FOUNDESS OF THE CONGREGATION OF SISTERS OF CHARITY OF ST ANNE, A WOMAN CONSPICUOUS IN ALLEVIATING ALL HUMAN MISERIES, WHO ARMED WITH THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY CONQUERED THE FRENZY OF WAR DURING THE SIEGES OF ZARAGOZA IN THE YEAR 1808. VILAFRANCA DEDICATES TO HER THIS REMEMBRANCE IN THE FIRST CENTENARY OF THE GLORIOUS SIEGES.⁵

A short time after the birth of Maria, the pious miller with his wife and children moved to the mill of Mascaro, in the village of Bieda.⁶

⁴ This Church was begun in the XII century, and its construction continued through all the periods of the gothic style. The interior of the Church was destroyed during the Spanish civil war of 1936. Because of its size and beauty it was rightly known as the cathedral of El Pasades. Maria was baptized by the vicar Michael Vila Rovira, and her godparents were John Paul Alcover, son of the house of Alcover to which the mill belonged, and her maternal aunt Maria Bruna Brugal (Parish Register of Baptisms. Book 15, fol. no. 166).

⁵ We are right in concluding it from the fact that Maria's next sister, born on May 24th 1783 was baptized in the Parish of Our Lady of Bieda, and in the baptismal register her father is called the miller of the Mascaro mill of the same parish. It is situated at 4 kms. to the North of Villafranca ("Vida documentada de la Madre Rafols" by J. Altisent. Unpublished. Novitiate Archive).



The servant of God—M. Maria Rafols



House in which M. Maria Rafols was born
Villafranca del Panades



At the feet of Our Lady they surrendered themselves to her
for the service of the needy

2. The influence of her parents

Maria was a child in whom the beauty of soul was joined to the charm of her features.⁶ She was mild by nature.⁷ From early childhood she was marked by her precocity and even more by her piety which all held to be extraordinary.⁸ While Christopher Rafols was busy with the work of grinding and cultivating that farm, and Margaret was looking after the children, instilling in them that piety that only the sweet language of a mother can place in their souls, the little Mary could not wrench herself from her mother's side; for from her tender age she "was a great lover of solitude, fleeing from the company of other girls and remaining close to her mother".⁹

In the rough winter nights she would fall asleep close to the hearth where her mother was preparing their supper. Yet, she was most unwilling to go to bed. In that home, every day without exception, the Rosary was recited, when the father of the family came from the fields. The tiny child looked forward to this moment. No sooner did her father enter than she would awake and say the Rosary with great fervour. To this tender and precocious devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary we must ascribe "that simplicity and innocence which marked her out from all other girls of her neighbourhood".¹¹ She loved to accompany her

⁶ Information of Mr. Santiago Abella, a lawyer of Villafranca, April 15th 1926.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ordinary Process. Witness XIX, Mr. Juan Badia, Dean of El Panades. Italian translation. Catalogue of Witnesses, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 26.

¹⁰ Santiago Abella, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Ordinary Process, *Ibid.* p. 24.

parents to religious functions and was regularly present at them.¹³ She edified all "with her piety in Church".¹⁴ "When she heard the bell for Mass, she ran to her mother, asking her to take her along, and during Mass her composure would raise great admiration. She remained on her knees until her mother ordered her to sit down."¹⁴

3. Growing in Christian maturity

She was four years old when she received the Sacrament of Confirmation, together with her little sisters Margaret and Josefa, this latter being two months old. The Bishop of Barcelona Don Gabino Valladares Mesia administered this sacrament to them in the convent of Carmelite nuns of Villafranca.¹⁵

She must have received this sacrament with such preparation and so well disposed, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, that she became "remarkable in all virtues proper to a child, chiefly modesty, humility, charity. In her the charm of her early years was enhanced by the splendour of supernatural grace, announcing and portending her future sanctity"¹⁶.

Her devoted heart was growing more and more in the love of God. "One day she heard a shepherd uttering a blasphemy¹⁷. She burst into bitter tears and held herself tightly to her mother".¹⁸ With the love

¹³ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁵ Archive of St. Margaret and Monjes.

¹⁶ Ordinary Process. Ibid. p. 25.

¹⁷ Ibid. Witness XX, p. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid. Witness XIX, p. 25.

of God there grew in her the love of the poor, and "no sooner did she see a beggar than she quickly ran to her mother to get something wherewith she could help him"¹⁹.

Her soul was becoming capable of recording deep as well as lofty experiences, and enkindled with the divine fires that holy flame was transforming her into a bright torch, the light of which shone through her transparent and sweet eyes. A longing for hardwork was already showing itself. Her parents could feel amply rewarded for their diligent care in "educating their child in the Christian faith, from her earliest days training her heart in the practice of virtue, in the fear of God, in the love of work and sacrifice and in all other Christian virtues"²⁰.

God was pleased with her, and the people of the place were attributing to her innocence and virtue the blessings Our Lord was bestowing on her family, "they were obtaining richer and better harvests in that mill where the servant of God was living than in the other mills of the neighbourhood. Some times they were spared from the havoc of hail-stones which destroyed many a neighbouring field, at other times a swollen river caused no harm in their lands"²¹.

"In 1793 we find the Rafols—Bruna family back at St. Margaret from where they had moved in 1773. There, on March 17th 1793 was born the last child named Joseph. We are not aware of the reasons why Christopher Rafols left the mill of Mascaró. We only know that he was living in the quadrangle of the

¹⁹ Ibid. Witness XX, p. 26.

²⁰ Ibid. Witness XIX, p. 24.

²¹ Ibid. Witness XX, p. 27.

Monjos, an annex perhaps of the inn, or a Catalonian country house located in a rectangular piece of land, which in certain villages is commonly called a quadrangle. It belonged to the monks of Santes Creus²².

4. Her early experience of sorrows

Maria was about to be twelve years old, and at this moment when she was ending her happy childhood and entering into the prime of life God sent her a chain of unexpected sorrows. On August 8th her little brother Joseph, the joy of the home, died. She had one angel more in heaven, but the void in that home could not be easily filled. A short time later her uncle Dominic, her father's eldest brother became seriously ill in the Abadal mill. Then her aunty Rosa Morato was taken ill too, and in a few days her maternal grand-mother. All three gave up their souls into the hands of God at intervals of a few days.

How mysteriously was God teaching her detachment from all affection and the secret knowledge of suffering! She was entering upon the hidden path in the bloody foot-steps of her Crucified Lord. This was the way she would have to walk to accomplish her mission. This was the price she had to pay if she was to become mother of martyrs and virgins, destined to renew the world with their own self-oblation.

We are not informed of her first Communion. It was customary in those days to postpone the reception of this Sacrament. We have reason to think that by that time she had become orphaned of her father, "for due to his constant work, and the sorrows experienced in

²² "Vida documentada" Altisent. Novitiate Archive.

the death of so many dear ones, his strength and health, though robust until now, began to decline. After a long illness which he bore with great patience, and after receiving the last rites administered by the parish priest, Raymond Volart, and the Anointing of the sick by the Franciscan Friar Paul Nombert, from the friary of Villafranca, he surrendered his soul to God on July 10th 1794²³.

After this demise a new era opened before the young Maria. We leave her embracing her cross and weeping over the dead body of her excellent and most beloved father.

She was thirteen when she lost her father. A mighty operation of grace must have come upon her after her father's death. For next moment we find her in the convent of Sanjuanistas of Barcelona. God's presence, the Spirit's presence was found no longer in her home, in her beautiful village, but within herself. God was leading her to the solitude of the desert there to speak to her heart, and to fill her now with the gifts of the Spirit, that will shape her charism.

²³ Information of John Badia, Novitiate Archive.

"GUARDIANS AND TRUSTEES UNTIL THE
DATE SET BY THE FATHER" Gal. 3, 2.

1. Led by the Spirit

The Author of history from the vantage point of His divine omniscience can direct and prepare suitable remedies for the needs of the times before they arise. God knew in every detail the need of proper attention which innumerable victims of war and the hunger and disease will experience. He foresaw the need for heroism and for self-forgetfulness in order to think of the needs of others.

Only the Spirit of God could have led Maria to enter an institution where she could best prepare herself to receive the particular charism which was to be entrusted to her. Maria could obtain a Christian upbringing and a well trained moral character in her own home, but the artful and delicate ways of the Spirit she was to learn in an ancient institution which defying the corrosion of time, had preserved ancient and ever useful values for all times to come.

It fell to the lot of the Hospitaller Sisters of St. John to lay the spiritual and religious foundations of the lofty edifice she was to raise in the Church.

Maria was thirteen years old when her father died. She had gathered from her training at home a tendency to loneliness and seclusion, a loving inclination towards the poor, a longing to heal and look after the sick, a powerful inspiration from her parents for hard work and initiative. It was not the action of the Spirit that

took up these talents, raised and transformed them and made them truly supernatural with the communication of His gifts.

It is well-established tradition in the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, that Maria Rafols had entered the Hospitallers Sisters of St. John in Barcelona, though the exact date is not known. It must have been very likely soon after the death of her father, for ever since the name of Maria does not appear in the parish registers, though her mother continued to live at St. Margaret till 1798¹, when probably she moved to the town of Villanova and Geltru.

2. Guardians and trustees

The convents of Dames Hospitallers were very ancient in the Kingdom of Aragon². Already in 1177 King Alphonsus and Queen Sancha gave the Castle of Grisen, at Calatayud, to the Dames Hospitallers to establish a Convent of religious women of that order. The same Queen, not satisfied with the ancient rules of the order, obtained from the Supreme Pontiff Celestine III, in 1197, and Innocent III, in 1207, the approbation of a religious order, following the rule of St. Augustine, which eventually was later accepted by all Hospitallers.

¹ We have the marriage registration of Margaret Rafols, Maria's mother, widow of Christopher Rafols, who married for a second time. Marriage Register of the parish of St. Margaret and Monjos.

² The religious congregation of women of St. John was an offshoot of the Order of Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, founded in the XI century by St. Gerard Terque. From this Order the order of Knights Templar was born in 1128. Some houses of the Hospitallers had female members to attend to the sick women: they were called "donatne". They were partly lay-women, partly religious. They would give part of their goods to the Order and they were free to accept the habit or not. From these women the congregation of religious women of St. John originated.

In this way Queen Sancha became the reformer of the order of Dames Hospitallers, and founded the first convent in Spain at Sijena (Aragon).

In order to know the spirituality of Maria Rafols and of the Congregation she founded, we must learn of the spirit infused into the new reformed order of the religious women of St. John. Their charism was a spirit of asceticism, of love of poverty, and seclusion from the world, constant and strict silence, mortification of the body by means of fasts and other bodily austerities, together with the exercise of humility in the chapter of faults. Regular instructions were given by the prioress for the edification and a spiritual profit of their souls.

The second monastery of the order was built at Alguaire (Lerida), which later was transferred to Barcelona.

It is of historical interest and of comfort to the spirit to know that many of the rules and practices of the first Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, which are faithfully preserved in the Congregation until now, go back to the famous Rule of Queen Sancha, thanks to the spiritual foundation Maria Rafols laid in her soul, and the training received during her stay among the religious women of St. John.

It is very likely that in the second half of the XII century the Hospitallers were in the Panades, and the Trusteeship of St. Valentine of the Cabanyes, close to Vilafranca, was one of the first foundations of the order of St. John in Catalonia. In 1306 the order had a Church and a cemetery at Vilafranca. The 2nd of July of 1794, six days before the death of Christopher Rafols the last trustee, Fray Manuel of Montoliu took charge of the Trusteeship of Vilafranca. He guided the young girl Maria in her way to the solitude she was longing for, in order to devote herself wholly to the Lord. He made the necessary arrangements for her entrance into the convent of religious women of St. John in Barcelona.

The chapters of the Rule of Queen Sancha recommend constant and strict silence always but specially in the Church, in the cloister, dormitory, refectory: the first Sisters of Charity kept this rule in the Hospital of Grace, and the same sisters keep it now with faithful observance. Similarly, the austerity in food and sleep goes back to the same rule, only the saying of Matins at midnight has been replaced by the not less exacting practice of watching the sick in the hospitals. In the Rule of Queen Sancha only flax was allowed for their clothes, and the use of costly garments and precious metals and expensive fur dresses was forbidden. The present rules of the Sisters of Charity order that "the habit should be poor in kind and make... and for the love of poverty the sisters shall not use objects made of gold or silver"³.

No wonder, then, if the spirit of heroic knights and dames, of valient warriors, of nobility and self-forgetfulness runs through the heart and veins of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, heirs to the virtues and deeds of the Friars Hospitallers, the Knights Templar, Dames Hospitallers and religious women of St. John. It flows down from the queenly spirit of Donna Sancha and through the twin soul of Maria Rafols.

From the convent of Alguaire also came to the religious women of St. John in Barcelona the devotion to St. Augustine. Mother Maria Rafols established later in her Congregation the recital of prayers to St. Augustine, in order to obtain the burning love he had for God, and that spirit of contemplation that belongs to the spirituality of the congregation.

³ Constitutions of Sisters of Charity of St. Anne. Ch. 1: Virtue and vow of poverty.

When Maria Rafols joined the community of Barcelona, their prioress was the illustrious Dame Antonia de Berart y de Ramon Cortiada. She had been elected prioress on April 8th 1780. She died on October 10th 1800 at the age of 87. She had been successful in fostering an intense spiritual life among the Dames, in order to strengthen the bond of union which the love of Christ had established in the hearts of the members of that community. A life of peace, prayer and manual work in favour of the needy had been the outcome of that renewal. Those religious women joined to the religious practices of the order and the observance of the evangelical counsels, the practice of charity towards the poor sick.

Maria Rafols remained nine years with the religious women of St. John, imbibing the religious virtues of the Dames. The spirit of God communicated to her an increase of His gifts, specially counsel, fortitude, piety and that relish of divine things specially in the exercise of charity, which we call wisdom. Maria left a happy remembrance of her stay, which time has not been able to efface. In 1931 the religious women of St. John of Barcelona declared in a written document signed by the prioress and legalized by the Vicar General of the diocese that "the many years that have passed and the many vicissitudes we have undergone, since the servant of God Maria Rafols left this monastery, have not been able to make us forget her; on the contrary, we have ever cherished her memory, and we remember her with extraordinary veneration and love. We are fully persuaded that she practised all virtues in a heroic degree. This is the constant tradition kept very much alive in our monastery till this date"⁴.

⁴ The original document is kept in the Archive of the Sisters of Charity of St Anne in Zaragoza.

In 1868 those religious women were expelled from their monastery, in 1874 Dames Raimunda Pont and Bautista Berenguer restored that monastery. We have a document saying that Raimunda Pont "used to gather the young sisters and with deep feeling of gratitude and looking up to heaven like an ecstatic used to say that many years earlier some religious women had set out from their monastery to found a house in Zaragoza. She narrated it as it had been an extraordinary event, and added that they all were very holy. Besides this testimony, we have another of Dame Patrocinio Casas in which she furnishes some details which she affirmed to have heard on different occasions from the same Raimunda Pont, "that there was a great plague in Zaragoza, that many were dying without any one being able to look after them for lack of personnel. That His Grace the Archbishop of Zaragoza moved with compassion had sent a circular letter to all the Bishops of Catalonia telling them that for the love of God they should obtain from the convents under their jurisdiction some religious women who might be willing to help those suffering of the plague. They would do a very great charitable work, for many were dying without the sacraments and were abandoned for lack of attendance. We can humbly remark that no others offered themselves to look after the sick of the plague than the religious women of our monastery, who moved by the love of God and of the neighbour, and with due ecclesiastical permission quickly set out for Zaragoza, and there with their great charity did a marvellous work"⁵.

⁵ Written information duly legalized of the religious women of St John. Novitiate Archive.

Other documents from Zaragoza give the exact date of that epidemic, "it was towards the end of 1803 and the beginning of the following year." They add, "that in spite of the huge capacity of the ancient Hospital, even the corridors were occupied with the sick."

It was at this time that "on account of the poor services the attendants of the Hospital and the women who took care of the sick, the Sitiada (whose president was the Archbishop of Zaragoza) ordered the institution in it of a Brotherhood and a Sisterhood whose work should be to attend with zeal and love the poor sick. They had come to know that in the principality of Catalonia the religious order of Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem, of both sexes, were assisting the sick with uncommon charity and zeal and with great edification of the people in towns where assistance to the sick in hospitals had been entrusted to them⁶.

When Maria Rafols and her companions went to found the Sisterhood in Zaragoza there was no rule of cloister nor had she taken any vows⁷. In the monastery of Barcelona there were two types of religious women, the religious of the full Cross and the religious of half Cross. The former were of noble descent testified by a title of nobility, the latter were called by that name because they wore a Cross on their mantle. These dedicated themselves with solemn vows to the service of the religious Dames, helping and serving them in the pious works they undertook in the service of the poor of Jesus Christ. We are certain that Mother

Maria Rafols belonged to these latter ones⁸. We have a confirmation of it in the habit of the Sisters of Charity of St Anne, which in their original form was exactly the same, except for a few slight modifications, as the habit of the religious of the half Cross of Alguaire. The broad headdress, the black habit and mantle, the crucifix in the waist are similar in both institutions. The few modifications were the change of the augustinian leather belt for a woollen sash, the black veil is somewhat longer, and the Crucifix has the image of Christ on the outer part, opposite to the practice among the religious women of St John⁹.

Maria Rafols had donned the habit of the religious women of the half Cross for a short time, since the document quoted above tells us that she had not yet made her profession. The years before the donning of the habit she must have spent at the service of those noble Dames who were entitled to have maid servants to assist them, and be trained in the monastery. The Dames were not following Community life.

3. Until the day set by the father

The date of Maria's departure must have been approximately towards the end of October or the beginning of November 1804. We know, however, the date of her vestition. That date we can reckon as the date on which the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of St Anne was born to the greater glory of God, the good of the poor and the edification of Christian people. It was December 13th 1804. We seem to conclude this date rightly, since one of the first sisters who came

⁶ Information to the visitors of this Holy Hospital. Register of Sitiadas. Vol. of the year 1816. Sitiada of April 25th. Hospital Archive.

⁷ Information of the religious women of St John.

⁸ Altisent, "Vida documentada" Unpublished. Navitate Archive.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

to Zaragoza with Maria Rafols was Teresa Calvet. We read in the first Admission Register of the Sisters of the Hospital of Our Lady of Hope, Huesca, the following entry: "Mother Teresa Calvet, superior. Donned her habit on December 13th 1804, in Barcelona."¹⁰

In this way Maria Rafols, moving from Barcelona to Zaragoza, impelled by the needs of the times and love of the sick and poor, but even more by the charismatic Spirit of the Lord moving in the Church, came to found a new Congregation into which the lofty spirit of the Hospitallers and Knight Templars, the spirit of St. Augustine which is the spirit of contemplative love, a spirit of turmoil and peace, of austerity, silence and devoted service to mankind.

¹⁰ Novitiate Archive.

CHAPTER IV

"THERE WAS A MAN SENT BY GOD. . . JOHN"

Jo 1.6

1. A guide, a helper and a friend

God's plans for the liberation of man do not exclude men, rather He liberates men through men. The charismatic gift of Sister Maria Rafols would have lain hidden and unused, unless a man sent by God, whose name was John had not come to unearth it and release its potentialities.

To detect and nurture the charism of heroic charity in Sister Maria Rafols no other person was more qualified than he who was called an apostle of charity. His was also a heroic charity.

John Bonal was a Catalonian too, born of a well-to-do family, on August 24th 1769, at Terradas, a village of the province of Gerona. A constant and steady will and determination was united to a remarkable tendency to undergo arduous, lofty and noble enterprises. From early childhood two loves mastered his soul: the love of the Eucharist and the love for the poor of Christ. Inflamed with these loves, and ever open to the Spirit of God, he unhesitatingly understood his vocation. It was to bring joy to those who mourn, to evangelize the poor, bring sinners out of captivity, breaking down the chains of their vices and bringing them back to the freedom of the children of God.

While he was still a student of Philosophy in the College of Huesca, he renounced his handsome patrimony in favour of his brother James: and later on, while

doing his Theology course, first in the Dominican College of Barcelona and later in the College of Zaragoza, he would attend both to the preparation of his classes and other academic activities, and to the most selfless exercises of charity and apostolate, visiting the prisoners and the sick of the holy Hospital. His charity never came in the way of his priestly training. He excelled in his intellectual pursuits. After successful endeavours he obtained the professorship of Language in the city of Reus, and made the field of his apostolate still broader by instructing youth and teaching orphan children and looking after forsaken girls.

After his ordination to the priesthood he embraced in his immense love all souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and gave himself up totally to preaching and hearing confessions with an apostolic zeal, the measure of which was the unquenchable fire consuming his heart¹.

He suffered with those who suffered, he revealed the wounds and weaknesses of the society of his time, corrected vices and exhorted all to virtue with both energy and meekness. His magnanimity, generosity and endless patience conquered the souls of people as much as his irresistible charm.

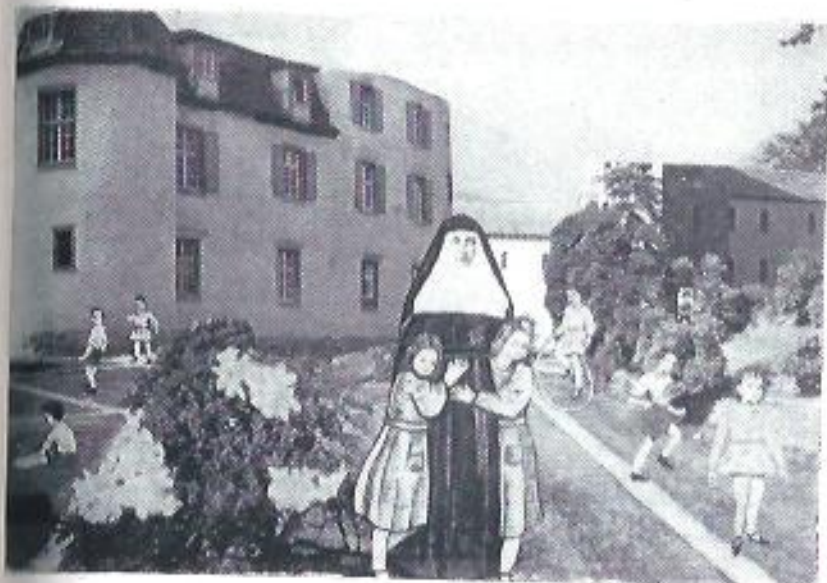
God was preparing the skilful architect for His work. In Father Bonal's mind was taking shape the idea of a universal institution of charity embracing all works and offering a remedy to all needs, specially "to serve and console the sick of so many hospitals, and to instruct the youth of so many villages who are sunk in deep ignorance"².

¹ Testimony of Augustin Sevil. Sitiada, Dec. 4th 1826.

² Letter of Father Bonal, quoted by Galindo "Vida de Mosen Juan Bonal" p. 77.



Hospital of Our Lady of Grace



M. Maria in charge of the Foundlings



At the risk of their lives the Sisters went to bring them back



4th August in 1808 the Hospital was burnt

We have mentioned in Chapter I how the Sitiada came upon Fr. Bonal and requested him to recruit Brothers and Sisters for that Hospital. In 1804 he was leading his small but well-trained army of twelve Brothers and twelve Sisters to take charge of serving the sick in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza. They were undertaking a hard and difficult task with unsurmountable obstacles. They were to be the victims of double dealing, jealousies even, and mean behaviour.

Rightly Napoleon Bonaparte used to say that whoever dares to be the founder of an institution must be ready for crucifixion. Father Bonal with heroic courage embraced the cross and began his painful ascent to Calvary. The Brothers broke down and dispersed. The fine group of Sisters emboldened by the example of their young and courageous superior, first among them for her talent, virtue and spirit of love, evaded obstacles, avoided pit-falls and climbed the heights of abnegation and sacrifice. Finally, the work so often cherished in Father Bonal's dreams, a Congregation of charity became a reality and the object of his predilection.

For four years he worked uninterruptedly in the organization and direction of the communities of Zaragoza and Huesca. This latter was the first shoot of the tender but already fruitful tree of the Congregation. He wrote the first Constitutions, a revelation of his godly spirit. He became confessor and spiritual director of his daughters, and alone he took the place of the Brothers in the wards of men. He served them unremittingly in a graceful and affable manner.

To all these tasks was added the office of "Pasionero

Penitentiary³ of the holy and general Hospital of Grace⁴.

2. His heroic charity

His acts of charity were not elicited by the needs of the moment, but were rather the manifestation of a tormenting thirst for giving himself completely to others. They were rather the unavoidable effects of a heroic soul and personality, ever transcending all human miseries and ever becoming ready for greater sacrifices. The terrible hours of the sieges of Zaragoza were fast approaching. War was spreading desolation and death everywhere. The French cannons manipulated by the genius of ambition were constantly vomiting cannon-balls. The city walls collapsed, but the super-human resistance of the citizens of Zaragoza, encouraged and upheld by the thought of their Mother and Patroness, the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar, caused surprise and amazement to the invader. For the first time they were being halted in their ambitious and delirious plans.

Fearless of even death, under a heavy shelling Fr. John sallied out against the besiegers, "already from the first moment of the siege holding aloft a Crucifix to encourage the defenders of religion, king and motherland."⁵

General Lejeune in his French "History of the Independence War" makes reference to this heroic

deed. "One day, one of the priests, of venerable appearance, of a majestic carriage and impressive height, was marching towards us, crossing the barricades of the Arrabal, vested in his priestly garb and holding a Crucifix. He advanced steadily and solemnly, in the least disturbed by the encircling dangers. His attitude was full of confidence, like that of a man who, inspired by God's voice, could answer: 'Lord, I follow your orders, thwart the perverse plans of the enemy!' When he was close to our most advanced positions and at a distance from where he could be easily heard, he stood and with a soundful and convincing voice, and in the name of religion, he delivered a most touching address. He pleaded that we should desist from uselessly attacking a city which was under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar. Several times he was told to desist from that mission he so courageously had undertaken. Yet he would go on. Only after he heard some shots in the air round about him did he decide to leave that audience so unwilling to hear him, and unharmed he went back into the city".

In those long days of the two frightful sieges, in which bodies were bent under fatigue and souls oppressed with anguish, he was seen everywhere: in the Hospital of Grace attending the sick, be they soldiers or civilians, in the Barracks for the convalescent, ministering the sacraments to five or six hundred sick or wounded grenadiers, who having no chaplain were deprived of all spiritual assistance; in the Hospital of the Duchess of Villahermosa, where he was the help and comfort of three or four hundred wounded men. He would go out and beg, collect alms to come to the rescue of so many in need during those fateful days

³ "Pasionero" this name was given to the priests appointed to collect alms by begging. They were also in charge of the spiritual ministry among the sick. Since this type of life was lived in the spirit of penance, the title Penitentiary was added to Pasionero.

⁴ Testimony of Vicente Ximenez, Feb, 20th 1820. Novitiate Archive.

⁵ Testimony of Augustine Sevil, op. cit.

After the French army entered and subdued the city, for five months, day after day, he visited the Hospital of St Lazarus, without neglecting any of his other duties. The invader had gathered there the noble Spanish army men, who were all deprived of assistance and victuals. Fr. Bonal was their help and comfort, bringing them the soothing remedy of his unbounded love of his heart-felt compassion, and the material help he could gather from his begging tours. He ransomed prisoners, assisted those sentenced to capital punishment. For his fervour in exhorting them, often he had to suffer unjust reproaches of a government guilty of unpardonable intrusion; he suffered them with unruffled calmness and patience⁶.

His outstanding behaviour compelled General Palafox, the defender of the city, to utter this most beautiful eulogy: "Reverend John Bonal priest of well-known virtue, exemplary and heroic life, and of great zeal for the glory of God, has given proof of these virtues like no one else. He has shown unquestionable signs of his ardent charity and patriotism, helping the wounded in places of greatest risk and danger to his life"⁷.

The results of the attack against the city and the following catastrophe changed the direction of Father John's life. That magnificent Hospital, object of his love and cradle of the new Congregation he had inspired, was totally destroyed. Whatever could be saved of that venerable and ancient institution was collected and brought to the Hospital of the Convalescent. There was need of everything which had to be urgently supplied.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Galindo, *op. cit.* p. 88.

From that time, though never interrupting his care for the Congregation and ever helpful to Mother Rafols in the many dangerous crises she had to undergo from 1816 till his death, Father Bonal continued his work of Pasionero. We can very well say that he lodged longer on the back of his mount than in any room as he moved from province to province along all the roads of Spain. Everywhere he exercised his priestly ministry, encouraging all, correcting abuses, comforting others, and as the fruit of that ministry exercised with such apostolic zeal, he would also gather most generous alms.

His priestly heart bled seeing God offended in many places, for he said "the corruption of morals had spread wide in Spain and perhaps all over Christendom. Utterances against God and His saints, blasphemies of a heretical or impious mind, doubts about our true and sacred religion, unbelief and false doctrines of masonry and jansenism and other false sects, and many other vices and errors, have taken roots in the hearts of many Spaniards. These errors are being preached by many anti-Christians and fostered by the stinking waters of licentiousness. It is also clear that our most merciful God who wants the conversion of the most forsaken sinners, uses His preachers as instruments for the conversion of many of them, especially those preachers who go from place to place giving missions. They, while showing the ugliness and wickedness of sin, invite sinners to penance, forgiveness and holy peace"⁸.

⁸ Ibid. p. 133.

3. His spiritual profile

Fr. Bonal was an apostolic preacher of modern times, a man of austerity and prayer, co-founder with Mother Maria Rafols of an institute of charity.

His itinerant and apostolic preaching is testified by many documents of the time. "He went on his errand of love along many long paths and roads, riding on a wretched and feeble mount, poorly clad and so lean that he will move anyone to compassion"⁹. He collected alms for the Hospital, but for himself "he would kindly refuse the requests of charitable people, asking him to take rest in order to recover his strength"¹⁰. He moved on mission tours in a widespread area, preaching sermons and hearing confessions in the Archbishopric of Valencia and the Dioceses of Tortosa, Barbastro, Huesca, Jaca, Pamplona, Cuenca, Segorbe, Sigüenza, Albarrachin, Teruel, Palencia, Osma and others"¹¹. The admiring crowds that followed him were electrified by his presence and touched by the unctio of his words. His sermons were so eloquent that people crowded round him, eager to listen to his exhortations by means of which he used "to move the faithful to penance and to true peace, his sermons being concluded with universal weeping"¹². He was well armed "with extraordinary faculties granted by the Apostolic Nuntiature, of which institution he was a Theologian, consultor and synodal judge, to solve cases reserved to the Holy See, and also with powers to dispense in

⁹ From a letter of the parish priest of Tivenis. Hospital Archive. Quoted by Galindo, *op. cit.* p. 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Legal testimony of Augustine Sevil. *op. cit.*

¹² *Ibid.*

the realm of conscience from occult and invalidating impediments of marriage, simple and perpetual vows, of chastity, and irregularities reserved to the Tribunal of the Apostolic Nuntiature of Spain, always with the permission of the Ordinaries and their tacit or explicit consent"¹³.

After preaching "not seldom some penitents came, touched by the word of God, ready to examine their conscience and confess the gravity and enormity of their sins, hoping to find comfort and the necessary faculties in the preacher"¹⁴. We would like to know the itinerary followed in his apostolic journeys, but unfortunately there are many lacunae in the documents preserved. We can only surmise the missionary activity of this untiring apostle from the incomplete list of towns and villages he visited in one extraordinary tour he made in 1817 in the region of Low Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia. It would serve no purpose to pin point the names of towns and villages all over the geography of Spain. Let it be said only that that tour took him to twenty towns and villages covering a distance from first to last of about six hundred kilometres¹⁵. He passed through towns and villages dragging the multitudes along, making the true faith sprout and bringing forth fruits of repentance. His popularity was for him a cause of suffering and of anxiety. Alms were pouring and with them, he said, "We can think of building a new house for the insane"¹⁶.

"We are amazed", writes the secretary of the Bishop of Palencia, "at the spiritual harvest you made here

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Letters of Fr. Bonal. Galindo, *op. cit.* p. 134.

¹⁵ Galindo, *op. cit.* p. 114.

¹⁶ Testimony of Augustin Sevil, *op. cit.*

among all classes of society. Truly, we never saw the like. That sorrow in the souls was so general that it could proceed only from God who pours His graces in the souls through your instrumentality. Give thanks to the Almighty for this excellent vocation He has given you of tirelessly working for His divine glory"¹⁷.

The second feature of his spiritual profile was his austerity. His was a heroism without éclat, recognition or compensation. He suffered hunger, thirst, the icy weather and heat, loneliness and insults even from those who accompanied him, "ill-treating him with harsh manners and with calumnies and all kind of reproaches, ill-disposing the parish priests of the villages towards him"¹⁸. Day after day, most fanciful and absurd accusations were brought against him before the Honourable Sitiada.

In the long sufferings caused by the envy of his fellow mendicants, he never uttered a word of complaint, but rather "if per chance the Honourable Sitiads, which takes the place of God, judges that he is of no use to the service of the holy House, on the slightest indication he will go away from there, from the sweet company of the poor, as well as from their guardians whom he loves with all his heart and reveres with his whole soul, and for whose lives and increase of joys he shall remain always praying to God"¹⁹.

The third feature of his spiritual profile was the practice of prayer. His countenance suffused with peace and calmness, his fervour admirable in every respect

¹⁷ Letter to Fr. Bonal. Hospital Archive. Galindo, op. cit. p. 135.

¹⁸ From the letter of the parish priest of Tivenis, quoted above.

¹⁹ John Bonal to the Honourable Sitiada. Hospital Archive. Galindo, op. cit. p. 114.

and his impressive meekness speak eloquently of a deep union with God in the innermost recesses of his soul. The little booklet he wrote to serve as a blueprint to the Constitutions of the Congregation reveals the treasures of his prayer life. Prayer was his priestly ministry, especially during the endless hours he spent in the confessional box, wrestling not so much with sinners as with the merciful God, so as to grant mercy and forgiveness to all sinners, and struggling with the enemy of human nature who held captive so many Christian souls. "He sat in the confessional box and crowds would assail him for endless hours, till four or six o'clock in the evening"²⁰. Sometimes he would generously offer himself to sit there till the early hours of the following day, unmindful of his food and sleep.

To conclude the description of his spiritual profile we must add his title of co-founder of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity. The example of his life must have been the real inspiration for Mother Maria Rafols to found her Congregation. Father Bonal assisted her in all her steps, offered himself as guide and helper, father and friend. He wrote first and outline of the Constitutions. In the year 1824, after a long and laborious process the Constitutions were approved and the Congregation acquired canonical status. In 1826, the exact moment in which the Congregation was born to the Church, Mother Maria Rafols emerged as its first President.

Now Father John could announce with that other John, "he must increase, I must decrease." He could rest peacefully. His work had been solidly established, the helm of the boat was steered by another hand,

²⁰ Letters Sanclemente to the Sitiada, quoted by Galindo op. cit.

skillfull and experienced, even if not his own. He had longed for that work, not for the control of the work.

At the end of the first triennial mandate of Mother President, Father Bonal expired at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Salz, of dear memories to his heart, where a Crucifix, so tradition says, had spoken to him. This Crucifix is preserved in the Novitiate House of Zaragoza. Mother Tecla Canti and sister Magdalena Hecho hastened from Zaragoza to the side of Father Bonal, and arrived in time to receive his last exhortation to charity and devotion to the Eucharist, that first love of his childhood. The two sisters, who set out from Huesca no sooner than the news reached them, were not able to receive that last comfort. On the 19th of August 1829 Father Bonal placidly closed his eyes to this world to open them to the new light of eternity that was dawning to him. The sisters shedding untrained tears accompanied the body to the Hospital of Grace where he was first buried.

Such was the providential man in the life of Mother Rafols. She was now aware of which was her charism. She and her congregation would give to the Church a legion of souls bound to heroic deeds of charity, exactly like the deeds of Father John Bonal.

CHAPTER V:

"LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED" Mt 13, 31

1. The way to greatness

We know how the charism of Mother Rafols came to light. In the next chapter we shall see how that charism came to perfection in her and in her Congregation. But before this, in this chapter we must direct our attention to two other fundamental attitudes in the Christian soul if heroic charity is to yield its fruits. These attitudes are humility and poverty. Without them charity will become a counterfeit jewel, easily to end in self-love.

We shall presently observe how Mother Rafols lay in her Congregation the foundations of humility and poverty to preserve and develop the charism of heroic charity.

Humility. "is the most difficult of virtues, and the most difficult but also the most necessary form of humility is to bear humiliations well" (Meschler).

Sister President, aware of the need of such solid foundation for the Congregation, instructed and encouraged her daughters with words and example to a life of happy seclusion, forgetfulness of all earthly concerns, of sublimation of the most radical tendencies of our proud nature, without fears to frighten them or dislikes to paralyze them. The steps down to the valley of humility are well-defined in her life: formidable opposition within the Hospital to the establishment of the Sisterhood; then the deadly danger from without, the sieges of Zaragoza threatening to destroy, as it

actually did, the Hospital and together with it the Sisterhood. Later, the Francophile Sitiada, forbidding the growth and expansion of the Sisterhood, would encourage its extinction. Finally, there will be an internal crisis in the Sisterhood seeming to make the fragile boat of the nascent Institute sink.

The skilful hand of the Sister President, in spite of all these obstacles, or perhaps because of them, sank the foundations of the Sisterhood deep down on the bed-rock of solid humility.

The way of humility ended only with her life. More spectacular humiliations were in store for her: imprisonment, banishment and finally physical paralysis. Then from her bed of suffering and humiliation she will mount, like an arrow shot into the infinite space, to the heights and to the object of all her desires, the humble and Divine Heart of Jesus.

2. Sowing the tiny grain

Humility is also shown in the acceptance of daily and insignificant matters of trivial value in the eyes of this world. Humility loves to efface itself and enjoys the effects of contentment, peace with God and men, and favour with both. Such was the path trodden by the sisters in the origins of their Sisterhood and for many years to come. Let us follow their life through the documents.

"On the first day of January 1805 the Brothers and Sisters under the direction of a Brother or Father President, and of a Sister or Mother President respectively, began to exercise their charity towards the sick in this holy Hospital, and to this purpose they followed

the demands of a devout life. . . Very soon the advantages of their service were experienced by all, especially in the greater cleanliness of the wards, beds and utensils for the sick, in their kindness when dealing with them and with outsiders coming to visit them, and also in the manner in which the sick were comfortably lying on their beds. The spiritual good of the patients was secured by the influence of the Sisters. With devotion and resignation they disposed themselves to receive the Sacraments and to bear their sicknesses and discomforts"¹. The sisters worked uninterruptedly in an atmosphere of deep silence, the protection and safeguard of humility².

The daily tasks of the Hospital were a positive asset to cultivate unspectacular humility: cleanliness of wards, beds and specially the sick themselves. The sisters used to serve them in the most menial and repulsive works³. It was also "under their supervision, the distribution of broth among the sick of both sexes, who were in need of special diet. The sisters instructed those sick with scabies, and the unwedded mothers. They took charge of supplying oil to all the lights in the wards and the corridors, and of washing and tidying the sacristy linen and of the main kitchen"⁴. In the short intervals left to them they would "study phlebotomy under the guidance of the Assistant surgeon

¹ Book I of Entrances of Sisters, written by Rev. Narciso Oliva, confessor and Director of the Community. Novitiate Archive.

² Testimony of Sr. Teresa Domenech who knew Mother Rafols and the first Sisters. She died at a very advanced age in the Hospital of Grace.

³ Primitive Constitutions, Treatise I, art. VI (Novitiate Archive) ordered hair-cuttings and the daily cleaning of the bed-pans and tidying of beds.

⁴ Book I of Entrances of Sisters, op. cit.

of the House, with the permission of the Honourable regents. When they found themselves sufficiently prepared, they appeared for a public examination in a hall before the Honourable Sitiada. They passed their examination brilliantly and were entrusted with operations of that kind on persons of their own sex, which they performed later with great success⁵.

That life for all its unpretentious appearance, enraptures and delights us even today. The first to give the lead was the young superior, a model of religious observance. She prayed with the sisters, fasted like them, studied with them and appeared with them for the public examination⁶.

Her authority, protected with the truthfulness and sincerity of humility, was a help to the sisters, never a hindrance.

Their life, though displayed in the precincts of such a public and huge institution was "hidden with Christ in God." Daily they would rise at the break of dawn, "at four o'clock through the year" to praise God in their prayer. "The sister who spends the night in watch knocks at the door of the dormitory reciting in a loud voice: 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son, etc.' Straightaway they would recite three Our Fathers to the Most Holy Trinity, and other three in honour of the holy patrons St Joaquim and St Anne, followed by the recitation of the holy Rosary."⁷ After the Rosary the sisters shall go to the chapel quietly reciting the Te Deum or one of the Canticles Bene-

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ They were Maria Rafols, Tecla Cantí, Maria Rosa Cucchi, Raimunda Torrellas. See Calzasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. "Heroism and sanctity" p. 72.

⁷ Primitive Rules. Treat IV, Ch. 1 Novitiate Archive.

dicite omnia opera or the Magnificat till they arrive at the place. Once there they shall begin their meditation for the space of one hour"⁸.

At eleven a.m. they hid themselves again in the chapel and likewise at seven p.m. to continue in that holy exercise of prayer and to find rest from their weariness light in their doubts strength to their energy. Only by doing so, were they able to persevere in the duty of their daily work. Work is the duty imposed by the Creator on every creature and humility is the acceptance of our createdness and nothingness in the eyes of God, "useless servants who have done what was expected." This is humility without a flaw. This is the genial gesture of a creature as a creature.

In the midst of the taxing, manifold and painful tasks, and of the hostility shown by maids and workers of the Hospital who were putting up obstacles to their selfless activities, the sisters were comforted with the smile of their good mother as with the light and the warmth of the sun. She moved about irradiating the warmth of her motherly love, the light of her suggestions and guidance, and support in discouragement and failure.

Notwithstanding the rude and constant opposition from many quarters, humility transformed everything and secured its effects of peace, order, restraint and well-being.

"In the evening Mother Rafols gathered the younger sisters, entertaining them with conferences and spiritual conversations, warning them of the possible

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

dangers they might encounter"¹⁰. Those meetings were very helpful to bring about unity of hearts and minds. Thus she led them along paths divine, in the midst of their busy lives, keeping them safe from the pitfalls of routine in the exercise of their heroic mission. The subject of her instructions was provided by the rule which urged her "in her office of elder Sister or President, to teach her sisters with words and deeds".¹¹

The humility of Christ was to be their model, "sisters shall have in their daily tasks special care to keep themselves in God's presence. While cleaning the bedpans and doing other menial services sisters shall have in mind that the Son of God, in order to cleanse us from our sins became man and lived in great humility..." "When they serve them breakfast, they shall consider that they are feeding Jesus, exhausted from His long journeys during His most holy life, and they shall pray to Him, 'my Jesus, fill me with your gifts and the gifts of your Holy Spirit, extinguish in me the thirst for earthly goods, and grant me an insatiable thirst of the heavenly goods...' When they give the sick water to drink, they shall consider Jesus' thirst on the Cross, and shall say, 'My Jesus, grant me real thirst, like your own, for the salvation of souls...'

"When they feed the sick, they shall recollect the great favour granted to Martha of serving Jesus as a guest in her house, and shall say, 'Give me, my God, grace to unite active and contemplative life...'

"When they give them their supper, they shall consider Jesus in the Cenacle and beseech Him, saying, 'My

¹⁰ Ordinary Process in Zaragoza, Witness III.

¹¹ Primitive Rules, Treat. 1, ch. 6.

Jesus, grant me fervent desires to receive you with great humility and devotion, and the gift of perseverance to possess you for all eternity...' While watching, and when helping those in agony, they shall say, 'My Jesus, assist me and protect me in my agony and at the moment of my death...'

"Sisters are advised and requested to have these or similar considerations, in all their works, for they will become works of immense value in the presence of God."¹²

Shielded with that humility the young superior could enter into the different departments of the huge Hospital, correct abuses, solve the difficulties of the moment, establish the Congregation on a solid basis, instruct her religious family, and evade the obstacles which the ill-will of the workers and menials were constantly and stubbornly raising against the progress and expansion of the Sisterhood. She would walk among these hardships with all calmness and composure, with full enthusiasm and most prudent caution straight to the aim of her life: the good of the poor of Christ.

3. Going underground

That clandestine war, which eventually broke up the Brotherhood, brought to light the singular talent, tactfulness and dexterity, in a word, the extraordinary virtue the sisters showed in those difficult circumstances. They had been strengthened by the courage of their remarkable superior. The Brothers faltered and succumbed, so the workers of the Hospital happy in their success, attempted also to do away with the Sisterhood.

¹² Ibid. Treat. IV, ch. 2, Novitiate Archive.

In their infamous determination against the unwanted rivals they did succeed in convincing some of the members of the Honourable Sitiada, among whom was a certain Senor Cistue, to discuss in one of the meetings the dismissal of the nascent Brotherhood. The Count of Sastago took up the defence of the Brothers. He brought the case to the Royal House in a magnificent defence, in which appear the numberless cases of arrogance the men of God had to bear, and presented other documents in which he answered the charges formulated against them by his fellow regents.

"It is absolutely certain", says he in one of the documents, "that many Brothers have left the Hospital, and to this Senor Cistue would agree. True, but the real reason why several Brothers have gone, and in particular Brothers Rocamora and his companion Brother Joseph, was because they were the first to experience the attacks against them. They were the persons mainly responsible for the government of the Brotherhood, they had to handle all cases against them, specially the frequent thefts, the propaganda made against them among the sick, as a result of which the Brothers were lacking even the necessary clothes. This happened so many times that it became necessary to let the Brothers go, so as not to force them to experience such shameful behaviour and such annoyances as they had to suffer. Thus to escape from discouragement and boredom, as it was the case with many of them, they eventually left"¹³.

The Sisters had to undergo the same annoyance

¹³ Hospital of Zaragoza, 1807. There are copies of these important documents in the Novitiate Archive.

and identical sufferings. But not a single branch from the slowly growing and well-rooted tree of the Sisterhood was torn away. They went underground. The malice and craftiness of their adversaries helped only to increase the quality of their humility and forbearance, and found themselves surrounded with that sympathy which is the privilege of those who are persecuted and compels the approval of the enemies themselves.

The Count of Sastago, in his reply to Senor Cistue, continues: "Senor Cistue makes a brief eulogy of the Sisters when he acknowledges that the Sisterhood should not meet with the same fate as the Brotherhood for, he says, *until now* they have brought about good results, and they can continue to bring them about in the future. I, for my part, say that they are inimitable, nay more, I suggest that within their own field, and with submission to the Sitiada, Mother President should order things without subjection to the main infirmarian, because we read in the Royal Orders that once upon a time there did exist the office of matron, or woman major infirmarian. If this office was suppressed, it might have been because she was of such a kind as the mothers we used to have before". This magnificent testimony of an illustrious and noble man of Aragon in praise of the Sisterhood struck by the marvellous deeds of charity he had before his eyes, will be validated with the affirmation of their conduct during the years to follow.

The heroic superior, descending to the lowest level of humility, allowed all tempests to pass over her head, and found the greatest defence against the continuous and frightening attacks in the exercise of the most

perfect humility, encouraging her daughters to the constant practice of it.

4. True riches

A life of poverty summarizes the first 50 years of the life of the Congregation. The most famous Hospital of Spain because of the greatness of its buildings, the soundest finances and the number of inmates came during the sieges of 1807 to a disastrous end, two years only after the birth of the Congregation. God wanted that Congregation to be marked with the sign of poverty from its cradle, as He had wanted the life of the Incarnated Word to be marked with the same sign right from its inception.

In 1804 the annual income was above one million reals, and the number of its inmates during a year oscillated between six and eight thousand. In years of epidemic the number will go up to even 12,000. After the sieges the influx of inmates, over 4,000, exhausted the finances. Gradually lands and other immovable properties were liquidated, without ever being able to get rid of debts and claimants. Sources of income were abolished by more liberal laws.

Poverty and misery became the faithful companions of the Sisterhood during this period. In 1843 and again in 1845, under the weight of crushing debts, and with 19 reals in cash, the regents contemplated the idea of closing down the institution.

Inspired by God Sister Maria Rafols established her Sisterhood on another firm column to support the whole edifice of the nascent Sisterhood, that is the strictest poverty. Poverty was to be exercised specially in un-

interrupted work, done purely for God's love, without any other compensation, and transformed into prayer by the uplifting power of pure intentions.

Their life was hard in those heroic beginnings. According to the agreements sanctioned by the Sitiada before their arrival, the sisters were to be given as food the same ration assigned to other priests working in the House. "They did gradually reduce this amount, for they found that a more moderate ration was sufficient for their maintenance, and so they gave to the poor what was over and above"¹⁴.

The fervent superior on her part, "in the spirit of mortification, several times a week used to take vegetables without oil or any other seasoning. Her temperance in meals was very remarkable"¹⁵.

To recover from the work of the day, the sisters slept the few hours allowed to them by the Rule, often interrupted by the watches in the wards, on very poor beds, which were more conducive to satisfy their longing for penance and mortification than to bring them comfort.

"In our recreations there was no other subject of conversation than the virtues of the servant of God. We were living an intense family life, and a life of poverty"¹⁶.

¹⁴ Register of accounts, April 25th, 1816.

¹⁵ Testimony of Sister Pabla Vives who knew Mother Rafols and was well acquainted with her. She belonged to the Community of Huesca where she died.

¹⁶ Testimony of Mother Josefa Badenas from the convent of St. Catherine of Zaragoza to the diocesan curia, February 11th 1928. Mother Josefa had belonged to the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, and had remained in it from the day she took the habit, September 1863, till August 17th, 1874, when she joined the cloister convent of St. Catherine. A copy of her testimony is preserved in the Novitiate Archive.

The sisters had no proper novitiate house or infirmary in their convent. Their lodgings were a cloister where the cells were located, one after the other, and at the end, there was a small chapel. At that time meals were prepared by the community in the kitchen of the ward of the Pillar. Above this poor room there was a store-room for grain, in which Mother Dolores Marin and three novices used to sleep. Everything was so poor that a professed sister once told Mother Magdalena Hecho, then superior, "Mother, could we buy some fine, roundish chair, like the ones in the room of Doña Maria?" Mother Magdalena answered, "we must respect the holy poverty that Mother Foundress left to us as an inheritance. I will change nothing".

Mother Josefa Badenas (see note 16 in this chapter) testifies, "I have a very vivid remembrance and as it were imprinted on my soul the picture of many objects which we were told to have belonged to Mother Rafols, or to be of her time. I have never forgotten them. In the dining-room there were four small and poor tables with legs x-shaped, a rather large picture of the last Supper with glass and frame of oak wood. The seats were of plaster."

"In her cell Mother Rafols had a small blue iron bed, without any decorations, very simple, with four cones like pine-cones made of golden metal. There was a small table covered with a black oil-cloth stamped with flowers, it had a drawer with a golden handle. On the table there was a Crucifix with an image of Our Lady of the Pillar at the foot. She brought it with her when she came to found the Congregation. A large chair with a high back painted brown like the tables. There was also a wash-stand painted blue,

like the bed, basin and jug with a blue band and the initials H.G. (Hospital of Grace). The coverlet of the bed was of linen intertwined with leaves on a dark brown surface.

"All these objects were brought to me to see whether I could recognize them. I was pleased to be able to do so, and I kissed them, and other religious women of this convent kissed them too. I can testify, therefore, for information, edification and solace of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, that all the said objects, whose detailed figures I kept in my mind, and which had been brought in my presence to see whether I could recognize them, are the same ones which were in my time in the holy Hospital, and which the senior sisters affirmed, since they had seen them, that they were for the personal use of the servant of God"¹⁷.

Rightly, the kind old sister could say, "for the edification and solace of the Sisters of Charity," and we can add, and of the pious visitor who even now is overpowered with reverence and devotion when he enters the little cell where the servant of God died and where we can see all these souvenirs, a testimony of her poverty and simplicity.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ As a surprising contrast and as a revelation of another aspect of her splendid soul, we can say that Mother Rafols did not hesitate to be even lavish as regards things concerning the cult of God and of His saints. Mother Josefa Badenas acknowledges and describes these objects. They were: "A statue of St Aloysius, still existing in the parlour. A crib kept in a cupboard of the Hospital. A shell for holy-water with the picture of the Infant Jesus, St Joseph and St John the Baptist. Cruets of glass on a golden metal plate. Altar cards with a golden frame. A tabernacle. A leather sofa with green silken coverings with tassels. A small ciborium to contain 25 hosts. A lampstand of white metal, at the foot of which there is a glass of red crystal, and in front a heart with flames to soften its light. "This lamp was very much venerated by the sisters, for the servant of God had it many times in her hands when years later she held the office of sacristan."

She had always been a lover of austerity and poverty in the outfit of her daughters, and in the furniture of the community. Yet, she was a lover of splendour and magnificence in the things belonging to the cult, and in the decorations of Churches, since those things belonged to the house of the Lord. It was delightful to see the good Mother, saddened by the frequent misunderstandings, the victim of mean spies, and snared everywhere with malicious nets from which she could escape only miraculously, encircled by her daughters in the short intervals of intimacy, teaching them "to make flowers, belts, sashes and ribbons for the amices, for she knew how to make them beautifully. She was very skillful at everything"¹⁹.

"The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit, says the Lord..." With this quotation with which the chapter on poverty begins in the Constitutions of 1805, we wish to end this chapter.²⁰

Mother Rafols while constructing the solid foundations of the Congregation made it rest on the two pillars of humility and poverty, so that the genuine nature of our charism may be preserved, and the Sisters may aim always at more heroic charity in the service of the poor. With her fine spiritual perception she cannot but have clearly seen that love of things and love of self could destroy heroism in charity, and thus charity might drift into inauthenticity.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Book of Entrances of the Sisters of Huesca, 1807. Book I. Novitiate Archive.

"HIS WAY IS IN THE WIRLWIND
AND STORM" Nah 1, 3

Great events of human history have changed the genius of races and thrown the psychology of peoples out of balance for subsequent generations. On the contrary, other events have shaped nations and societies and left an imprint in the individuals who carry on in them and their posterity the consequences of those happenings. The people of Israel, after the destruction of Jerusalem and their banishment to Babylon changed their self-sufficiency and confidence in themselves and experienced for the first time the sense of individual guilt and the reality of sin, of which they seemed not to have been until then fully aware. The scriptures written during and after the exile bear witness to the psychological and social change in the people of Israel. Likewise, the Greeks who achieved great feats in the annals of history and culture and developed a refinement of soul unsurpassed by any other people during the times of Pericles, lost after the reversals in war the balance of the spirit and that human equilibrium apparent in the classical period, never to regain it.

Mother Rafols and her Congregation carried on in its Constitutions and life the imprint of the Sieges of Zaragoza. Charity, the object and aim of the Congregation became by practice, and by power of the tragic events of history, heroic charity. Heroism was in the atmosphere of the city of Zaragoza, in her General, in the army, in the citizens, all over the country at the appearance of the invader. And so the Congregation

born three years before received the baptism of blood and was for ever marked with the seal of heroism which runs now through the veins of its members, and is symbolized in the fourth vow of charity which is inclusive of heroic deeds.

1. The Congregation receives its first Communion

The sieges of Zaragoza like the seige of Gerona too, are one of the most glorious pages of the History of Spain. Zaragoza had been surrounded by the troops of Napoleon. The people of Zaragoza revealed the indomitable resistance of a dignified people who preferred fight, fire, hunger, epidemics, even death rather than allow the motherland to be overrun by an invader, rights to be disregarded, religion trodden under feet, homes threatened and time-honoured institutions razed to the ground.

When the troops of Napoleon came to the gates of Zaragoza the spirit of the citizens had risen to the highest pitch. The spark of indignation which was produced in the capital, Madrid, on May 2nd 1808 was extinguished by the brutal repression of Murat. Yet, the fire had already spread all over the breadth and length of Spain and turned into a conflagration. Napoleon, mindful of his talent and resources, had never thought Spain to become a serious danger, or an enemy to be reckoned with. This error, difficult to excuse, exceedingly harmed him.

The war of independence showed that there were in Spain vast energies in reserve and these latent powers were generated by a powerful ideological as well as

social organization of simple and unsophisticated people who were led exclusively by their religious convictions¹. Religion gave adamant courage, and it was strengthened by an unshakeable faith in divine protection, since they were fighting for a just cause.

Zaragoza was fervent with enthusiasm, for in this city, chosen by the Virgin Mary, there had been signs and prodigies which confirmed people in their faith and trust. "On May 17th, at about 12 noon, some people affirmed that they had seen on the sky a white palm with a crown. It passed over the dome of the holy Chapel of Our Lady of the Pillar, where it stood still for some minutes. At the sight of this great and marvelous novelty, all began to invoke Our Lady, and shout in a loud voice, 'miracle, miracle!' At the same time they noticed that there was another palm-leaf with a crown inside the holy Chapel. There the rejoicing and shouting was still greater, and people began to invoke Our Lady's powerful patronage.

"Many witnesses testified to these events with an oath in court, and though I did not see it, for I was not there at that time, yet I witnessed the large crowd which from that moment till after eleven p.m. flooded into the holy Chapel, and heard the manifestation with which they signified their gratitude to our Patroness. Moreover, the fact seems to have been so certain that some preachers did not hesitate to commemorate it in their sermons and exhortations as something which could not be questioned"².

This happened less than a month before the ordeal.

¹ History of Spain, published by Institute Gallach. Vol. V.

² Unpublished manuscript of Faustino Gasamayor, quoted by M. Pano, in "La Cordesa de Bureta" Ch. 8, p. 102.

All the strata of society, convinced of a sure victory by the singular event and portent made themselves ready for battle against the invading troops. They were already marching towards them. No more eloquent sign of the enthusiasm was shown in those moments than the generous and patriotic subscription raised by the people, both civilians and religious, whose contributions were published daily in the Gazette of Zaragoza³.

The invading army led by General Lefebvre left Pamplona on June 16th 1808. On the 8th the forces of the Marquis of Lazan were defeated in Tudela, and on the 15th the French troops arrived before the walls of Zaragoza. This very day the Spanish troops repelled the attack at the three gates: Carmen, Portillo and St Engracia. "Six thousand French soldiers were halted, and 700 killed, 30 army men were made prisoners, six artillery guns, six flags and a great number of rifles, horses and ammunitions were recovered"⁴.

Who directed this magnificent defense? A common belief, a spirit of fortitude, a feeling of solidarity and a faith that could move mountains in the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar, the rallying-point and inspiration of the people of Aragon⁵.

³ The secular and regular clergy figure at the top of the list. The chapter of Canons of Zaragoza contributed 30,000 silver coins, that of Huesca 20,000, of Jaca 5,000, of Barbastro 2,650, and of Roda 1,500. The great monasteries did not lag behind: Montearagon 5000, the Cartusian monastery of the Immaculate Conception 4,000, the monastery of Piedra, Rueda, Veruela, Santa Fe 3,000 each, Sijena 2,000, and other convents about 1,000 each (Pano, *op.cit.* Ch. 13, p. 134).

⁴ Pano, *op. cit.* Ch. 11, p. 132.

⁵ *Ibid.* Ch. 12, p. 138.

It was on this day of light and patriotism that a new period opened for the small Sisterhood of Charity. We could well say that the Sisterhood received then its First Communion. If Communion is a sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ, the Sisters shared in the passion of the mystical Body, in the blood and agony of the living Jesus. Several Sisters lay down their lives after that First Communion, victims of heroic charity.

The humble superior had not until now attracted the attention of the outside world. Nobody would have suspected, perhaps not even herself, the heroic nature of the charity she was about to display. Heroism is not improvised. Maria Rafols from her early years had been developing that heroic charity, going through all the degrees of a gradual growth. "Nihil repente fit summum" says a Latin adage, nothing becomes great in the twinkling of an eye. Maria Rafols had first shown by entering the cloister heroic detachment from people, from those of her relations taken away by sickness and death, from her dear ones and lovely surroundings. She had shown heroic patience and poverty, submission and obedience in the insurmountable difficulties coming from regents, patients, and workers, who had made the Brotherhood sink. She emerged from them stronger. She had increased her charity, attending to the needs of thousands in those sombre wards and corridors, deprived of light and fresh air, in an atmosphere of gloom and hopelessness.

"In the exercise of charity the tenderness of her heart was such that even the sick, unbelievers included, and immoral people too, used to tell other sisters that their superior captivated their hearts, and that when she was assisting them they thought she was their own

mother"⁹. In those four years she spent in the Hospital she had trained her daughters, twenty-one by now, in the same ways of charity. Their charity, like Christ's, was to be exercised in comforting people, restoring health to the sick, healing their wounds, offering their hands perfumed with the odour of charity, and bringing peace and joy everywhere.

Charity cannot be kept idle or shut within narrow limits. Charity is ever expanding and leading to more heroic deeds. Only an opportunity must offer itself, and the opportunity had now arrived. The sieges of Zaragoza will provide them with many tragic situations, with many examples of valour to be imitated, with occasions to risk their own lives, and with the final catastrophe of the Hospital where they were giving their lives. That heroism, in that historical moment, left an imprint on the Congregation.

Mother Maria did not stop her exercise of charity at the end of the day. "By day and by night, interrupting her sleep, she would go making her round of visits to the sick, and relieving the sisters who had night-watch⁷, taking every possible opportunity to teach her daughters not so much with words but with the outpouring of her heart which went out to the sick. Whatever she taught in her instructions held "every Thursday, or latest every fortnight," as the Constitutions prescribed⁸, had been more vividly depicted earlier before their eyes with the living lessons of her active charity. She could, then, freely "remark whatever improvements

⁶ Ordinary Process. Italian Translation, Catalogue of Witness. Witness III, no. 8, pp. 44-45.

⁷ Ibid. Witness VII, no. 11, p. 63.

⁸ Constitutions. Treat. IV, Ch. 3.

might have been desirable concerning the better service of the sick."

She was now in a position to inspire the sisters onwards to the ascent, urging them on to bravery, and unknowingly preparing them for martyrdom. Let the hours of hunger, misery, exhaustion, pain strike quickly! Let the endless days of continual assistance to the sick and the wounded come fast! The sisters are all ready to give up their lives and their bodies piecemeal.

General Palafox, the heroic defender of Zaragoza, helped by the Governor Don Calvo de Rozas, had begun to organize the defence entrusting the works of fortification to the famous engineer Antonio Sangenis. On June 26th, the eleventh day after the siege had begun, civilians were set up to guard the gates of the city. They gathered in the Carmen square, and took the oath of defending the city till death. So well did they fulfil the oath that when the walls cracked and a breach was open and the enemies entered, they met with an insurmountable parapet in the chests of the citizens of Zaragoza. They had thought that to storm the city it was sufficient to throw themselves and make an assault through the open breach. They never thought that Zaragoza had walls and bodies to guard its treasures.

Years later, Napoleon in the solitude of the island of St. Helena, calling to mind that unexpected heroism which lasted throughout this war, exclaimed, "Spain has behaved as a man of honour"⁹.

⁹ History of Spain. Ballesteros, Vol. VII.

2. Heroic deeds

Commandant Falco, by withdrawing from Torrero and heading towards the city, defected, and allowed the French General Lefebvre to get hold of a very strategic point. On the 25th General Verdier arrived in the camp and being an officer senior to Lefebvre took over the leadership of the enemies' forces.

Wounded soldiers began to be brought to the Hospital. The number of victims soon rose to alarming numbers. On the 30th the bombardment began from Torrero. Never had such a collective holocaust been seen before. No sacrifice was spared, no possessions, no blood, no life. In their patriotic fervour they cut down fruit and olive trees which obstructed the way of their defence. "The first projectile was shot, crossed over the city and fell into the river Ebro"¹⁰. The bombardment continued till three o'clock in the morning of the 2nd. of July. One thousand four hundred bombs and grenades were counted by the watchmen of New Tower. A few hours later, Verdier thought the time had come for the assault. The battle was bloody. The defence of the Sancho Gate was unforgettable, that of Portillo heroic. On this day Agustina de Aragon obtained the glory of heroine which was attached to her name in the History of Spain. The fire-line was now reaching the convent of St Joseph. The French army was repelled with heavy losses. Verdier ordered his men to withdraw.¹¹

The inmates of the Hospital passed hours of terrible anxiety. The inflow of wounded people was constant.

¹⁰ Pano, *op. cit.* Ch. 12, p. 139

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 139-44.

There was no time for meals, no time to sleep. They experienced the calamity of war in all its grim reality.

In this first siege Mother Rafols, with all her presence of mind, stood out performing an admirable feat that revealed her character and proved the quality of her dedication. She came to know that some Spanish prisoners had been sentenced to death. She did not hesitate for a moment. In the company of another sister and after a narrow escape from death, "she arrived in the enemy's camp and presented herself before the French General. He yielded to her requests and granted remission of the death penalty in favour of the one who was already at the point of being executed"¹². The same grace was granted to four others.

On July 17th the brave and heroic defenders repelled the assault at the Carmen Gate. Danger and anxiety grew day by day, but all the time the protection of the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar was experienced in all her loving and motherly love. A few days later, on July 23rd, Fray Benito de los Dolores wrote to the father of the regent Don Pedro M. Ric, "My revered Master and Lord, numberless are the extraordinary favours we are experiencing every day through the protection of Our Lady of the Pillar. . . . Yesterday, on St Magdalene's day, at four o'clock a.m. the French army shot into the city some grenades, without however obtaining what they desired, namely to destroy the people of the neighbourhood. The only untoward event we have come to know on that occasion was that one shell badly hurt a poor calzed Augustinian Friar who was lying in bed in his own monastery. Another shell fell in the General Hospital in one of the patients ward.

¹² Ordinary Process. Witness III, no. 8, pp. 44-45.

But no harm was caused to any of the sick who were amazed and gave thanks to God¹³.

Regent Ric himself added in a letter to his father, "there were also some skirmishes at the Portillo Gate, and the French had to flee hurriedly, but later there was heavy shelling on our batteries, however we suffered no casualty"¹⁴.

3. The fate of the Hospital of Grace

The bombardment became heavier on July 31st and during the 1st and 2nd of August, "the projectiles were falling everywhere. Seven batteries and sixty artillery units of guns were carrying death every where. From the first moment it became clear that the enemy's target was the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. On the third day the inmates had to vacate the Hospital and transfer all the suffering population to the Town House of the city and to the High Court"¹⁵. In the midst of the anxieties of that agonizing operation, the calmness, courage and amazing charity of the sisters called the attention, admiration, sympathy and respect of the tried citizens of Zaragoza. They were moving among the whistling bullets falling everywhere like hailstones. In such critical situation "they did not abandon their sick, but braved all dangers while transferring the patients and carrying away the belongings which could be saved from the conflagration in the Hospital. They continued to serve them in spite of the lack of all things and helpers to attend to them"¹⁶.

¹³ Pano, *op.cit.*, p. 149 foll.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 15, p. 161.

¹⁶ Book I of Entrances of Sisters, manuscript of Fr. Narciso Olivas, director of the community. Novitiate Archive.

They were not alone in those tragic hours. They were one with the people of all classes of society of both sexes. Some obstructed the attack of the invader to help the sisters, others hastened to help those heroines of charity in their magnanimous and exhausting task.

The 4th of August dawned, the fateful date for the time-honoured institution. After a frightful display of artillery that caused the death of all the defenders stationed at St Engracia Gate, the enemies opened two breaches in the walls, and through them the hated French army poured into the city, assuming that it was already conquered. The French General offered peace and capitulation. General Palafox answered, "War and the sword!" They arrived in the Coso and stormed the convent of St Francis and the General Hospital where terrible scenes of horror and pain were seen. "The poor insane, in those moments of confusion, run to and fro, some of them entering the enemy's camp. Mother Rafols fearing for their lives, took another bold step by going out in their search. Under heavy shooting she went up to the enemy's camp. No sooner did the insane see the sisters, and specially Mother Rafols, than they recognized them, followed them as meek lambs, and the sisters brought them home with much labour and danger since the shelling was every time heavier and the French were closely advancing towards the city"¹⁷.

Soldiers and civilians, full of terror, were running away towards the Arrabal. In such a critical situation Antonio de Torres halted in the Cathedral square another group of soldiers and civilians who were rushing panic-stricken towards the stone-bridge. He

¹⁷ Apostolic Process. Testimony of Mother Josefa Badenas.

addressed a harangue to them, made them react as brave men, and together with the crowd proceeded along the crossing streets in the direction of the Coso. They mercilessly slaughtered many soldiers who were indulging in looting and arson. They paralyzed their activities and by shooting and stabbing with bayonets shut them up in the buildings of the Hospital and of St Francis¹⁸.

According to the Chronicles of the sieges, "Zaragoza looked like an erupting volcano with all the thunder, convulsions and agitations of such eruptions. Some were battling in their houses, others in the streets, in some places they were making their way forward, in others backward. No discipline, no battle formation, no tactics. Each one had to do battle wherever it was needed. Losses from both sides were very many".

It was a night of sorrow and anxieties for the poor sisters who were unable to offer those victims the comfort of their ardent charity. Everything had been left behind in the Hospital, medicines, bandages, linen, beds.

The French General Verdier was wounded and General Lefebre was again in command. On August 5th hopes revived with the coming of a new dawn and with the arrival of fresh troops. New arrivals continued during the following days and hope returned to the hearts of the citizens, for together with the reinforcements, the rumor spread of the victory of Bailen, where famous lancers knocked down with their weapons the French infantry who for the first time in their lives witnessed the bravery and agility of those

centaurs who speared the enemies as if they were brave bulls¹⁹.

The sufferings of the sisters did not diminish but were rather on the increase as the days went on. The sick were lying on the ground, the sisters could give them only some straw sacks, yet there was scarcity even of straw. Mother Rafols went from house to house, from hospital to hospital carrying in her soul the weight of all those misfortunes with no other help than the charity of the citizens she was imploring²⁰. She had to leave behind many of her sisters, the greatest number of them being sick due to fatigue, frights and ill-treatment. On August 13th the besieging army received orders to withdraw, and on the 14th began to march towards Navarre. A French historian informs us that the troops were marching with heavy hearts, showing in their faces the greatest sadness for having been humbled to the extreme and forced to go back before soldiers whom they reckoned as little experienced²¹.

"Thanks to God and to the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar", writes the regent Senor Ric to his father on August 17th, "we have been liberated from the French army. They took to flight on Saturday at midnight, leaving behind the memory of their fury for a hundred years to come. They burnt down the Hospital, St Francis, St Didacus. Everything has been razed to the ground, all is in shambles, squalid. The fields are covered with filth, rags, bullets, shells, grenades, hides, etc."²¹.

¹⁹ History of Spain. Ballesteros. Vol. VII.

²⁰ These begging tours of the sisters are mentioned in the process of Beatification, in the Acts of the Sistiada, in the information of official beneficent institutions, and in the constant tradition of the institute.

²¹ Pano, op.cit. p. 154.

¹⁸ Biographies of Jeronimo and Antonio Torres. p. 60-61

The damage caused to the Hospital was irreparable. On August 4th the huge building fell into the power of the enemy, and before they left the city was set on fire. In this manner the valuable and abundant medical stores, utensils, bed-linen, pillows, mattresses, heaps of grain, stock of wine and oil and large flocks of sheep perished. The total loss amounted to 25 millions of reals²². The only material that was saved was the linen sent out for washing, and this was the only thing that could be offered to the sick. From that day on their food was to be begged for day after day. The poor sick had to suffer many discomforts and be deprived of clothes and of everything else. The sudden transfer did not allow more provisions to be taken and every one else in the neighbourhood could not offer any help since they were too busy with themselves and the victims of panic. No words can describe the sufferings of the sick and wounded during the defence of the city or the destitution in which they lived for days on end²³.

The sisters shared in this painful penury. They completely lost the few belongings they had. Only the few clothes sent for washing were recovered. They had no headdress to change, for the few that came from the laundry, in the excess of their charity, were torn and made to serve as bandages to wrap the limbs of the wounded²⁴. "Such were the labours and calamities experienced by the sisters on account of the war, that only with God's help could they overcome them"²⁵.

²² A former silver coin of Spain.

²³ Pano, *op.cit.* Ch. 15, p. 161 foll.

²⁴ Tradition handed down in the community.

²⁵ Register of Sitiada, from April 22nd 1808 to September 2nd 1811, Book I. Hospital Archive.

On August 16th, General Palafox sent an order to the Sitiada to the effect, "that knowing the discomforts of the sick, both soldiers and civilians, in the hospitals provisionally set up after the destruction of the General Hospital, we have come to order that as soon as possible all the sick, and the different departments be transferred to the Royal Hospice"²⁶.

Without respite the second transfer was immediately started. Though it was not so dangerous and spectacular as the first had been, however it was equally painful, and it had to be done to set things in order in the new location without in the least interrupting the tasks and duties of every day. Sisters were quickly moving from the Hospital wards to the gates of the Church, from there to the streets and squares on errands of charity, begging for their poor sick. The brief remarks in the Registers of Sitiadas show, for all their laconism and coldness, the difficulties of the situation. "Fifty blankets were taken in loan for the sick officers. Beds were asked in charity from different communities." "The chief cook submitted two written petitions in which he expressed the need of supplies. They could not be purchased for lack of money"²⁷. "The administrator informs of the lack of supplies and money to procure them; there is no one who wants to give loans"²⁸.

When all doors remained shut, one heart only remained open to the needs of every one during this terrible calamity. The heart of Mother Rafols poured out all the treasures of its zeal and all the devices it

²⁶ Sitiada of August 22nd, I Book of Sitiadas. Hospital Archive.

²⁷ Sitiada, August 15th.

²⁸ Register of Sitiadas, Book I. Hospital Archive.

could think of. In the Sitiada of November 16th reference is made to the rations the sisters had left in favour of the sick. In other Sitiadas of the following years it is recorded that the sisters gave up completely the right to their rations during the years 1808 and 1809. Besides this, "Mother Rafols often went out to beg in the city, so that she might attend to the needs of the poor sick by collecting bread, the cheapest kind of sardines available, dry and already yellowish, which however in that scarcity were considered a dainty"²⁹.

4. The sisters' holocaust

Our admiration of Mother Rafols increases when we come to know that during those days the energetic superior was moving here and there, spending her time and alms and all the treasures of her heart. She was all the time confronted in her agonizing spirit with the frightful vision of her daughters who, emulating the deeds of her admirable Mother, were succumbing to exhaustion and hunger, real victims of charity. "Last Sunday we buried sister Maria Teresa, one of the young sisters, and there are six more seriously ill"³⁰. In point of fact, nine sisters died in the year 1808, and three more in the following year. The Sisterhood had been wounded and badly depleted, but its spirit had been strengthened and confirmed with the charismatic gift of heroic charity. Permission was asked and obtained from the Sitiada on November 12th to accept six other sisters. Father Bonal went to

²⁹ Testimony of Mother Josefa Badenas in the Process of Beatification, referring to the narratives of Mother Manuela Manzano.

³⁰ In a letter of Majordomo Fausto Saenz to the Count of Sastago, dated November 14th 1808. Quoted by Father Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op. cit.* p. 101.

search them in Catalonia. The plan did not materialize for the time being, for on November 23rd the unfortunate battle of Tudela took place and the advance of the enemy's army, inundating the plains of Navarre along the banks of the river Ebro, like an overflowing river, brought panic to people in the country side and in the cities.

The diminished group of sisters, gathered new courage and strength from the Heart of Jesus. They were little more than skeletons or corpses, unable even to stand on their feet. But in spite of this and of the imminent attack, they accomplished such prodigies of charity that they can rightly be numbered among the great benefactors of humanity. The wonder and admiration of eye-witnesses and the contemporary documents substantiate the truth of this statement.

5. Attack resumed

General Moncey, leading his troops of veterans, reached the gates of Zaragoza on December 16th. General Palafox took refuge within the city with some 30,000 men³¹. A new Calvary was about to begin, surpassing in horror the previous one. The untold sufferings undergone by the people of Aragon in their resistance can be compared with the most brilliant and heroic feats in the History of any country. On December 20th the siege was completed. Already "in the last days of 1808 public health had been deteriorating. The unburied corpses lying about the ruins of the first siege, the excess of an adventitious population of over 30,000 people, the cold nights and lack of habitual

³¹ History of Spain, published by Institute Gallach. Vol. V by Federico Camp.

rest, the scanty and unpalatable food made the troops, specially those from Valencia and Murcia fall sick. In the Hospital of the Hospice during the last days of December there were well over 6,000 sick³³.

6. Death but not surrender

General Moncey was replaced by General Junot, Duke of Abrantos, who in turn was succeeded by Marshal Lannes, Duke of Montebello. "After January 10th, the frequency of the bombardments against the unconquerable city increased. Houses, Churches, Convents, everything were left in ruins. On the 24th surrender was suggested to General Palafox. He proudly answered: "I know not how to capitulate, I know not how to surrender. We might speak of it after my death"³³.

Epidemic was spreading rapidly among many people, "nearly 350 victims fell dead every day, 400 were daily taken to the Hospital and those who were admitted there were lacking medicines and food. A hen was sold for 5 pounds."³⁴

In the straitened circumstances, which no words can express, says Mother Josefa Badenas, "Mother Rafols with two other sisters, one was called Tecla Canti, the other I think was called Julliana, went through many dangers and threats from the advanced troops, to the French camp. After great difficulties and insults they succeeded in arriving in the presence of the French General. In her native Catalonian language Mocher Rafola explained to him the destitu-

tion and misery of the holy Hospital on account of the scarcity of means and victuals. With such humility and persuasiveness she spoke to the General that he granted her requests and gave her victuals and besides a safe-conduct, (which I myself saw kept in a cupboard of the holy Hospital, it was shown to me by Mother Martina Balaguer), so that Mother Rafols and the sisters could continue to collect pieces of bread and meat left over by the French army"³⁵.

She came down the hillock of Torrero beaming with joy. She did not carry, like another Judith, the head of the enemy of her people; her victory was more sweet, more pleasant, more pure. The ascendancy of her virtue, the charm of her presence, clothed with humility, had penetrated into the heart of the foreigner, and her hands, were full of provisions. Time and again she crossed the line of fire, and brought victuals for the sick of the Hospital, and there was even so much left over that the urgent needs of many other civilians could be satisfied. Among them were the Carmelite sisters of the Convent of the Incarnation who were "suffering great penury and danger. They were given heads and legs of animals and other victuals through a window which was open to the site where now is the ward of special cases of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace"³⁶.

In the meantime neither fire, hunger, plague nor mines were able to conquer the souls of those who

³³ Ordinary Process. Witness XV, no. 8, p. 53-54.

³⁴ Testimony of sisters Esperanza Lorente and Josefa Esteban Cotaina, Carmelite sisters of the convent of the Incarnation, Zaragoza. This convent was situated next to the then called Convalescents Hospital, and now is the actual Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. Ordinary Process. Witness XVI and XVII, pp. 55-56.

³⁵ *Pana*, op.cit. Ch. 25.

³⁶ History of Spain, by Modesto Lafuente.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

were besieged. Marshal Lannes wrote to Napoleon, "the siege of Zaragoza is unlike any other of our former battles. To enter into the houses of the citizens we are compelled to make an assault or to make use of a mine. These wretched people defend themselves so wildly that we cannot imagine anything like this. In a word, this is a terrifying war. At this very moment the city is burning on four different sides and hundreds of bombs are falling on it, but nothing can intimidate its defenders". Lannes in order to demolish that stronghold of loyalty ordered the water supply to be cut. The terrifying torment of unbearable thirst, and the contamination of the air with the stench of mountains of corpses heaped up in the streets and public squares made life impossible.³⁷

Mother Rafols, like another Moses of old, ran once more to the enemy camp to strike the rock of the angered French Marshal and obtain the water for the city, striking him with the miraculous rod of her admirable charity³⁸.

7. Capitulation

The days of Zaragoza were numbered. "The fight was now hand to hand, from house to house. The last days of January and the whole of February were a horrible nightmare. General Palafox fell sick. The defence Board thought any further resistance impossible³⁹. Pedro M. Ric went to hold a parley with General Lannes. This one said, "women and children

will be respected, the matter is ended here". "Not even begun," answered Ric, "this would amount to an unconditional surrender, for the city has still weapons, ammunitions and above all...guts!"

A capitulation was signed on February 21st 1809. It was an honourable one for those valiant and besieged citizens. The breach had lasted for 25 days, and the besieger had to spend fifty-two days to be able to enter the city. He had been compelled to fight in the streets and to storm house after house. There had been 20,000 dead and 13,000 sick and wounded. The French army lost more than 8,000 men⁴⁰.

The day after the capitulation the city was looking like a huge cemetery. The unburied corpses were piled up and half decomposed in the squares, specially near Churches and Hospitals. Many days were spent in works of sanitation. The 5th of March was the day fixed by the Duke of Montebello to make his triumphant entrance into the conquered city. It was an unhappy day for the courageous citizens of Zaragoza. That military parade was the last drop of gall in the mostrous cup of their sorrows. Several loyal men were willing to be shot for the only crime "of having loved their mother land, the country of their ancestors, their children, their most holy religion and the most revered Pillar"⁴¹.

8. A new Esther

Marshal Lannes had invited his officers and Franco-phile Spaniards to celebrate his triumph. They had

³⁷ History of Spain. Lafuente.

³⁸ Letter of Manuel Sevil to Tomas Villanueva. Guallar, op.cit.p. 187 (see note 2 of Ch. 1 of this book.)

³⁹ History of Spain, published by Institute Gallach. Vol. V.

⁴⁰ History of Spain by Ballesteros. Vol. VII.

⁴¹ Epilogue of a Poem of Garcia Arista.

been invited to a sumptuous banquet in the palace of the Count of Sastago.

Charity alone drove the servant of God, a lover of silence and humble solitude, away from the seclusion of her life, and brought her to the midst of that orgy. Full of shame and confusion, before the amazement of those invited, she, the uninvited guest, walked into the midst of the lighted hall and fell on her knees at the feet of the Marshal. There was such an ardent look, such a fervent appeal reflected on her pale countenance that the Marshal, deeply touched, asked her, "what does our little sister wish?" "The grace of forgiveness for those sentenced to death, Lord." The General answered, "Granted." And they were left free⁴².

This became another of the tasks she undertook during the war and after it, viz. the assistance to the prisoners. Several times the sisters had gone "under heavy shelling to heal wounded Spanish soldiers fallen in the French camp"⁴³.

With this golden broach we close the chapter of the most glorious event in the history of the nascent institute which distinctly revealed for all times the charism of Mother Rafols and her Congregation.

⁴² Ordinary Process. Witness XII, no. 8, pp. 47-48.

⁴³ Official information of the Provincial Commission of Charity. Years 1869-70. Novitiate Archive. Quoted by Guallar, op.cit. p. 207.

"BE SUBMISSIVE TO RULERS
AND AUTHORITIES" Tit 3, 1

Charity loves to give, but no greater gift can man offer to God than for His sake to subject his own will to another's will (St Thomas Aquinas). The relation between charity and obedience is the relation between love and well ordered love. Obedience becomes the acid test of the worth of our charity and charismatic love. Charity needs to be controlled by obedience.

1. The aftermath of the war

It is impossible to describe in what state Zaragoza remained after the capitulation. The sufferings of the citizens did not end there. The chief defenders of the unconquerable city together with their leader, the distinguished General Palafox, were deported. The Spanish army evacuated the city. Most indispensable victuals were lacking, anonymous heroes were dying of starvation, an epidemic was claiming their lives. Eight thousand civilians died during the first year of the French occupation. Hospitals were overcrowded with the sick, and it was hardly possible to feed them.

The Fortress and jails were filled with prisoners, and above all this there was the profound sadness of being oppressed rather than governed by the hated invaders, which increased the horror of the incredible calamity.

It was the time to display heroic charity, and the "angel of the Hospital and heroine of charity"⁴⁴ braced

⁴⁴ Ordinary Process. Witness XV, no. 8.

herself to meet the challenge. The dream of her youth, the ideal that had inspired her life had become true. A broad field of action spread before herself and her daughters.

Her practical talent and the spirit of sacrifice appear in all situations. She cheered up the sick, provided a home for the foundlings, assisted the insane, helped and rehabilitated fallen women, came to the help of prisoners. Often she risked her life to help many to escape death. She went to the doors of the Churches to implore the charity of the faithful.

2. Difficult obedience

The quality of obedience is tested when we have to deal with unfriendly authority. On April 29th 1811 a new chapter opens in the life of the Sisterhood. A new governing body of the Sitiada was installed. The President was Miguel Suarez de Santander, Bishop of Huesca. This new Sitiada brought to the nascent institute a period of untold sufferings and difficult obedience. The Sisterhood was to be shaken by storms of misunderstandings which undermined its very foundations. The union of the members was jeopardized, the authority of the superior set at naught or called into question, and its very existence was attacked with uncalled-for interference, intemperance and insults. Yet this abuse of authority served only to reveal the outstanding patience, meekness and supernatural obedience of the Foundress. This obedience and submissiveness was acknowledged by the President of the Sitiada who in his writings bestows veiled and timid praises on that group of chosen souls. In the preamble of his Constitutions for the sisters, he says:

"we can not but acknowledge that, while examining the costumes and moral habits of the Sisters of Charity, God has filled us with spiritual comfort, on account of the good example they give and the edification they cause with their solid Christian behaviour".

However, his opinion about the Sisterhood was made clear in a letter to the Sitiada²: "I have looked at the small society of sisters not as a small group of women who live actually an edifying life. I have not looked at them as at a child in the cradle from whom nothing can be feared, nothing can be suspected; but I have looked rather into the coming centuries and, instructed by the past examples of people who, though weak in the beginning, became later strong and even almost unconquerable, have completely closed the door to every possibility of their development. And so I have confirmed their absolute subordination to the most Honourable Sitiada".

Authority does not mean autocracy. Mother Rafols obeyed but did not acknowledge unlimited power. She upheld the rights of the little Sisterhood against the meddling of the Francophile Sitiada. Through written requests in which her freedom of action is revealed, she negotiated with the new regents, so as to preserve the distinctive features of her institute. Often she guarded her daughters from unjust vexations.

On account of the war not only the city but the whole country was reduced to great penury. Under these circumstances it was unthinkable to aim at the restoration of the ancient Hospital "Urbis et orbis".

² Register of Sitiadas, December 2nd, 1811.

For this reason, another Hospital was rehabilitated "which had been a Hospital of convalescents, founded in 1677 by His Excellency Don Diogo Castillo, who died as Archbishop of Zaragoza on July 9th 1686. Since the building had not been constructed to lodge the sick, it was lacking all the facilities for comfort and hygiene"³. Yet the resourceful charity of Mother Rafols and her daughters made up for the lack of comfort. All of them were very exact in keeping their duties and very exemplary"⁴. "faithful imitators of the servant of God."⁵.

3. Obedience to civil authorities

The Commandant General of the place in a kind appeal addressed to the Sitiada requested that the Sisters of Charity should take over the work of cooking and distributing meals to the prisoners of war. Victuals and the necessary rations would be supplied to them. "The regent Marquis de Fuente Olivar agreed to it and from December 1st 1810 the sisters took charge of this service"⁶. The prisoners were very many. "The number of prisoners we have seen in Zaragoza goes up to 46,000. Food has been provided for all of them and

³ The narrowness of the building and the discomfort in it forced the French General, Count of Suchet, Governor General of Aragon, to order that the convent of nuns of the Incarnation be added to it. There is a public testimony of this fact written in Zaragoza on January 6th by Pedro Vidal (Information about the Provincial Institute of Beneficence, 1869-70, Novitiate Archive). The sight of the old building was so depressing that one of the regents wrote in a letter to the Count of Sastago, "Whenever I enter the Hospital doors my joy is ended and sorrows overwhelm me" (Galassanz Rabaza, Sch. P. Op. cit. Ch. XIII, p. 99).

⁴ Ordinary Process. Witness XV, no. 20, p. 94.

⁵ Ibid. Witness III, no. 17, p. 79-80.

⁶ Register of Sitiadas, Book I, February 12th 1811, Hospital Archive.

distributed", wrote the Francophile Bishop of Huesca, Don Miguel Suarez Santander. Though the prisoners were many, Mother Rafols knew them all, she knew their sorrows, the great penalties inflicted on them, the bitterness of their soul, the miseries they suffered in their prisons, and even the state of their consciences. "She provided them with all kind of victuals," chocolate, biscuits and other sweets, from the alms some charitable souls had handed for this purpose as a fitting help for the sick and the weak. "Certain officers and other important prisoners ordered her to buy those delicacies by pounds and by quarters and she would faithfully procure them."

Loaded with her provisions she walked to the Fortress, to Torrero, wherever those wretched prisoners were to be found, carrying them in her large-sized pockets, which became a byword. They were like an inexhaustible and bottomless larder, for charity has no limits either. She served them with such kindness, sweetness and patience that all were captivated by that sudden revelation of the vision of saintliness made flesh.

Her presence brought light in the dark hours of imprisonment. She was always welcomed with gladness, no obstacle could stop her from her charitable work. On day she expedited the flight of one prisoner, another day of another prisoner, sometimes by changing their clothes or by taking them in the cart of the dead, or under the cart of supplies. Her boldness was bordering upon madness. She constantly risked her life, but God kept her safe in marvellous ways. In one of her errands they stopped the cart, providentially that day no prisoner was being carried surreptitiously, and so they let her pass. Not always was she so fortu-

nate, for on one occasion she was caught while she was saving some prisoners. She had fallen already on her knees offering up her life to God and waiting for the death-blow, when those people accustomed to the horrors of war and without any human reason which could explain their behaviour, laid down their arms and left free that scarlet pimpernel⁶ his of modern times.

4. To die rather than to disobey

Sister president was under a complete totalitarian system exercised from the heights of absolute power. This system gave room to all kind of attacks and injustices which became the exquisite food served daily to the poor sisters. On most occasions they accepted it in silence and submission, except when the uprightness of their behaviour, the need of their good name or the purity of their life were called into question. Then the voice of the Mother was heard in magnificent arguments for the defence of her daughters. With the determination of a Foundress she protected constantly the institution born of her heart.

In the Sitiada of April 4th 1811 the Accountant of the 4th. division, in a document he submitted, demanded that the sisters should give an account of the alms collected in the boxes of the Churches. The answer of Mother Rafols, humble but courageous, calm and logical, foiled this design which tried to cast doubt

⁶ bis. The name refers to a character in French novels about the French Revolution. He was a gentleman of the English nobility who succeeded in saving many persons belonging to the French nobility, helping them to cross the English Channel and find safety in England. The English gentleman wore in a bottle-hole the flower called scarlet pimpernel.

and suspicion on her fidelity in the administration of the Hospital. The sisters were actually the outstanding benefactresses, "who for the benefit of the poor had left their own food, and the money given to them for their indispensable expenditure. These facts are not only known to all, but are also recorded in the account books of the Hospital"⁷.

Soon they aimed at further attacks, relying on the impunity with which they could get the better of them. Mother Maria would come out of her customary silence to defend the honour of her daughters which they were aiming to smear. They had accused them of hiding a calumny against the reputation of an innocent priest. The Sitiada gave her no satisfactory answer, and so she had recourse to the Archbishop before whom her voice sounded calm and courageous like the voice of the prophets of old⁸.

Her sharp mind and the knowledge she had of men made her understand that the attacks had been directed chiefly against her. Full of generosity and magnanimity she tendered her resignation on September 12th 1811.⁹ Of little importance was it to her that she should be ignored and set at naught, what mattered was that the congregation should be preserved and should embalm and purify the air with its fragrance.

Eleven months later, the new Constitutions written by Bishop Santander came into force. They had been written with the deliberate intention of forbidding the

⁷ Register of Sitiadas. Book I, November 9th 1810. See also the brave defence of the Mother made by Marquis of Fuente Olivar, in the same Sitiada of April 4th 1811, Register of Sitiadas. Hospital Archive.

⁸ Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. Op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁹ Document IX (Proc. fol. 387).

growth and expansion of the institute. The reality far surpassed his calculations. The application of the Constitutions mortally wounded the Sisterhood. Without the action of Divine Providence that was watching over that work inspired and preserved by God, the institute would certainly have disappeared. The prudent Mother quickly perceived the danger and in a petition, full of tact and foresight, proposed some remarks which time was to show how necessary they were for the wellbeing of the Congregation. She declared, "that they do not aim at commanding but at obeying", she added "that they would be extremely satisfied, at peace and rest if their superiors were always and only the Senor-regents", for "they would order them in the best manner, without passion or envy which are to be feared in any other subordinate position as they themselves are"¹⁰.

On August 10th the election of a new superior took place. Mother Tecla was elected and on August 20th the different offices were distributed. Mother Maria was appointed to take charge of the keeping and washing of linen, and of the sacristy.

Obedience and submissiveness brought her to that type of death. For all purposes of ruling the Sisterhood she was dead. Gladly she accepted the new situation when she would have many more chances to obey than to command. She had been a soul intimately possessed with the idea of atonement. Her desires had been always to help, like another Veronica, Christ in His obedience, and, like another Cyrenean, to carry the Cross, to weep like the women of Jerusalem and to pour, like Mary, the alabaster of perfume at the

¹⁰ Original preserved in the Novitiate Archive.

feet of Christ. Nothing, therefore, could have been ordered from her more congenial and more in keeping with her inclinations, than the new appointment. She had learnt from her Lord that souls can be saved only by obediently dying on the Cross.

She buried herself in the trivial duties of decorating the altars with lovely bouquets, set the vestments in order, kept the dust away from the sanctuary, made the hosts with her own hands and placed them in the sacred vessels. God alone could reveal to us the intensity of that love with which she was performing those tasks.

5. No union of hearts without obedience

Almost from the beginning of the government of the new superior disunion and restlessness began to be felt among the members of the community. "In the very same month of August, sister Maria Macia left the group and was the first to quit the Sisterhood of Charity of St Anne to pass on to the convent of Ensenanza. The sister had had some disagreements with a regent, of the Sitiada¹¹.

On September 17th Mother Tecla proposed to the Lord Bishop "that since two sisters had died and another had passed to the convent of Ensenanza, and a fourth one was in Huesca without hope of life, she would like very much to know whether it would please His Lordship to ask the Honourable Sitiada to grant her permission to admit four sisters to take the place of those four"¹². The Sisterhood had been,

¹¹ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. Op. cit. pp. 146.

¹² *Ibid.*

indeed, very much reduced and its continuation seemed to be impossible. In these critical circumstances for the life of the Congregation Mother Maria, the very soul of the Congregation, had to leave, on September 24th, for Orcajo de Daroca, accompanied by sister Teresa Rivera also seriously ill¹³.

Mother Maria confided the anguish of her heart to no one. In her sorrows "she loved the comfort of conversing alone with God." The only key to the possession of Being is not-to-be. The blessed fruit of always obeying is the destruction of self-love, self-determination, self-will. When these walls are pulled down the rush of heavenly waters flows into our being inundating the soul with Divine Love.

¹³ See petition of Mother Tecla to the Sistiada, Novitiate Archive.

CHAPTER VIII:

"DANGER FROM MY OWN PEOPLE"

2 Cor II, 26

We left Mother Rafols, at the end of the previous chapter, undergoing a kind of spiritual death. We are not to imagine that that was the end of her story and of her influence in the Congregation she had established. Quite the contrary. This death is like the death of an apostle, like the destruction of the grain that falls and dies in order to bring forth a new life, more plentiful and vigorous. In the life of the spirit and in Christian life life comes from death. The last end of holiness is not so much renunciation of the human personality as the possession of God. She began now to live a new life, and to be more influential than ever in the Congregation she loved. It was probably at this time too that she developed higher degrees of prayer, for her influence now points towards a more spiritual leadership and to a more intimate union with God.

Whoever attempts the foundation of a religious congregation will labour in vain if he thinks that he can accomplish his design by multiplying rules, increasing external austerities, regulating diet and abstinences. All these things would have little or no effect unless the minds of religious persons be truly instructed in the ways of prayer and in the need of following the internal guidance of the Spirit. It is remarkable at this time how spiritual peace, serenity and tranquility showed in her actions, which could not proceed from any other source than the Spirit. And the Cross was all the time her sovereign delight.

1. The Sisterhood without the Mother

The period of time that follows the departure of Mother Maria to Orcajo de Daroca is full of anguish and is most depressing for the Sisterhood, indeed, not for her. There was need of that power flowing from her words, giving certainty of faith and hopeful assurance of a better world where only the strong arrive. There was need of that "grave demeanour and stately decorum,"¹ even if it was only an exterior help, but clearly revealing her interior beauty. That example was attractive and uplifting. There was need of her smile illuminating the dark nights of penury and uncertainty, when things were so unstable and without any support to lean on. Briefly, she was needed for the future of the Sisterhood since the Congregation had not yet been confirmed by Church authority, and for the perseverance of the sisters in their first vocation, specially now when no other prospects were in view than a wretched existence and a life without scope or ideals.

She had "helped the sisters in making great progress" during the hard days of the foundation and the most difficult times of the sieges. She had been "appointed sister Major from the start, and she continues to be so now, discharging her office with great success"².

By accepting her resignation the Francophile Siciada had deprived the Sisterhood of that supernatural driving force exercised through her government. Without her the Sisterhood had begun to crack and to tumble down. This process of deterioration appeared most

¹ Ordinary Process, Document 58.

² Register of Siciadas, 1810. Hospital Archive.

clearly at the moment when she moved away from the Hospital and her protective action came to an end. No one was there now to exhort, instruct, foster hopes and confirm them with the vision of better days. At least no one like her.

Several of the sisters, who had remained with Mother Tecla, thought of entering other congregations where they could find the security of a stable congregation and the possibility of perfection. They made all the necessary arrangements to obtain their wishes. Other sisters went farther, questioning the authority of the new superior.

On November 16th, 1812 the Siciada had to study certain questions raised by His Lordship concerning the well-being and government of the Sisterhood, "making the sisters understand the absolute subordination they must offer to their superior, in the things concerning the Hospital as well as those concerning the Sisterhood, according to the Constitutions and promises they have made"³. Poor Mother Tecla, in spite of her good will, was powerless to ward off the evils threatening the life of the Congregation.

2. The Mother without the Sisterhood

These news reached Orcajo de Daroca, but the servant of God, far from being cowed down by the difficulties, spurred herself to overcome them with acts of self-conquest and sacrifices but, above all, she had recourse to prayer. Prayer was the powerful weapon she had decided to use to avert the ruin of the Sisterhood and its total extinction. Her prayer was

³ Ibid.

accompanied with tears and fervent acts of faith and trust, and so they obtained an answer from heaven.

Shortly afterwards she returned to the Hospital, and with her presence all animosity subsided and life began to be different. Her prayer life had the secret power of irradiating peace everywhere and together with peace, courage, trust and happiness¹.

3. No danger from without now

On July 9th 1813 the French troops left Zaragoza for good. Three days later, there was an extraordinary meeting of the Sitiada. The regents had received an official order from the legitimate authority in these terms, "having been informed at my arrival in this city, that the Royal and General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace is governed by a Sitiada made up of persons nominated by the intruder Government, I order that the members of the said Sitiada cease immediately from their functions, and leave them expeditiously to the legitimate regents who were their members before the occupation of the city"².

Though we are not sure of the exact date, it seems very likely that Mother Tecla, taking as an opportunity the change of the Sitiada, appointed Mother Maria to the work in the Hospice. The change might not have been to the liking of every one, and so a report of it reached unofficially the Sitiada. On August 26th, 1813 the Baron de Purroy, one of the regents, was empowered to investigate "whether any sisters had been removed from their offices who had been appointed

by the Sitiada on the proposal of the superior on August 20th of the previous year, and to forbid the superior to change any sister without the knowledge of the Sitiada"³.

Investigation was carried out by the Baron "and as a result of it, in the Sitiada of August 30th, a memorial was read out in which the superior, Mother Tecla Canti, beseeches that the Sitiada may deign to grant faculties to her to change the sisters from the wards and other offices, as it had been customary before." To this effect it was agreed upon that "as regards the change from the wards of sisters who assist the sick, she may do so according to her prudence; but she shall not be empowered to change the sisters who had been appointed by the Sitiada, for the removal from these offices is exclusively reserved to the Sitiada, and the Sitiada shall never proceed to make any change without knowledge of the case"⁴.

The removal from office of sister Antonia Dalmau appointed on August 20th 1812 to the care of the foundlings, and her replacement by Mother Maria, does not appear in the subsequent Registers after the disposition of August 30th 1813. From this we can conclude that very likely the change had already taken place before that date and though, under cover of a seeming protest, the Sitiada let it pass as a fait accompli.

4. "In toil and hardship"

God led her through obedience so this new field of the apostolate. Her zeal for souls found a golden opportunity to be exercised. The children became her

¹ Tradition kept in the Congregation.

² Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. Op.Cit. p. 150.

³ Register of Sitiadas, 1813, Hospital Archive.

⁴ Ibid.

patrimony till the end of her life. They were her wealth, her solace, her very life. She took care of them with delicate love and uncommon tenderness. She planted in their innocent souls the seeds of virtues. She became to them their providence, their counsellor, their true mother.

No sooner was she chosen for that task than she "in a most beautiful document informed the Sitiada about the wretched condition of the wards set apart for the children. The sick children were living together with the healthy and there was danger of contagion. There was need of more beds. The wet-nurses were behaving unbecomingly. The squalor of the rooms was demanding an immediate remedy together with a few more improvements for the well-being of the little boys and girls"⁸.

The request found a great supporter in Senor Navarrete, regent for the week, who on October 20th 1813 suggested "the need to transfer the Hospice to a more suitable place with larger rooms and more fresh air". He wanted also different wards for fallen women, for the wards they occupied then had not the required privacy and one can easily imagine the inconveniences. In answer to his request, it was agreed that in the convent of the Incarnation a suitable place should be found with all the requirements which were lacking in the present ward of foundlings within the narrow precincts of the Hospital. Senor Baron de Purroy was commissioned to do the needful. Once the apartment was ready the children should be transferred there, and an honest woman sought who could reside permanently in that institution and help

⁸ Guallar, "Life of Mother Rafols" Book V, Ch. IV, p. 231.

the sister in the care of the children and the wet-nurses.⁹

Notwithstanding the Hospital's penury, the regents showed themselves lavish in complying with the wishes of Mother Maria. Later on, when the nuns of the Incarnation, through their superior, the Provincial of the Calzed Carmelites, made a case against the Hospital claiming back the building which they had abandoned out of compulsion and which Marshal Suchet had joined to the Hospital of convalescents, the Hospital claimed in defence of its rights that "the said convent had been annexed to this Hospital with all the contiguous vegetable gardens, and so the Hospital had preserved and repaired the convent and had invested a good amount of money, as much as the financial straits would permit, in order to make it fit for use. It had been used to set up those departments that could not be conveniently kept within the precincts of the Hospital or the building for the convalescent, and so the foundlings and several other offices were lodged there."¹⁰

When the building of the old Hospice, located in one of the wings of the convent of the Incarnation, was about to crumble down, it was repaired in order to preserve the memory of the servant of God who had not only spent the greatest part of her life there, but had also rendered her soul to God."¹¹

The children of the Hospice under the motherly care of Mother Maria were now lacking nothing.

⁹ Register of Sitiadas, 1813, Hospital Archive.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* November 15th 1813, Hospital Archive.

¹¹ It was repaired by Senor Miguel Allae Salvador, President of the County House of Zaragoza, most devoted to Mother Rafols.

She knew how to provide them with whatever was needed. The Hospice became to them a home, a Church, a school, a place of recreation. Sometimes she would ask from the Sitiada woollen or linen swaddling clothes; at other times, make use of the well-known name she enjoyed in the whole city of Zaragoza and collect abundant alms for her little ones, to the extent of provoking a certain amount of jealousy among the regents. They agreed in Sitiada of October 25th, 1814 "that the Sisters of Charity in charge of running the Hospice, which is the only department in the House that gathers alms for themselves, should collect them in boxes fixed in an appointed place, and should give an account of the amount gathered and of the manner how it has been spent". The Act was signed by Senor Navarrete and Don Augustin Sevil.

She was much concerned that the small babies should have all the care and attention their tender age demanded, "watching the behaviour of the wet-nurses, warning them with love and affection...inspecting daily whatever things were done for the greater cleanliness and neatness of the wet-nurses and the children, and taking care that the wet-nurses should live in peace and union among themselves"¹², "sparing no labour or sacrifice in order to procure them some satisfaction"¹³.

When the children grew up and began to speak, she taught them to pronounce the holy name of God, and infused into their own tender hearts the love of Jesus and Mary, His Mother, of the holy guardian

¹² Primitive Constitutions. Treatise on the Sister in charge of foundlings. Novitiate Archive.

¹³ Ordinary Process. Witness XI, no. 8, p. 46.

Angel, feeding them with the milk of tender and solid piety. Her intimate, sweet words found a deep echo in the souls of the little ones who loved to be by her side. "She would recite with them the acts of faith, hope and love"¹⁴ "teach them pious hymns,"¹⁵ so that from the mouths of little ones and of babes divine praises resounded all over the place. She enjoyed their infant games and inculcated in the young sisters all these practices "recommending them to treat the children with the greatest tenderness and since they had no parents the sisters should take their place"¹⁶.

That isolated department was a unique department of the Hospital, a true sanctuary of peace, a holy place where the angels of God were ascending and descending, for God had granted her a special gift to end discords, and wherever she was, there was no room for discord of any kind¹⁷. This peace was the outcome of her diligent endeavour that "the wet-nurses should live a good Christian life, persuading them to attend Mass daily, recite at least one part of the Rosary, say the Angelus when the clock struck have some time for spiritual reading and to prepare them for confession and communion at least once a month"¹⁸.

She discharged this delicate task "with exemplary prudence and zeal"¹⁹. Such zeal brought about valuable results. The hearts of people were open to her. Her words full of motherly love and the unction of

¹⁴ Ibid. Witness III, Sister Justina Sanz.

¹⁵ Primitive Constitutions. Ibid.

¹⁶ Information of certain sisters contemporary of the servant of God.

¹⁷ Ordinary Process. Witness V, no. 11, p. 38.

¹⁸ Primitive Constitutions. Ibid.

¹⁹ Ordinary Process. Witness II, no. 17, p. 79.

grace were enhanced by the power of truth and a life of constant surrender and sacrifice. They could demolish even the most solid fortresses of vices and sins. "God had granted His maid-servant a special gift to stir the hearts of people, and so, during the war of Independence, with her good example and words, she succeeded in converting several of the sick in the Hospital, both Spanish and French."²⁰

These admirable conversions filled her heart with joy. She obtained them from God not only with the burning language of her prayer of petition, but also with the help of the most austere mortification. "She was very mortified and penitent, she used to chastise her body and scourge herself in spite of her bodily weakness²¹.

5. "In hunger and thirst"

After the calamity of the war and the French occupation the scarcity of means in the Hospital was so great that it might well have been called misery. In Sitiada of December 2nd, 1813 it was already agreed "that due to the scarcity of linen in the Hospital, an appeal should be made to the zeal and charity of Father John Bonal whether he would be willing to go, alone or in the company of the persons he might choose, to the city to beg for this particular need". The situation became more and more painful and on March 24th, 1814 it was decided "as it had been customary before, to restore this year the feast of the Sorrows of Our Lady, the Friday before Good-Friday, to be celebrated in the Church of this holy Hospital,

²⁰ Ibid. Witness VII, no. 11, p. 63.

²¹ Register of Sitiadas, 1814, Novitiate Archive.

empowering the Senor Baron to appear before the chief Mayor of the town and request him to invite the Town Council to the celebration. In times past the Deputy Governor used to attend this sacred function and give a handsome amount of wool, linen and other articles. Since the Monarchy, by a new Constitution, has established once more the County Council, it was agreed that this Provincial Body be invited to this function. The Senors Navarrete and Baron de Purroy were deputed to this effect."²²

The celebration took place with great solemnity, but due to political events, the longed-for and much-needed alms were not collected. "On April 6th, 1814, Wednesday of the Holy Week, at 3.30 p.m., on his return from banishment His Majesty King Ferdinand VII, made his solemn entrance into the city of Zaragoza. He was carried in a decorated royal-carriage pulled by fifty citizens chosen from among the heroic defenders of the city. Twenty-four damsels, daughters of those who had most distinguished themselves in the time of the sieges, clad in white garments, their hair let down over their shoulders, and their heads decorated with garlands of flowers, were holding as many ribbons that hanged from the royal-carriage. Several couples marched before the carriage performing some bucolic dances and other items. At the head of the march there went a squadron of dragoons from Madrid, followed by several companies of rifle-men. His Majesty was accompanied by the Military Governor, the Royal Lieutenant and other governors, General Wittingham with his army generals and other distinguished personalities riding on their horses. In the

²² Ibid.

royal-carriage His Majesty was accompanied by Prince Don Carlos, the Duke of St. Charles and General Palafox. The procession crossed the stone bridge, made its way along the Tanneries and entered by the Burnt Gate. All along the way till the Royal lodging (the House of Sastago) there were decorations and ruins.

On April 11th, after having spent the Holy Week in Zaragoza, at 7 a.m. His Majesty set out for Valencia²³.

The days between the feast of the Sorrows of Our Lady and the entrance of the King had been days of ceaseless activity for the authorities, busy with the preparations for the royal visit. There was no time or opportunity to remember the straitened circumstances of the Hospital. The joys of the grandiose reception were still lingering in the memory of everyone, that exorbitant expenditure had not yet been liquidated when a decree was issued on May 4th, derogating the Constitution and all the Institutions created by it, and establishing Absolutism.

During these years, most difficult for the upkeep of the Hospital and its very existence, the sisters, for all their spirit of self-denial and sacrifice, reached the limit of human endurance. In the informations of the Sitiadas is reflected the state of inanition to which they were reduced. Frequently, we read remarks like the following: "Permission has been given to sister Francisca Rusic to go to breathe her native air, since doctors have prescribed it as necessary for the recovery of her health"²⁴. Two months' leave was also granted to

²³ Marians Pano Rueta, "The Countess of Buzeta" 2nd part.

²⁴ Register of Sitiadas, October 3rd 1814. Hospital Archive.

Mother Maria to visit her native place, "this leave was most willingly granted by the regents since it was apparent to all that she was sick and exhausted". A short time later "a certificate of Doctor Martin Jimenez was submitted, in which he declares his opinion that Sister Josefa Codina should move to her native place in order to restore her health"²⁵.

These constant failures, in the health of the sisters could not but alarm their superiors, and Mother Tecla knowing well what was the cause of the evil, submitted a proposal to the Sitiada clearly informing "that the ration of bread supplied to them was not sufficient from the time when the ration had been reduced. The Sitiada accepted the proposal and ordered that 24 ounces should be supplied daily to each one of the sisters, so that they may make soup for breakfast"²⁶.

It was not only Mother superior but the regents themselves who were witnessing with pity the heroic endurance of those admirable sisters. Fearing their total extinction, they proposed to their fellow regents, as Senor Arias did²⁷ "that since three or four sisters were sick and with no appetite, it would be convenient to add bacon and "garbanzos"²⁸ instead of beans. He, of course, was only suggesting to the Sitiada so they may follow whatever course of action might be judged fair and conducive. The Sitiada agreed to the proposal of Senor Arias and ordered the Administration to supply the corresponding amount of the said articles²⁹.

²⁵ Ibid. 1814-15. Hospital Archive.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A type of peas called in India *Kabli gram*. Latin, *cicer*.

²⁹ Register of Sitiadas, 1814-15. Hospital Archive.

These precautions, necessary and just though they were, came a bit late. Their bodies were weakened and exhausted by the constant fasting of so many years, and by the excessive labours. Not only was the Sisterhood suffering this inconvenience but the workers in the Hospital were also greatly handicapped by the constant shortage of the sisters. Sisters were wanted in all the departments, for the few who were left could not cope with all the tasks in spite of their selfless endeavours.

The administration found "that it was most economic to put the management of the kitchen in the hands of the Sisters of Charity",²⁰. The Sitiada agreed to the representation, but said "that it could not be done on account of the small number of sisters; in the event of their numbers being increased the Sitiada would find the means to implement the proposal".

Reports were also brought to the Sitiada about "the negligences found in the care of the insane of both sexes. They agreed that the Senor President should discuss with the Sisters of Charity whether in order to remedy those deficiencies they could take charge of the female insane and on what conditions the transfer could be made".²¹

This same year 1815 seven sisters joined the Sisterhood²², a number, however, still insufficient to replace those who had gone away, and inadequate to satisfy the requests for more sisters coming from everywhere. In the Register of Sitiadas, on November 16th 1815, the Senor Dean notified that on the morning of that

²⁰ Ibid. March 28th 1814.

²¹ Ibid. 1814-15.

²² General Chronicle of the Institute. Novitiate Archive.

day a delegate sent by the Brotherhood of the Blood of Christ had visited him with the request that four sisters of Charity should assist a woman sentenced to death on her way to the gallows. She herself had requested this favour to show her gratitude for the charitable services of the sisters during the days she had been in prison. The Dean, knowing that the exercise of such acts of charity was most proper to the institute, gave permission to attend to two of the said sisters to whom the due order had been given"²³.

Mother Maria, in her hours of prayer and active union with God was reading in all these events and situations the plans of God concerning the Sisterhood. Universal charity was to be the distinctive mark of the Congregation, "founded to bring relief to suffering humanity in all the needs of the soul and the body"²⁴. This was what was actually taking place in those moments when the extinction of the Institute seemed to be imminent.

In that spiritual ascent to mount Calvary which the sisters had begun, the servant of God was their spiritual guide, lifting up their hearts with her words of comfort, pointing to a better world in which they would find the reward of their sufferings. "Though she was not the superior, all the sisters had recourse to her in their doubts and pains, for they felt such trust in her. She advised and comforted them with great wisdom"²⁵. She led them to God in Whom she had anchored all her hopes. All penury, contradictions, labours and

²³ Register of Sitiadas. Hospital Archive.

²⁴ Tradition of the Institute preserved by the early sisters contemporary of the servant of God.

²⁵ Ordinary Process. Witness XI, no. 9, p. 59.

sufferings seemed to her sweet gifts from His Divine Mercy. Her kindness, discretion, compassion and total forgetfulness of all miseries, joined to her austere and penitent life, gave her such ascendancy that in point of fact she continued to govern the small Sisterhood.

The Sitiada had recourse to her when asking her opinion "about the requirements in those who aim at becoming Mother of the Hospice". The appointment was in favour of the one considered to be most fit by Mother Maria. She was watchful over the admission of postulants. The Sitiada, however, still kept this right claiming "that in the admission of sisters the Sitiada is absolutely free".

In July 1814 a postulant named Ana Maria Grefier was accepted by the Sitiada, since "she will have time to be tested during the period prior to the vestition of the habit. On the other hand, the Sitiada was aware of the good and commendable qualities of her who was requesting admission among the postulants". So the Sitiada admitted her. Mother Maria had her misgivings, and cast her vote against that decision. In fact, hers was the only vote against. Time showed her deep penetration in discerning vocations and knowing persons, for the said postulant, so much praised by the Sitiada and by the other sisters who accepted her for vestition with a most favourable testimony on October 3rd, 1814, left the Institute after the 5th, of May 1815.

6. Danger from within

Her superiorship, even if she was not in authority, was acknowledged by all and it was decisive in uprooting latent weeds of discord which time and again

would sprout, bringing about the loss of vocations. In that same year 1815 we have an example of this in the case of sister Rosa Cuchi, who left the Sisterhood to join the monastery of St. Catherine. Only her voice, full of authority and conviction, could reach the depths in those souls plunged into uncertainty and overcast with aguish. She alone could bring them back peace while making them understand "how lamentable it was if, exercising their charity towards the whole world, they would not exercise it among themselves"⁸⁶.

In the deep crises that furiously shook the young tree of the Sisterhood and nearly uprooted it, her spirit of faith and prayer appears in a new and brighter light. She appears every inch the Foundress and Mother of the Sisterhood with her peerless qualities to rule and govern it. Any other intervention, except hers, was doomed to failure. In 1813 the good will of the Sitiada obtained that priests of the St. Charles' Seminary would take over the spiritual direction of the Sisterhood to provide the sisters with solid spiritual training. Yet, not all the sisters were pleased with this move and had unwillingly submitted to the decision. Some had asked for a certain Father Landa, of the order of St. Cajetan. It became clear later that only the discontented sisters had been exercising undue pressure on the others. It appears so in a memorial that two of them submitted, "they affirm that they had been forced to subscribe to the petition and therefore had desisted from it"⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ Tradition of the Institute from the early sisters.

⁸⁷ Register of Sitiadas, November 15th 1813. Hospital Archive.

The Sitiada felt itself unable to remove the causes of the discontent for the simple reason that the causes had deeper and more subtle roots than they could perceive. The intelligence of the servant of God and the intuition of her loyal heart could detect and rectify them.

The causes can be easily understood. They were the misery of those wretched times in which the bare essentials of life were in great scarcity or totally lacking; the uncertainty about the Church's recognition of the Sisterhood for so many years expected and never forthcoming, and also "the ambition of a certain sister who, by little commendable devices was aspiring to higher positions and dignities"³⁸, and was sowing the seeds of confusion among the few sisters left.

Mother Maria met this dangerous attack with the irresistible weapons of her forbearance and resignation and her delicate charity. She seemed to have heard spoken to her ears the words that the prophet Zachary heard, "not by might, not by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts". Zach. 4, 6. With her wonderful prudence and discretion she succeeded in finding the person but in such a way that not even the name of the guilty sister was known to the majority of the sisters³⁹. She renewed the courage of all, urged souls to the heights of heroism, demolished all resistance and pacified the spirits, ceaselessly bringing about peace and unity without which no work can stand long.

Those days were unquestionably days of violence and discord, and so were not the most conducive to

³⁸ Tradition preserved in the Institute from the early sisters.

³⁹ Do.

obtain peace even within the Sisterhood. On May 30th the Francophile citizens were expatriated. On March 15, 1815 a new Ministry of police and security was created. On April 15th of the same year some magazines were suppressed, theatres closed down and masked balls forbidden.

These measures brought discontent in large sections of the people in the country, and so the opportunity was offered to the freemasons to do underground work. Some revolutionary attempts were nipped in the bud. Restlessness became widespread, the revolution was on the march, the Monarchy insecure, the economy of the country at its worst, and hunger and misery became a spectre to peoples, cities and institutions. The Hospital of Zaragoza was no exception and was still struggling to recover from the downfall caused by fires and devastation of war.

Through a secret information rumors reached the Sitiada that among "the Sisters of Charity there was a cause for discord" and "after due investigation to ascertain the truth of the facts and with the secrecy demanded by the nature of the thing, the Sitiada found it to be true, and the cause was mainly the precarious situation in which the sisters were"⁴⁰. The Sitiada, according to its own words, was complacent with the investigation made and with the success in bringing some remedy to the evil that was feared"⁴¹.

But better than the Sitiada the servant of God had succeeded in pacifying the Sisterhood, when there arrived in the Hospital sister Manuela Lecina, a

⁴⁰ Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P.*, op.cit. Ch. XX, p. 160-61.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 162.

might take charge of the men of the Hospital of Zaragoza while the sisters would take charge of the women of the general Hospital of Madrid, "where they want us to establish ourselves, and on our part we have no objection, provided this be the will of the Sovereign, our revered Ferdinand VII, of the Senors of the Sitiada and of Your Excellency from whom we kindly expect orders"⁴⁴.

With these provisions and helps the economical situation having been improved, Mother Rafols turned now to the more arduous problem of the Constitutions. As a result of the Royal visit, the official visitors of the Hospital acknowledged the need "of some rules or ordinances which might fix the stability of the sisters in the Hospital in the convenient and prescribed manner" yet officially they only "encouraged to promote its advance"⁴⁵.

When the servant of God realized that no progress was made in this matter she went personally to request this favour from His Grace the Archbishop Don Manuel Vicente Montaner. He gave her great hopes of complying with her wishes. A short time later, the illustrious Prelate ordered the writing of the Constitutions, adapting them to the spirit, customs and traditions of the Sisterhood. To this effect he asked for the primitive Constitutions or Rule which Fr. John Bonal had given them when they came to found the Sisterhood.

With such hopes the Sisterhood remained calm, greatly hoping for the day of its definite approbation.

⁴⁴ Letters of Mother Rafols to General Palafox. County House of Zaragoza.

⁴⁵ Calasanz Rabaza, Sc. P. op. cit. p. 170.

Sister Manuela Lecina, who had inadvertently caused such a storm that the Sisterhood was in the point of being submerged, became sick during her stay in Zaragoza, and herself asked to be brought to the Hospital. Six months she remained among the sisters and was delighted with the experience of their virtues and became extremely friendly, specially to the servant of God. Convinced of the great service that a Sisterhood in which so great virtues were practised could do to the Church, she asked Mother Rafols many times for forgiveness for having desired to join her own Congregation to the Sisterhood. According to her own words, she began incessantly to beseech God that the Sisterhood might be strengthened and propagated for the good of many souls. On July 24th, 1818, after giving heartfelt thanks for the charity with which they had received her and assuring them that she would not forget them from heaven, she breathed her last and with enviable peace and in the arms of Mother Maria she handed over her spirit to the Creator.

"She was buried in the Hospital, next to the sisters, and there she remained until September 22nd, 1930, when the sisters of Charity, after identifying her remains brought them with great veneration to the Novitiate House of Madrid"⁴⁶.

By order of His Grace the Archbishop, the Constitutions were written by two outstanding persons, Pedro Valero, Bishop-Elect of Gerona, and Benito Fernandez de Navarrete, Dean of the Cathedral. They were approved by the Sitiada on November 18th, 1818. It would take some time, however, before they could be put into practice.

⁴⁶ Chronicle of the Congregation. Novitiate Archive.

8. Again dangers from without

"In 1819 the clouds of revolution were gathering all over Spain. Secret societies had been preparing it. The freemasons were an important factor in the development of events. On January 1st, 1820 Rafael de Riego, Commandant of the battalion of Asturias, proclaimed before his troops the new Constitution of 1812. King Ferdinand VII swore by the Constitution by which ecclesiastical benefits were abolished, the Society of Jesus suppressed, and other regulations were directed against certain religious orders. Military service became compulsory for all Spaniards, seminarians and religious men included. On October 1st monastic communities were suppressed and, though the King first refused to sanction this measure, later he yielded out of fear.⁴⁷

Such a turmoil had necessarily a repercussion in the life of the Hospital, and "in fulfillment of many arbitrary dispositions all the workers of the holy Hospital were forced to pass to the Hospice to swear by the new Constitution. The same oath was exacted from the Sisters of Charity, who bluntly refused to do so. This praiseworthy attitude of the sisters brought down on them the anger and vindictiveness of some workers. They first tried to intimidate them in many ways, cutting for instance one night a beautiful vine which cast its shade over the working-room of the sisters, later covering the gate of their lodging with branches of mockery, and proceeding to more grotesque mockery they came to threats and they even made attempts on their lives"⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ History of Spain. Ballesteros, Vol. VII, Ch. II.

⁴⁸ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 172-73.

"One day while the sisters were at prayer they heard that the community bell was striking of itself. Taking this sign as a warning from heaven, for on other occasions they had been warned in a similar way, the servant of God told the sisters to get ready for sacrifice, since a grave danger was threatening them. When the sisters came out of the chapel they met the workers armed and ready to kill them. Mother Rafols stepped forward and with a smile on her countenance and with humble manners restrained them. They went their way without doing any harm to them."⁴⁹

In such hostile surroundings the sisters lived. On February, 6th 1822 a General Regulation for Charitable Institutions placed the Hospital under the control of the County House and its direction in the hands of a Municipal Board. In spite of adverse opinions the Board acknowledged the useful services of the sisters and kept them without making any change, and approved the changes suggested by their superior, Mother Tecla, concerning certain services. It also rendered ineffectual the accusations against the sisters made by people of evil intentions. This was a remarkable fact, for the Legislative Assembly had forbidden the use of a habit, and to make profession in any religious order. The Assembly encouraged members of religious orders of both sexes to be secularized. "This signal favour the sisters attributed exclusively to the protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Whom they had placed all their trust"⁵⁰.

At the level of the direction of the Hospital the sisters were held in great consideration, but it was not the

⁴⁹ Ordinary Process. Witness IV, pp. 42-43. Witness III, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Information of the early sisters.

same among the workers of the Hospital. They did not abandon their attempts to exact revenge. They aimed now at Mother Rafols, the most outstanding figure among all the sisters.

Sister Justina Sanz in the Process of Beatification declared to have heard from Mother Raimunda Oliver, a contemporary of the servant of God, that "one day the revolutionaries appeared in the holy Hospital, in order to take Mother Rafols to prison. When the sisters and the sick saw that those wicked people were carrying away the saintly religious to throw her in prison, they began to weep bitterly. She spoke to all with such calmness and affability that one of the villains said, "Let this lady alone, for with her words and her sweetness she is capable of melting the stones". And so they desisted from their purpose"⁵¹.

The intercession of the 100,000 children of St. Louis. In 1823 brought to an end the period of three years of liberalism. It had been born in the heat of the out-break of war, and died by inner divisions and the force of an invasion. The political regime changed once more, and all the laws against prelates, parish priests and religious orders were abrogated. Under this new favourable climate the Congregation would finally acquire its stability and begin its canonical existence by the approbation of the Constitutions.

⁵¹ Ordinary Process, no. 8, pp. 44-45.

The death of Father Bonal, which was to take place soon, would take away from the Sisterhood one who had detected the charism of Maria Rafols — he possessed a similar charism — had inspired and preserved it, and helped its development. With his disappearance, and later on with her own disappearance (so must have thought Mother Maria Rafols), there would be need of a lasting means to define, preserve and protect that charism so well guarded and so energetically active in her life and work. God gave now, at the appropriate time, all those institutional means which are its guardians and guarantees, and above all of them, the Constitutions.

They had tested it in their lives, and even before the times of Father Bonal and Mother Rafols, in the lives of Hospitallers of other times and places. The Constitutions were not first written and then put into practice, but rather, they were practised, tried, modified, perfected, corrected and finally written.

Together with the narrative of the approbation and printing of the Constitutions, we shall in this chapter consider Mother Rafols' life as an exemplar of the living Constitutions, the embodiment of the charism and other essential features of a religious life lived in the Church, like vows, exercises of piety, austerities, silence, the cloister and the common life.

There is also another important role, and a most difficult one, of the Constitutions, that is, to make the

charism practical and effective for every day life, in the absence of unambiguously clear surroundings of heroism. The sieges of Zaragoza had proved that charism and had shown the capabilities latent in it. Yet such events are not of daily occurrence. Then how is this heroic charity to be exercised? Are we to vow the practice of something that will never take place? The Constitutions give the answer: we vow heroic charity in the unspectacular heroism of the religious life in the Congregation. The Constitutions are a juridical help to discard fears, illusions, errors in the exercise of the charism. Better than this means there is no other. Heroic charity is to be expressed in real-symbolic actions, that is, actions that make *real* what they express, which unambiguously proceed from pure faith, hope and love. Faith, hope and love are Theological virtues, God-centred, not self-centred and so they have all the heroism of what is "beyond nature" and "above nature". Take for instance, the care of the poor sick. The *fact* of devoting a significant amount of time each day to seek the face of God in the sick is a radical and unambiguous expression of our love of Jesus Christ, not transfigured but disfigured (and thus demanding greater faith) in the suffering sick, in poor sinners. The care of the sick, then, is a real-symbolic act. If this is prolonged year after year, through the thick and thin of life, with the right intention of doing it exclusively for God's sake, it may amount to heroic charity.

Mother Maria who went through the agonizing hours of the sieges appears not less heroic now in her routine work of the foundlings, the sick, the upbuilding of the Sisterhood. That is to be *our* heroism.

I. Enshrining the charism in the Rule

On June 14th 1824 in the hall of meetings of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza, the Archdean of the Chapter Canons, Reverend Vincent Jimenez, President of the Honourable Sitiada sat together with the former regents of that respectable Board, re-established in their offices by the government of the Absolute Monarchy after having suppressed the Public Charity Board.

A new day of grace dawns for the Congregation of Sisters of Charity, tossed often until now on the waves of uncertainty, upheld only by a firm hope in the midst of so many sorrows. In that session were discussed the last conditions required for the canonical birth of the Sisterhood. The president presented the rules and Constitutions which had been approved in 1818. The Sitiada agreed to forward them officially to the Ordinary for their canonical approbation and to make them valid for their observance¹.

On the 28th of the same month they were handed to the Provisioner and Vicar General, during the vacancy of the Sec. Having examined them and heard the General Judge of the Archdiocese, he deigned to approve and confirm them on July 10th 1824. The Sitiada of July 15th decided to put them into practice, for which purpose they commissioned their President Vincent Jimenez. He obtained the permission to print them².

The sisters took the Constitutions as from the hand of God. The new Constitutions clearly described the

¹ Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op.cit.*, Ch. XXII, p. 180.

² Entrances of sisters. Book I. Novitiate Archive.

genuine charism of the Sisterhood. That charism had taken flesh and life in Father John and Mother Maria. It had been formulated by the same Father in the primitive rules he had given when he came to found. It had animated the first sisters, in fact not one of those sisters who made up the first sisterhood had failed in their commitment to Christ. "Eight died gloriously in the memorable sieges of this immortal city,"⁴ "another sister, sister Teresa Calvet, in 1807 went to Huesca to found that holy Hospital, and died in the odour of sanctity, after having set up the first branch of the nascent institute and helped its development with her edifying virtues." The remaining ones were "the superior, sister Tecla Canti then convalescent, sister Maria Rafols who was in a village recovering her health, and the third, sister Torrellas who had moved to the tower of the Gallego of this holy Hospital to further her recovery, for her health was in a precarious condition"⁵.

These three wounded sisters underwent a prolonged martyrdom to teach generations of younger sisters the demands of heroic charity.

From now onwards the sisters spent a year in the Novitiate, in a life of daily humble service, in the monotonous and heavy tasks so lovingly accepted.

Heroism for them consisted in following their hidden, simple way of love, meditating, praying, saying their

⁴ The Constitutions were printed in the press of the holy Hospital of Our Lady of Grace in the year 1824. Some few copies are preserved in the Novitiate House of Zaragoza.

⁵ Letter of Father Bonal to Ramon Gregorio Gomez, Sept. 13th, 1824. Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 189.

⁶ *Ibid.*

beads, serving the poor, educating the children, toiling in the care of the insane, following the adorable Master with pure joy and silent deeds.

2. Spiritual direction

In their ascent to the heights of the spiritual life the help of holy and wise direction was not wanting to them. On March 11th 1825, the president of the Sitiada sent a request to the rector of the St Charles Seminary, asking him once more to take charge of the spiritual direction of the Sisterhood. The answer came promptly, willingly accepting the obligation "since after having proposed the matter to the seminary staff, it had seemed good to all to accept that obligation, as it had been done previously in June 1805." Then the seminary had taken the spiritual direction of the Sisterhood, for "Reverend John Bonal was said to be away the greater part of the year, giving missions and collecting alms for the poor of the Hospital"⁶.

The zealous rector of the seminary, Reverend Narciso Olivas, did at no time neglect the duty he had just taken from the hands of God rather than from the Sitiada. Accordingly he began to prepare that small group of dedicated souls for the decisive and final commitment to God by means of their religious vows. The day was fast approaching when they were about to pronounce them. He gave them the Spiritual Exercises, during which he made clear to those souls, well-prepared with purifying labours and penances, and eager to receive more abundant grace, the hidden treasures implied in their oblation, and

⁶ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 181.

made desirable to them the sweetness of a life totally hidden in Christ.

3. First vows in the Congregation

On July 15th 1825 the first anniversary of the day when the Constitutions had begun to be put into practice, they kept a vigil in preparation for their vows. And on the following day, July 16th, Saturday "the Feast (in Spain) of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, and of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, at 11 a.m. the sisters pronounced their vows. They were gathered in the inner apartment of the sisters where they also had their chapel. The Archdean Major of St. Mary's, Rev. Vincent Jimenez, president and delegate of the Honourable Sitiada of the holy Hospital, presided over the ceremony. The spiritual director of the Sisterhood was also present. The sisters in order of seniority came up to the altar holding a lighted candle in their hand, and on their knees, each one read the formula expressed in the Constitutions. The Archdean had prepared them for this act with a brief exhortation on the act of surrender which they were about to offer to God. The names of the professing sisters were the following: sister Tecla Canti, president, sister Maria Rafols, Raimunda Torrellas, Teresa Rivera, Cecilia Aparicio, Mariana Bruned, Josefa Codina, Teresa Periu, Jeronima Carreras, Ana Maria Barbera, Serafina Valls, Nicolasa Jimeno Dolores, Munnoz"⁷.

As a pledge of the mystical spousal they received a little metal shield of the coat of arms of the Hospital, which "they shall wear on the right side of their chest"⁸.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸ *Constitutions 1824*, Ch. IV, p. 17.

This was the first step in their official renunciation of the world and all their attachments, in order to follow Jesus, poor and humble. The following stages in the journey were fixed by the Constitutions, "every year, on the day of the Annunciation of Our Lady, which is the Titular Feast of the House, they shall renew these vows in the presence of the president or director, who will exhort them to the faithful observance of them. This renovation shall be made until they have completed five years from the day of vestition. Then they shall take an oath of stability or perpetuity in the presence of any of the ecclesiastical governors, or any other priest appointed by the sisters. Sister president shall notify in advance to the Sitiada the name of the priest so that the president may empower him for that purpose. After this oath the vows will bind them for as long as they persevere in the Sisterhood"⁹.

Neither the servant of God nor her first selfless companions were in need of the prescribed five years before taking the oath of stability. Their vocation and their constancy and fidelity had already been tested during the long and calamitous twenty years between 1805 and 1825. They were entitled to a shortening of this period and to an immediate entrance into the promised land of their hopes and aspirations.

4. Final vows in the Congregation

"On the 15th of November 1825 at eleven a.m. in the inner apartment of the sisters where they have also their chapel in the presence of the Archdean

⁹ *Ibid.* Ch. VI, p. 17.

Major of St. Mary's Reverend Vincent Jimenez, president and delegate of the Honourable Sitiada of the holy General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, of this city of Zaragoza, in the presence of the sisters who were able to attend this act, of their spiritual director of Mother Teresa Canti, actual president of the Sisterhood, Mother Maria Rafols, sister Raimunda Torrellas and sister Rivera, promised God our Lord, and swore by touching the four gospels and a Crucifix, to remain for life in the Sisterhood of the Sisters of Charity of the said holy General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of this city of Zaragoza, serving in it according to its Constitutions and the vows they have taken. The Reverend Archdean had prepared them with a brief explanation and exhortation about the promise they were about to make. Those who had been commissioned, and the four sisters who had taken the oath, and the director, and two of the remaining sisters who had been present at the ceremony signed the present document"¹⁰.

This simple and inspiring ceremony came to an end. The holy day was spent in acts of thanksgiving. At dinner time the customary silence was broken to celebrate the glorious event, and some delicacies at table were added to the habitual frugality¹¹. There was a holy joy filling the hearts to overflowing. The night came, silent and soft, enveloped in the sweet fragrance of virtue. Those sisters had never slept more peacefully nor more pleasantly than on that night.

The foundation of the institute had been solidly established on those four solid pillars. The first three

¹⁰ Entrances of sisters. Novitiate Archive.

¹¹ Customs of the community from earlier times until our present days.

belonged to the original group that came with the Foundress. Sister Teresa Rivera had gone through the dangers and unexpected turns of the sieges with the same heroic spirit of sacrifice and immolation as her companions. She had joined the Sisterhood on June 15th, 1806¹².

5. A "new" or an old superior?

For the perfect observance of the Constitutions it was necessary now to elect a new president or Mother, since according to the same, "the office shall last only for three years"¹³, and Mother Tecla had been holding the office from 1812.

Once again, in this critical moment in the life of the institute, God cast His eyes on Mother Rafols. She had been all along the true mother destined by God to give life and warmth right from the Sisterhood's cradle.

"Two days before the date fixed for the election, the director requested them to proceed to the election without passion or human respect. On Sunday morning, April 16th 1826, he celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit, and in the evening at 6 p.m., in the presence of the Rt. Reverend Vincent Jimenez, president and delegate of the Honourable Sitiada, and of the director, they had the balloting, made the scrutiny and counted the ballots. The president declared that election had taken place and that the elected sister was Maria Rafols, according to the regulations laid down in the Constitutions of the Sisterhood"¹⁴.

¹² Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Novitiate Archive.

¹³ Constitutions 1824, p. 21. Novitiate Archive.

¹⁴ Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Acts of election of president, April 16th 1826. Novitiate Archive.

On the following day, April 17th, the president in his capacity, notified the election to the Sitiada, adding "immediately she asked me with insistence that I should accept her resignation in view of her poor health, for the reasons for which she had renounced the same office in 1811 were the same now, and even greater". The president added, "I have other reasons worth considering. This office is incompatible with the charge the sister has at present, of looking after the foundlings; serious inconvenience would follow if she was taken away from this charge, and also harm to the interests of the holy House, about which the secretary and the treasurer would be able to inform the Honourable Sitiada"¹³.

In spite of these solid reasons, God had decided otherwise. Mother Maria, in her humility, had tried her best to hide herself in the depths of her lowliness, the president judged her irreplaceable in the work she had in hands and remarked that the interests of the holy House would be harmed, since the fame of her holiness brought to the administrator a handsome amount of money in alms. Yet it was God who had decreed to raise her up for His purposes concerning the Sisterhood.

The Sitiada did not accept her resignation, nor had regard for the fears of the president concerning the foundlings, and so they approved the election. The servant of God accepted the office from His hands, and lovingly shouldered, for a second time, the burden of government. On April 26th, 1826 the election of a consultor took place and sister Raimunda Torrellas was elected to the office, Mother Tecla, according to

the Constitutions, was by right also a consultor, since she had been president¹⁴.

The only three survivors of the twelve who had come to found made the governing body of the institute at the beginning of this new period. The new era of the Sisterhood had begun with God's blessing.

On May 4th, sister Teresa Periu was elected mistress of novices, after the consultation held according to the Constitutions among the new president, her consultors and the director¹⁵.

6. A symbolic gesture

The first act of Mother Rafols' government was worthy of her heart and of her faith. On July 1st 1826, Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, she consecrated the institute to the most sacred Heart of Jesus, and enrolled the Sisterhood in the Pious Union of the Sacred Heart canonically erected in the Royal Church of the Imperial College of the Society of Jesus, in Madrid, by order of Rev. Father Provincial Mauricio Busqueto, S.J.¹⁶. This meaningful act of the devout Mother points out to one of the distinctive marks of the spirituality of the institute, the praise and worship of the sacred Heart of Jesus. The institute had chosen to be the object of His good pleasure and delight. The affectionate love of the Heart of Jesus, with stress on the spirit of adoration and atonement fostered by the Foundress of the institute from its inception, has been preserved among the sisters through

¹³ Constitutions 1824. Novitiate Archive.

¹⁴ Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Novitiate Archive.

¹⁵ A photocopy of this document is kept in the Novitiate Archive.

¹⁶ Calisanz Rabaza, *Sci. P. op.cit.* p. 185.

successive generations. It has given life and impetus to all the great enterprises of the institute"¹⁹,

The Sisterhood had now another haven and shelter. In the first period of its life the institute had its shield and refuge against the exterior enemies in the protection of Our Lady of the Pillar, under whose patronage so many conquests were achieved throughout the history of Spain. In the second period, just begun, the institute had its haven and shelter against more subtle enemies, and against the destructive powers from within, in the Heart of a Father, a Friend, a Beloved Spouse, the supreme Ruler of the Sisterhood. Jesus, by a movement of His compassionate Heart will henceforward rule the Sisterhood, leading it along mysterious ways, unknown to human prudence, towards the accomplishment of His lofty designs. He secured its propagation, He became its pilot.

Mother Rafols rested satisfied. Henceforward nothing will be able to perturb or discourage her.

7. New arrivals

On that solemn day of the consecration there were present three postulants²⁰. From 1820 there have been no entrances registered in the book. After her election, a number of souls, led as it were by the fame of her extraordinary virtue universally acknowledged in Zaragoza, joined the institute. Unquestionably they came to take shelter in that cenacle guarded by the walls of silence, to follow the sublime ideals they could

¹⁹ Beautiful details about this subject can be found in the life of Mother Pabla Bescos, Tarazona.

²⁰ Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Novitiate Archive.

see in the life and behaviour of the venerable superior. Without words she had revealed to them the virtues of her heart, or better, the virtues of Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, for she in the process of her spiritual progress, had "put on Christ".

The first to don the habit were sisters Pilar Miguela Codina, Francisca Maya and Gervasia Domenech²¹. In their youthfulness they were a source of joy and fervour to the early sisters who saw in the new branches, promising fruits of virtue, through which moved the sap that feeds heroines and saints.

The number of young girls seeking admission in the Sisterhood was never interrupted during the three years of her mandate.²² On June 21st 1827 sister Madgalena Hecho, born in Huesca, donned the habit. On January 25th 1828 and on February 17th three more sisters, and the fourth one on December 13th. Finally, on March 29th 1829 sister Teresa Torrens donned the habit. Her vestition had special solemnity, since His Lordship Bishop Bernardo Frances, who had been her director in La Seo de Urgel, gave her the habit in the oratory of the Lay-Sisters of the Soup²³.

8. More than any Rule

The sisters found in Mother Maria a practical guide who helped them to ascend to the summits towards which they were called, "joining great sweetness to a salutary energy in correcting", and "correcting in them even the least defect, in order to make them

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chronicle of the institute. Novitiate Archive.

perfect religious"⁴⁴. They could see in her, through a vision of faith, the inspiring beauty of the ideal of a Sister of Charity. Full of deeds of goodness and mercy, "she exercised towards the sick all the works of mercy, both spiritual and bodily, comforting them in their sufferings and sorrows, trying to cheer them up and taking very special care in preparing them to receive the holy sacraments"⁴⁵.

Above all, they had in her a loving heart ever ready to love and protect them, preserve them in the right spirit and defend them from all harm with her self-sacrificing charity. We have an example of all these three attitudes in a case concerning sister Raimunda Torrellas. A denunciation was brought to the Sitiada against sister Raimunda Torrellas who was in charge of the insane. It was about the keeping of the linen in the wardrobe. In answer to the accusations the sister explained "that with the product of certain transactions she had managed to make, she had obtained enough shirts to have a change for the male and female insane. About five hundred shirts had been made in all, and the female insane had also now bed sheets". This Sitiada asked for further information about it from the interim Majordomo, Don Mariano Alonso and from Mother President, requesting them to explain what was to be done in this case.

Mother Rafols answered in an exposition which is a model not only of exactness, charity and vigour, but also of a clear document giving much light about the manner of dealing with the insane and keeping up the wardrobe and supply of linen. She spoke in vindica-

⁴⁴ Ordinary Process. Witness XI, no. 9, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Witness VIII, no. 8 p. 45.

tion of the honest and practical way of acting of her beloved daughter and companion of the first days of the Sisterhood. She had acted wisely in order to make up for the inadequate amount of supplies in her department. Her behaviour was deserving of praise and not of condemnation. The Sitiada "was appraised of the above information and acquiesced in all the representations made, only two additions were to be made, first that sister Raimunda should be given thanks for her zeal in promoting the interests of this holy Hospital, procuring by her own resources means to provide clothes to the insane⁴⁶; secondly, that for her own pleasure she might be allowed to have four or five pairs of pigeons to improve the quality of food on certain extraordinary days. In this manner sister Raimunda had been protected, defended and her good name preserved by Mother president.

Mother Maria was "most observant of the rules of the institute, even in their slightest details," and so she could lead others to their faithful observance with the efficacy of her example⁴⁷.

She was specially conspicuous for her exactitude in the exercises of piety. In Ch. XV of the Constitutions we read about the particular exercises of piety the sisters had to practise. From there the servant of God drew inspiration and guidance. "She was most devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, she made visits every day before and after her work. These visits were most frequent during the night, and the sisters knew where to find her"⁴⁸. She was very particular about the beauty and

⁴⁶ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 197-98.

⁴⁷ Ordinary Process. Document 58, paragr. 30.

⁴⁸ Testimony of the contemporaries handed down in the institute to the present day.

splendour in the cult of the Holy Eucharist. Her daughters, following the example of her devotion, got up from their beds to worship the Holy Eucharist, and so for this reason there was always one sister or other at the foot of the Tabernacle³⁹.

Her prayer was continual and her greatest delight was to spend long hours before the Tabernacle wrapped in the contemplation of Our Lord's mysteries, especially those of His Passion which used to move her to the point of shedding tears. She made the Stations of the Cross daily, and often she moved from one station to another on her knees. Her confessions were brief, and she communicated as often as the rule allowed them, that is, on Thursdays, Sundays, Feast days of the Apostles, and other important Feasts. She approached Holy Communion with such recollection that the other sisters were inspired to greater fervour⁴⁰. She held in great esteem the practice of the annual Spiritual Exercises which she made for ten days, and the monthly recollection to which practice she attached great importance. She started it on the evening of Saturday till Monday morning, keeping silence so strictly that she did not utter a word⁴¹.

Besides the moments of prayer she was fully active, "never idle even during her sicknesses, she would get up at night to help the sisters who were watching the sick, advising them to shun idleness as a means to avoid sin"⁴².

³⁹ Ordinary Process, Witness XI, no. 5, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Testimony of sister Esperanza Carles who used to tell this to the sisters.

⁴¹ Ordinary Process, Witness III, no. 5, p. 31.

⁴² Ibid. Witness XI, no. 9, p. 59.

Her health continued to deteriorate and her life seemed to be a perpetual miracle. Only the interior flame was keeping her alive. To the sisters it was a cause of joy to see her entering the wards, or meet her walking along the corridors with "her polite manners and noble countenance which were a revelation of her sinless soul"⁴³. She was communicative in a very lovable manner, thus contributing with that openness to the solace of her daughters in the midst of the heavy tasks of the day. From her dealings they learned those three virtues which, according to St. Francis of Assisi, are like three sisters who make the soul good and happy, humility, charity and joy.

At night she never forgot her former role of mistress and comforter of her daughters. Those evening recreations, so much looked for by the sisters, in the now remote days of the Foundation, were held even now in an atmosphere of greater and more radical poverty and penury, which favoured greater intimacy. How holy the outpourings of the heart of the experienced Mother before her young daughters! In those enjoyable hours, free from all other occupations, the sisters tasted in the conversations with the good Mother, the sweetness, of Christ Himself. With ineffable joy they felt how sweet was the yoke and how light was the burden of the Cross.

The ordinary topics of her conversation were "the love of God and neighbour, anything and everything that would encourage them the following day to the love of greater sacrifice"⁴⁴, "warning to guard them-

⁴³ Ibid. Witness XIV.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Document 58, quoted above.

selves against possible dangers they could meet"³⁵, chiefly of the danger of vainglory (recommending them not to speak of the works of charity, lest the devil might keep the best part),³⁶ and of dissipation. "She used to describe the holy Hospital as a sacred place sanctified by human sorrow. She expected from her daughters the greatest recollection in the cloisters and in the wards of the sick, where they were not to talk without real need. The first sisters learned from her to speak only edifying words when they met"³⁷.

9. More than eloquent speeches

She was a model in keeping silence, as in all other things. "Her natural inclination led her to seclusion and silence, and no one saw her talking along the corridors, nor did she permit the sisters to talk in her presence useless words. On this account she was not less polite and kind, talking when the fulfilment of her duties so required"³⁸.

Such a voiceless way of instructing brought about deep and lasting effects. First, she was very particular in the choice of personnel, "herself testing carefully the qualities, virtues and aptitudes, and submitting the final decision of admission or refusal to the judgement of the confessor, and sometimes even to the Bishop's judgement"³⁹. Secondly, she taught by the unction and extreme kindness of her instructions.

³⁵ Ordinary Process. Witness III, no. 5, p. 31.

³⁶ Ibid. no. 8, p. 44-45.

³⁷ Testimony of the contemporaries.

³⁸ Ordinary Process. Document 58.

³⁹ Testimony of sister Esperanza Carles.

Her contemporaries, if we are to judge by the liveliness with which they narrated it, seemed to hear still the soft and spiritual accents of the Mother, when she would tell her religious sisters, "My daughters, let us not be ambitious, let us live our today, for tomorrow is in good hands, in God's hands. If we are humble and trust in God's providence, He will satisfy all our needs"⁴⁰. Or when she exhorted them to have a pure and delicate conscience, to foster a habit of continual prayer and interior life, without which the labours of a Sister of Charity can hardly be borne"⁴¹. Or when she requested them to join her in her supplications and penances, "for she fervently prayed to God for herself and for her daughters that they might be very holy and lovers of sacrifice"⁴². On few occasions also she would allow her fervent love of God to be outwardly manifested in a persuasive eloquence, of few words but of burning zeal which consumed her soul. "If she met a patient difficult to deal with; said the senior sisters, "she spent many hours with arms outstretched praying for him, adding some penance to this end".

10. Love longs to suffer

Every one loved her company. Her amazing mortifications, far from frightening any one, inspired the desire to imitate them. "Even when she was sick, she would eat very little," her habit was so worn out and patched "that when she died, Mother Raimunda Oliver (who was her contemporary and superior at Magallon), had to lend her own habit to expose the

⁴⁰ Testimony of sisters Teresa Domenech and Esperanza Carles.

⁴¹ Ordinary Process. Witness XIV.

⁴² Ibid. Witness XX, no. 7, p. 40.

corpse decently clad. She was very mortified and penitent"⁴³. Her continual indispositions were not an excuse to discontinue the practice of scourging and afflicting her body with all kinds of rigour.

Her spirit of austerity and mortification was veiled by that mantle of sweetness and affability which she always showed, specially in her dealings with the community. Sister Magdalena Hecho (who later became president General for many years), fell sick during her novitiate. The economical resources of the community were very few, and the sickness required great expenditure; the good Mother had no fears, for "though the amount of money could not take us very far, the amount of charity stretched out beyond all limits, and as a true poor of Christ she went out to beg from people well disposed towards the Sisterhood", and she succeeded with her great concern to save the vocation of one who was to give so much glory to God.

In August 1828 she asked the Sitiada for "two days' leave to accompany a sister from Huesca who was sick in the Hospital and was eager to return to her place"⁴⁴. She loved to please her sisters, as far as she was able, with some sweet-meat or fruit, and in her sickness she would never taste any delicious dish served to her unless the sister who brought it shared it with her. One day they brought her raisins as dessert. "Mother Rafols, as it was her custom, kept the smallest amount. The Sister, seeing this kind deed, refused to accept the remainder, and burst into tears, for she confessed that in the way she had eaten some few raisins. She kindly corrected her, making her realize that

⁴³ Ibid. Witness VII, no. 11, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Register of Sitiadas 1828, Hospital Archive.

though the fault was slight, yet in a religious it was to be considered great, for in all her actions should shine the splendour of a delicate conscience."⁴⁵

The pious sentiments of her most kind heart were best revealed in her dealings with those sisters who were tempted to abandon their vocation. Her patience with them knew no limits. The weak sisters ordinarily ended by believing in God's mercy and throwing themselves into His arms.

She loved them with compassionate love and could not bear to see them treated with hardness, even when it was to correct their misbehaviour. "Once one sister, showing little charity to another who seemed to have lost her vocation, gave the opportunity to Mother Rafols of rebuking her. She told her to show more charity to those who were tempted, for it might well happen that one day she herself could be tempted and fall. This was what actually took place, for some time later that sister left the Congregation with great scandal"⁴⁶.

Time was gliding away, but the characteristic spirit of the Congregation was being fixed and consolidated with her prudent, wise, discreet and motherly direction. God had so planned that from the end of her second term as president till 1887, the year in which Mother Magdalena Hecho died, the highest government of the Congregation was in the hands of those sisters who had been directly trained by the servant of God. They preserved the examples and teachings of their venerable Mother as a precious treasure and heirloom.

⁴⁵ Ordinary Process, Document 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Witness III, no. 17, p. 79-80.

11. A new descent before the final ascension

On April 22nd 1829 Mother Teresa Periu was elected president, and the Foundress went back to her beloved seclusion in that corner of the Hospital among the little ones. A short time later, in August of the same year 1829, her grateful heart nearly broke with the sad news of the death of Father John Bonal, who from the shrine of Zuera took his flight to heaven to receive the reward of his heroic virtues.

Her days passed in an atmosphere of peace and silence, rich in merit, yet uneventful to the eyes of the world. She continued, however, to be the sentinel of the institute, keeping it safe from all possible dangers. She was the irreplaceable procurator too when favours or privileges were to be obtained for the Sisterhood. Thus in 1823, in connection with the death of sister Ana Maria Barbera, Mother Rafols accompanied by Mother Teresa and the director approached the Vicar-General to obtain the privilege of being considered as cloistered sisters, exempted from the Royal Order that commanded that the bodies of non-cloistered sisters should be taken to cemeteries lying outside the towns. Sister Ana Maria was buried in the pantheon of the Hospital⁴⁷.

Now everything was ready to pluck the martyr's palm if not by blood then by love.

⁴⁷ Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Novitiate Archive.

CHAPTER X

"MY IMPRISONMENT IS FOR CHRIST" Phil. 1, 3.

Love and the Cross are two inseparable realities. "The Cross is very beautiful and the best remedy to sanctify the soul" seems to have been the words of Mother Rafols. Love of the Cross, the secret of the holiness of all saints, was to be a distinctive feature of the Sisters of Charity. Jesus on the Cross, with His open Heart is the centre of their spiritual and religious life. We find at this stage of her life the mystery of the Cross casting its radiance and shadows in all the material and spiritual aspects of the mystery: persecutions, betrayal, humiliations, labours, enmity, banishment. This was the rich harvest Mother Rafols gathered in the period of her life we are to narrate.

1. Persecutions for justice sake

When King Ferdinand VII died of a stroke of apoplexy, the politicians drew a sombre picture of the future of the country. The first problem was, who was to be the heir to the throne? This problem more than a dynastic problem (Ferdinand had no son to succeed him but a daughter), it was a problem of ideology between the traditional and Catholic sense of life and the liberal ideas of the French revolution. Through the influence of the free-masons those ideas had percolated into the minds of the people, poisoning the majority of them with liberal ideas.

From that time on, throughout that century, there is hardly a period relatively peaceful. Fratricidal

battles with much blood-shedding, unspeakable hatred ending in mob violence, political instability of governments succeed one after another without ever being able to dominate the situation. Governments were busy issuing decrees and denunciations against religious orders, trying to appease the voracious hunger of the mob but in reality voraciously increasing it. Horrid crimes were perpetrated at midday in the streets and they went unpunished. Those who climbed to power inflicted frightful vengeance on their competitors, only to fall down next smashed under the weight of adversity. Day and night, in the city and in the country-side, in Spain and abroad conspiracies were plotted to overthrow private enemies. Uncertainty lashed the minds, misery spread wide and undermined the foundations of society, threatening to bury with the collapse of institutions everything beautiful and lofty that had been built with most praiseworthy endeavours by a believing and missionary country.

Religious orders had been suppressed, but the Sisterhood of the Hospital of Zaragoza was exempted from the total ban. The institute was too small to attract the attention of anyone. Yet the influence so widely exercised by it could not but be felt by the powers of evil. Attempts were made to check or even suppress that influence. Besides, the Foundress of the institute was a too remarkable character, an outstanding personality to be ignored or to pass unnoticed. The glorious episodes of the sieges of Zaragoza, in which she had taken an active part, were in the mouths of all¹. So many accusations were directed against her.

¹ Written information of Antonia Belzume, a witness in the Apostolic Process. Novitiate Archive.

Hardly any riot or tumult in Zaragoza did not result in a more or less open persecution against the Sisterhood. There were many enemies of right order within the walls of the Hospital. Protected under the cover of law, and knowing that they could act with impunity, they tried on some occasions even to kill her. It is a miracle how she remained alive. There was a real plot to do away with her.

The long period between 1820 and 1853, the year when she died, attempts were made by all possible means to obstruct the progress of her plans, to cow down her resolute spirit, to check the charitable distribution of alms she so lavishly spent for the benefit of the sick in the Hospital and in the city.

God permitted these hardships to purify the soul of His servant, marking her with the seal of the elect, the Cross of Jesus Christ, and to crown her with the halo of those who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness. The Cross had been her inheritance from a most tender age.

On February 27th 1834 investigations begun to find the cause of a supposed conspiracy against the Queen. Times were difficult. Civil war broke, so intent on extermination that General Zumalacarregrui had to restrain his men from the total destruction of the enemies, with these words, "young men, that's enough! Stop! Spare those who are defeated!"

At the beginning of the same year several leaders of the party of the pretender King Carlos had been shot. The mere suspicion of being one of his followers was already a treason. Therefore, all those who were suspected, or involved in true or false accusations or in

any plot, so frequent at that time, tried hurriedly to go into hiding or to escape.

2. Victim of her own charity

Mother Rafols was too innocent and too charitable to be able to escape all traps. She lived in that quiet seclusion of the Hospital, in the department of the foundlings, a peaceful kingdom of charity and affection, far removed from the political turmoil raging outside. Her all-embracing charity, her unsuspecting character, her determination and fearlessness in moments of danger were too well-known in the city.

"Some noble people whose life was sought for" had recourse to her. She hid them². In the Sitiada of May 12th 1824 "Senor Arias communicated that, while the Count of Sobradiel, regent of the week, was making his visit in the evening of the previous day, May 11th, Don Joaquim Carbonell entered the Hospital by order of, or sent as commissioner of the Magistrate of the Military Commission, to arrest Mother Maria Rafols and take her to the jail of the Inquisition. This was done with great politeness on the part of the Commissioner. The Sitiada took notice of the case"³.

3. Her way of the Cross.

The scene of Mother Rafols' farewell was most pathetic. The unusual sight, the unforeseen turn of events, the flagrant injustice against the exemplary religious who had spent her life in tragic days to save

² Letter of sister Mauricia in answer to the circular letter of Mother General asking information about Mother Rafols. See Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 211.

³ Register of Sitiadas. See Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. Ibid. 204.

Zaragoza, and the deep affection the children, the sick and the sisters felt toward her, summoned round her in an instant that large family who lived under her maternal care. A universal outpouring of laments, sighs, and weeping burst from the hearts of those people. Neither the pain of the calumny, nor the ill-treatment, nor the desolation of those who loved her well, could in any way alter the equanimity of that brave soul, or disturb the peace of her countenance. "With a smile and with calmness she comforted the sisters, requesting them to show great love to the sick, for it was very painful to her to have to leave them. She recommended herself to their prayer, and promised to pray for them. She recommended to them to accept the will of God who permitted all that was happening"⁴.

The sisters accompanied her to the gates of the Hospital, and there they remained weeping. It was a sad way across the streets of Zaragoza, accompanied by those who had been commissioned to take her and by two sisters who shed tears profusely. How many times she had gone along those streets, leaving behind a luminous path, scattering all kind of benefits, but now she could not find there any one to look friendly at her or any one to come to her defence. The bitterness of that Via-Crucis was great. Every minute seemed like an eternity. Finally, they arrived at the place and she entered the prison and gates were closed behind her. Behind the prison bars she gave the last farewell to the two sisters, "who bid adieu to their Mother" with a heart transfixed with sorrow, while tears flowed from their eyes. They heard again "the same recommendations made to all when she had left the Hospital"⁵.

⁴ Ordinary Process. Witness VIII, no. 12.

⁵ Ibid.

She, too, shed a few tears when she found herself alone in that prison. Yet her peace was absolute, for she knew by experience that "wherever they might take her, the Fatherly love of God would follow after". She had now ample time to meditate, to taste the gall of that unjust imprisonment with all the aggravating circumstances of desertion and betrayal. How different their treatment towards her from what they had done earlier with other sisters, when in July 14th 1829, the regents of the Sitiada had been shocked to hear that the superintendant of the Criminal Branch of investigation had summoned to the office of Senor Boneta sister Ana Maria Bruned to give information. They officiously answered that, "the Sitiada in consideration to a Sisterhood so praiseworthy and well deserving of all esteem, could not but represent that the said sister, thought bound only with simple vows, is yet a religious and as such wearing the habit. They had succeeded in obtaining that a secretary should come to the Hospital and there receive the requested declaration. And they had made known, by Sitiada of August 23rd, that "the precedent case shall serve as the norm for cases which may arise in future".

Later on, they had obtained the same exception, in favour of sisters Antonia Torrens and Gervasia Domenech⁴. Why then did they not take any step now to help her? Why the cold remark, "the Sitiada took notice of it"? They had let her be exposed to public shame and undergo the humiliation of being taken to prison, guarded by two constables, along the public streets, exposed to the vulgar and perhaps hostile gaze of the passers-by since antireligious feelings were distinctive signs of the times.

⁴ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 205-206.

4. The betrayer

The most painful and tormenting thought of her sensitive heart was that, "a sister who was overeager to become sister president was the one who had reported to certain gentlemen, who were like ministers of the Parliament, her act of charity with the intention that she should be ousted from Zaragoza"⁷.

Mother Rafols, in her tribulation, could repeat with the psalmist, "even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." Ps. 41, 9. This sorrow surpassed any other sorrow of her well-tryed life. To her noble soul this pain was more piercing than the sight of the orphan children, more than the ill-will of the workers of the Hospital, more even than the death of her heroic daughters or the failure in the vocation of others, all those sufferings were as naught compared with the wound inflicted on this occasion. Her generous heart completely forgave, from the first moment, "and no one ever heard her speaking evil or complaining of any one"⁸.

Within her institute the devil had succeeded in fostering such mean sentiments, and outside he was raising political debates and suspicions against her by means of calumny and persecution, with the only purpose of spoiling her good name.

In the meantime her daughters were moving heaven and earth to obtain the release of their mother on bail. The military advocate dispatched the legal document without difficulty. The president of the Commission

⁷ Letter of sister Mauricia, quoted above.

⁸ Ibid.

passed it on to the official magistrate, and the sisters sought for the powerful influence of the Senor Count of Sobradiel to plead before the magistrate. The case followed its course. On May 24th, Don Joaquin Jovellar, Lieutenant Colonel, advocate of the military commission, officially writing to the chief Major-domo of the Hospital, summoned as witnesses four maidservants of the Hospital who once more, on July 11th, had "to ratify their former declaration made in the prosecution against Mother Rafols and the Sennora Countess of Villamur"⁹.

During the two months imprisonment the servant of God, with admirable meekness, exercised her zeal among the other women who were with her in the same prison. They happily used to come to her captivated by a supernatural attraction they felt towards her. At the end of two months she was left free, since "the Magistrate was all the time of the opinion that nothing could come out from the whole investigation"¹⁰

5. The scourge of plague

At this juncture a terrible epidemic of cholera broke out. It had been infesting Andalusia and was spreading now all over Spain. In Madrid there were many cases of that frightful disease. Ignorant crowds, persuaded by the freemasons and in complicity with the authorities, plotted on July 17th a heinous slaughter of Friars in the Convent of St. Francis, of Mercy, of St. Thomas and the Jesuits of St. Isidor (Toledo street). The scourge arrived also in Zaragoza. The small group

⁹ Process, fol. 412, Doc. XX.

¹⁰ Exposition of Mother Rafols to the Honourable Sitiada, on July 24th 1836.



M. Rafols requested pardon for the Spanish Patriots



They granted her estates...



Prison in which M. Maria was for two months

of heroines of the Hospital, faithful to their glorious tradition, and encouraged by the presence of their Mother and Foundress, "laboured with great zeal and charity, inside and outside the Hospital, so as to deserve praise from the citizens and authorities"¹¹.

The wards of the Hospital were crowded, and the "insufficient number of beds caused great distress to the servant of God. Some few medical students of the last year of Medicine offered their services during the epidemic. The County House decided to reward them. Witnesses of the distress and suffering of Mother Maria for not being able to offer the sick the comfort she would have liked, they unanimously agreed to buy beds with the sum granted to them, and give Mother Rafols that satisfaction. She was deeply touched by their gift offered to her poor sick for whom she was giving her very life"¹².

The case against her was not yet over. She was ignorant of how all would end. Sick and exhausted by sufferings and hardships she continued, nevertheless, to keep a watchful eye on the children and the sick of the Hospital. She secured some income for the exhausted treasury and infused new courage into the sisters. She deserved only rest, but God knew the strength of her heart and the power of the surrender she had made of her total self. Sister Casiana Bardones informs us that "in the persecutions she underwent she showed always great resignation and admirable patience and meekness. She never uttered a word of

¹¹ Chronicle of the institute. Novitiate Archive.

¹² Information of Donna Antonia Belzunce in the Apostolic Process. She had heard it from her father who was one of the students of Medicine referred to in the information.

complaint against her persecutors, believing and proclaiming that such was the will of God to which she ought to submit herself joyously"¹³.

6. Sent to banishment

"On April 10th 1835, Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, in Sitiada, Senor Arias declared that he had been informed that the Royal Tribunal of crimes having gone through the case brought against Mother Maria Rafols found that she was not guilty of complicity. However, she is sentenced to banishment to the town of her birth. On account of her sickness she wants to appeal to this Tribunal"¹⁴. She did in fact appeal not to protest against that unjust sentence, but to beseech that since she had to go to banishment, she might be sent to Huesca, among her daughters. Her appeal was granted¹⁵.

Why should she talk or protest before those unworthy judges who did not find any cause to condemn her, proclaimed her innocent and yet they passed sentence of banishment? There was no other reason for such an extreme penalty than the judgement "of the Royal Tribunal that deemed that her presence in this city might not be conducive to peace in those circumstances of turmoil, and so should be confined to the city of Huesca, more as a political manouvre than as a sentence of justice"¹⁶.

The victim was ready for sacrifice. In Sitiada of May 7th "following upon a resolution of April 10th,

¹³ Ordinary Process, Witness VIII, no. 12, p. 66.

¹⁴ Ibid. Doc. XX, fol. 411.

¹⁵ Ibid. Doc. XXII, fol. 413.

¹⁶ Ibid. Doc. XXVI, quoted above.

Mother Maria declared that she had an appeal to the Royal Tribunal of crime, and was allowed to go to the city of Huesca. She was ready to set out immediately". A few days later, after May 11th Senor Arias, in Sitiada, reported "that last Saturday Mother Maria had bidden him farewell to set out for Huesca where she was due to proceed yesterday, as in fact she did"¹⁷. Official documents are silent, or rather non-existing, about this whole process. We can well imagine that the farewell before the banishment surpassed in pathos the departure for the prison.

To certain extent the banishment was to the Sisterhood more painful than the imprisonment. While she was in prison they had the compensating joy of visiting her, two by two, every day. They could bring her soup in a little tureen and offer her the solace of their company and loyalty. Now everything had vanished and she was far away in exile. Before leaving, they had grouped together round her, anxious to gaze for the last time on her kind and sweet smiling face, and hear her last recommendations. As she had told the sisters before going to jail, so now too "the servant of God told them to show great charity to the poor, and to bear all things for the love of God. The sick people who were able to witness that scene, cried in the midst of lamentations, "how is it possible that they treat thus Mother Maria who is such a great saint!"¹⁸ In that journey she was accompanied by a maid-servant of her confidence whose name was Teresica. Years later she used to tell Mother Badenas "how sad

¹⁷ It is interesting to know that after thorough investigation in many different official Archives of Zaragoza and other cities, no document has been found referring to the case of 1834 against Mother Rafols.

¹⁸ Ordinary Process, Witness VIII, no. 13, p. 66.

that journey to banishment had been, and many other things about the holiness of Mother Maria, and that they had banished her not for any evil whatsoever but for her great love of the neighbour"¹⁸. Her daughters of Huesca welcomed her with great love and assigned to her the best room in their House. This little room where she was to suffer so much during the six years of her banishment has been providentially preserved intact. During the Spanish Civil war of 1936-39 one shell fell in that cell and ought to have destroyed it, but it made no impact on it, not even the bulb that was lighting the room was broken. The generosity of the County House renewed the old building and the devotion of her daughters have beautifully restored the little cell, full of so many memories and a silent witness of the tears and sorrows of the beloved Mother.

The Sitiada of Zaragoza "having in mind the good services that the said Mother has rendered for over thirty years in this holy House, and judging her to be in need of help for her own livelihood, decided that in the event of her departure she would be helped with 400 reals for the journey and six reals daily for as long as she is absent from this holy Hospital"¹⁹. The amount was made effective at the moment of her departure.

The life of the servant of God during her banishment was marked by the shadow of the Cross. "Her health, already fast deteriorating came to be ruined with the last stroke received in the case of the presumed conspiracy of February 27th 1834"²⁰. She never went out

of her cell except to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. Frequently she was confined to her bed, exhausted from her sickness and the nostalgic remembrance of her dear Hospital of Zaragoza. The delicate services of her daughters of Huesca could hardly mitigate the sufferings which had come upon her. Prayer was her only occupation. "Quiet and patient she was often found praying and shedding copious tears"²¹. In these intimate encounters with God she found the spring of ineffable sweetness. Here her faith was strengthened, her hope renewed, her tears dried up, her charity rekindled, and from her heart a universal forgiveness would be imparted to all her persecutors who had provided her with so many means of increasing her merits.

7. Loving her enemies

"She had great love for her enemies and persecutors, she not only pardoned them from her heart but showed herself ready to give her life for them if need arose. She did not speak evil of any one and never uttered a word of resentment"²². The choice subject of her meditations was the passion of Jesus. She would contemplate it with arms outstretched before the Crucifix she always wore on her. When some sister or other found her unawares, she would kindly smile and say, "the Cross is very beautiful and the best remedy to sanctify souls"²³.

¹⁸ Information of Mother Badenas to Don Marceliano Casado, Notary of the Diocesan Curia.

¹⁹ Sitiada of April 10th. See Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op.cit.* p. 208.

²⁰ Ordinary Process. Doc. XXVI, quoted above.

²¹ Letter of Sister Mauricia, quoted above.

²² Ordinary Process. Witness XII, no. B, p. 47-48.

²³ Information of sister Esperanza Carlos, from whom several sisters heard the narrative.

the many. She could say "I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" for the good of His body, the Church and in it the Sisterhood.

The sisters of Huesca said that she was languishing, of sheer exhaustion and weakness, but her large heart unmindful of her own afflictions, would continue to show concern for her own sisters and for others. The works of charity revealed in a letter written from her banishment show great interest for the village of Beecha.

Her strength was visibly giving way, and "fearing her approaching death" she prayed "that they bring her to die in her beloved Hospital of Grace"²⁹.

God was pleased to hear the humble request of his servant. The time of her banishment was coming to an end. Her desires were to be satisfied, not however without much pain for her daughters of Huesca. They always thought it a blessing of God to have had her so long. She left to them as an inheritance the remembrance of her heroic virtues and, in the depth of their souls, an ineffable sweetness.

²⁹ Letter of sister Mauricia to Mother General, quoted above.

"CHRIST WILL BE HONOURED BY LIFE
OR BY DEATH" Phil. 1, 20

The death of the saints is very much like their life. They glorify and serve God and edify people by death as much as they did by their life. The example of their patience and fortitude, and the exercise of many other virtues shine then even more brilliantly than at any other moment of their lives. There is no doubt that the last hours and death of Jesus contained more striking lessons for our Christian living than the many examples of His hidden and public life. The passing of the saints carry in those few last days or hours all the holiness and merits of their entire lives. They complete the Paschal mystery in union with Christ through living faith and love of the eternal goods which Christ merited for them through the incomparable sufferings of His temporal life and death.

The Sisterhood had a final message in the final years of Mother Rafols' life.

1. Welcome back to Zaragoza

On June 2nd 1841 Don Antonio de la Figuera and Don Manuel Cantini, president and secretary respectively of the Charity Board of Zaragoza, addressed the following official communication to the Board of Huesca: "Honourable Sir, on April 13th last, Maria Rafols, a sister of Charity belonging to the community of this Hospital, had recourse to this Board. She resides in that city from 1835, and she requests that permission be granted to her to return to this charitable institution,

since the reasons for which she was ousted from Zaragoza no longer exist. This Board has no difficulty whatsoever in granting her request. The Board, having no doubt that the said sister will make use of this resolution to return to this Hospital, believes it would be failing in its duty if it did not express to Your Excellency its gratitude and recognition for the good reception and help offered to her during the time she remained there under Your Excellency's protection"¹.

The Board of Huesca sent an immediate reply to that communication with a warm eulogy of Mother María, since "due to her good behaviour during her long stay in this Hospital of Huesca she is worthy of every consideration"².

On June 13th of this same year³ she entered the Hospital of Grace of Zaragoza, after returning from banishment, and was received with a delirious joy, "all welcoming her with great signs of enthusiasm, and the very same persons who had been the cause of her banishment took part in the demonstration, acknowledging her innocence and great virtues"⁴.

To the sisters, more than to any one else, this fortunate event appeared to be like a dream. How many things they had to tell one another! During her absence many things had happened in the Hospital which her well-known foresight, watchfulness and prudence would have easily avoided. The Sitiada had punished the sisters for an act of courage and bravery. The

¹ Ordinary Process, Doc. LXVI, fol. 471.

² *Ibid.*, Doc. XVII, fol. 472.

³ Register of Schedules 1841, bundle 246, p. 12, Hospital Archive. Quoted by Guallard, *op.cit.*, p. 302.

⁴ Calasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op.cit.*, p. 229.

sisters had condemned a public scandal given by a medical practitioner and a maidservant of the surgery ward. Senor Marraco, of the Charity Board, in July 1837 had succeeded, against the opinion of the other fellows of the same Board, in imposing a fine on the sisters. Mother Periu insistently appealed on grounds of justice and fairness⁵. "Never during the long stay of Mother Maria in the Hospital had there been any disagreement or difference of opinion among doctors, practitioners or members of the governing Body of the Hospital. She always had tried with extreme prudence to see that good harmony should prevail among all"⁶, and she had succeeded, due to "the gift God had granted her of settling quarrels, since her mere presence and her words were sufficient to bring about peace"⁷.

Now they had her with them, and with her presence they felt that they were defended, guarded and protected. Soon they were to experience it.

2. Guardian of the Sisterhood

On May 10th 1841 General Espartero began his Regency of the kingdom. Donna Christina, on July 18th, protested against it. The moderate opposition increased in numbers and joined the protest of the ex-Regent Queen. The leaders of this political movement were Isturiz and Montes de Oca. The first to raise the standard of rebellion was General O'Donnell in Pamplona, on September 20th 1841. This first attempt had profound repercussions in Zaragoza, and General Borso di Carminati was shot.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶ Ordinary Process, Witness V, no. 9, p. 58.

⁷ Information of sister Esperanza Carlos.

Taking advantage of the political upheavals the workers of the Hospital tried again to use violence against the sisters, "they suffered much during the political changes and religious persecutions in Spain at the time. Some ruffians appeared in the Hospital threatening the life of the sisters. Mother Rafols told them, "you may kill me, but leave the sisters alone." These words had such an effect that the ruffians went away doing no harm to them⁸.

After her return Mother Rafols took charge again of the Hospice, the field of her devotion and labours. Her constant zeal and personal success had made her not only indispensable but also irreplaceable.⁹ The charity Board of the Hospital and the Ladies Association of the Hospice were warm in praising her for the diligent care she took of the children, "with whose zeal this Association is very much pleased". She was wanted for new services, like the supervision of wet-nurses, "since this Commission is fully aware of the good qualities found in Sister Maria, and so it will be very pleased if Your Excellency deemed it good to assign her to this task"¹⁰.

3. Mother Maria retires

As the light of the sun is beautiful even when it sets, Mother Maria's life was running to its setting and till the last moment the light of her virtues and examples was a thing of charm.

⁸ There are many testimonies, in perfect agreement, about this fact.

⁹ Ordinary Process, Witness IX, no. 12, p. 67.

¹⁰ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 229.

¹¹ Petition of the Association of Ladies of the Hospice of Zaragoza to the Charity Board of the Hospital, December 18th 1844. Doc. XLIV, fol. 451.

Her strength was gradually declining, yet she could not or would not take a well-deserved rest. In February 1845 Mother Teresa Periu ceased to be the president and Mother Josefa Codina succeeded her. On March 31st Mother Maria retired. Due to her advanced age, she was 64, she was assigned to such tasks as might be compatible with her years. The Board was fully satisfied with the zeal, diligence and skill she had displayed during the many years she had offered her services, not only in the Hospice but also in the general Hospital. They expected she would continue her services in so far as her strength would permit. On June 28th 1845 the Board had to order that she be transferred to Bellver de Cinca, in the Province of Huesca, "to restore her broken health for as long as it seems necessary"¹². The house where Mother Rafols lodged during the time she spent at Bellver was that of Don Joaquim Ruiz, a surgeon in that town, and Donna Juana Castell, his wife. It was called "Surgeon's House" and it was on Mount street (today Pilar street).

We know some few details of her stay there, and of the impression her solid virtues made. A son of the surgeon, Reverend Manuel Ruiz, parish priest and dean of Fraga from May 21st 1849 to November 4th 1896, knew the servant of God in her parents' home. He was a man of few words, "but when he spoke of Mother Rafols, he waxed very eloquent and said that she was a woman with a great heart, and he would add, a sentence of Mother Maria was worth a full sermon"¹³.

All the attention given to her health proved to be

¹² Register of Sitiadas. See Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 231.

¹³ Ibid. Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. p. 231.

¹⁴ Notes of Dr. Altisent. Novitiate Archive.

of no avail. Her soul was already mature for her heavenly abode. God, however, was pleased to prolong her valuable life much longer than was expected, probably to allow her to consolidate her work and to give to the very end an unusual example of total giving of oneself, and thus fix the heroic character of the Sisterhood as a necessary demand of a life of love and dedication to the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in atonement for the forgetfulness and ingratitude of men.

Her love of the Church grew during this period. "She was deeply pained when hearing of the evils which were assailing the Church, attributing them to her own unfaithfulness, and prayed continually to God for the Pope and for the Church"¹³, "she would offer extraordinary penances," and "all her sufferings and works for the conversion of sinners"¹⁴. She bore her grave illness not only with resignation but also with gladness. "On no account did she agree to be dispensed from the observance of the rule to the end"¹⁵. "She dragged herself, though sick and half-paralyzed, to the sick wards, and the sisters would come to meet her there to their great edification"¹⁵.

4. Lover of the Sisterhood

This last stage of the Mother's life was characterized by an increase of tenderness towards her daughters. They became witnesses, within the small and poor rooms, of very touching scenes of family life. The

¹³ Ordinary Process. Witness XI, no. 5, p. 33.

¹⁴ Ibid. Witness XIV.

¹⁵ Ibid. Witness XI no. 12, p. 68.

¹⁶ Ibid. Witness III, no. 13, p. 41.

young sisters used to go to her to find an answer in their doubts. "One day a sister complained to her that she had not been able to say her prayer, for she had been called to the side of a sick man. The Mother answered, "you can remain unperturbed, for to assist a sick person for the love of God is also prayer". She kept herself busy working with the sacristy linen, and as in former times she taught the younger sisters to decorate the altar.

In 1849, a small ceremony took place which was a cause of great joy to the servant of God. "They made a little chapel within her own room. She could retire there to pray, to have meetings for the elections, renew their vows. The chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. It was blessed on January 1st 1849 by Rev. Augustine Oliver, rector of the Royal Major Seminary of St. Charles, and director of the Sisterhood. A solemn Mass of three priests was sung, which three regents attended and in which all the sisters received Holy Communion"¹⁶.

As her last days were approaching God filled her heart with great joys. "In 1850 the sisters took charge of the men's wards, and since the work had been doubled, the number of sisters was also increased"¹⁷. The thick veil that was hiding the constant progress of the institute and its propagation gradually begun to be removed from the eyes of the humble Foundress. Her first reaction was a show of gratitude. Other manifestations of her joyful heart enlightened the last years of her life. In fact, every year brought her a new cause of joy. In 1851 her most beloved daughter,

¹⁷ Entrances of sisters. Book I. Novitiate Archive.

¹⁸ Information of the Charity Board, quoted above.

Mother Magdalena Hecho, undertook the government of the Sisterhood as new president. Mother Maria when she was president had received her as a postulant in the Sisterhood. She had been first in her heart and was heir to her spirit. In 1852 a wooden statue of the Immaculate Conception was blessed and solemnly placed in the recently inaugurated private oratory of the sisters²¹.

These celebrations were for the soul of the sick and disabled Mother soothing remedy in the midst of her pains. Soon was she to enjoy the eternal liturgy in her Father's house.

5. The marks of the Lord Jesus

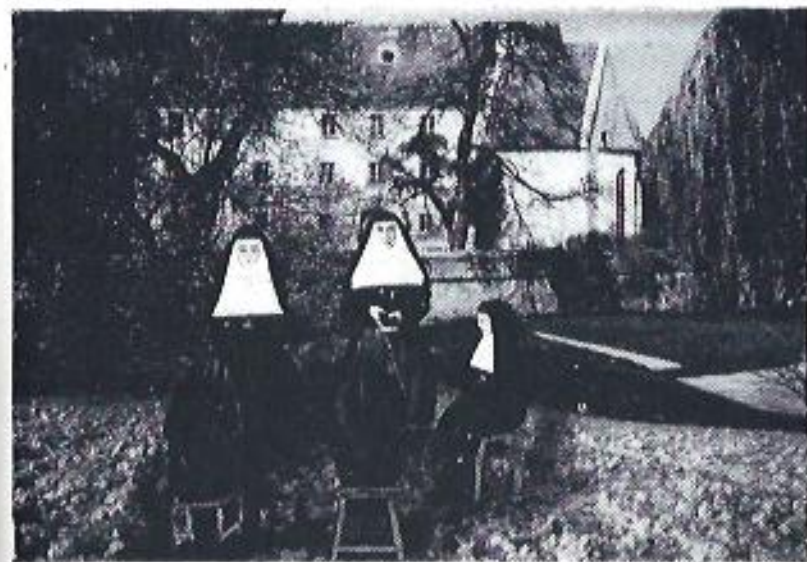
The alarming catalepsy set in, and a progressive paralysis followed with all its frightful symptoms. It was like a living death which was undermining her constitution and paralysing all bodily functions. It was rather the mystery of the Cross falling on her and marking her with the marks of the Lord Jesus. On that Cross, after a slow agony, was she to breathe her last.²²

The bed whereon the servant of God was rivetted became a pulpit from where the sisters got wise advice and learnt exemplary virtues and sublime lessons to live well the life God gave them. "In the evenings", when the work in the wards was over, "they used to gather round the bed, and told her everything that had happened during the day. For all she had words of encouragement, good advice and practical remarks to improve their behaviour²³. It is remarkable how

²¹ Entrances of sisters. Book 1. Novitiate archive.

²² Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 231.

²³ Ordinary Process. Witness XI, no. 8, p. 66.



Once again M. Rafols became the animator of the Sisterhood



Room of M. Maria Rafols



On 20th October in 1925 the mortal remains of the Founders were transferred from the Hospital to the General House



Coffin containing the mortal remains of M. Maria Rafols

"she was able to use her lips and instruct her daughters, in spite of the paralysis which had crept over all her limbs"²¹. She specially recommended to them union and charity among themselves for she considered these two virtues as essential means to exercise fruitfully their apostolate with the sick"²². "She exhorted them to enkindle their love by constantly meditating of the Passion of Our Lord and urged them to the practice of constant prayer", which would be made easy, "if they saw God in all things"²³.

At that time when she was very sick, "Mother Raimunda Oliver was a postulant. She was very sorry because she had to leave the Congregation on account of a finger of her hand which was in a very bad condition. It seemed to have become incurable, in spite of all remedies having been tried." Mother Rafols encouraged her and offered herself to be her infirmarian. "The finger, against all expectations, was cured." "Mother Raimunda considered it as a little miracle wrought by the charity of the servant of God"²⁴.

6. Preparing to meet the Lord

Her patience was astonishing, "for it was sorely tried by the paralysis of her last years. Her fortitude and resignation to the divine will was a cause of wonder to the sisters"²⁵.

Her interior gaze was constantly fixed on Jesus,

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 9, p. 52.

²² *Ibid.* Witness V, no. 9, p. 58.

²³ Information of sister Esperanza Carles obtained and preserved by tradition.

²⁴ Testimony of sister Justina Sanz, in the Beatification Process.

²⁵ Ordinary Process, Witness XI, no. 13, p. 58.

the beloved of her soul, and with a most comforting trust was she waiting for the final embrace. Her heart was full of devotion, peace and loving kindness. Sister Casiana said "that all the senior sisters spoke of her as of an extraordinary case of holiness, and that this was the common view of all her contemporaries"²⁹.

On August 28th 1853, Feast of St. Augustine³⁰, Mother Rafols became so seriously ill that all immediately understood that her end was nearing. That day was the Feast day of Father Augustine Oliver, the confessor of the community. In other occasions it would have been a day of joy for the community. It turned out to be a day of great sadness for them since they saw the end of their dear Foundress. She was given the holy Viaticum. The sisters plunged in deep grief and shedding copious tears accompanied the priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament. Their sorrow was mitigated by the sight of the fervour with which the sick Mother received Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, and of the happiness and ineffable joy reflected on her face. Next day she became worse, though in the midst of her sufferings she did not lose her calmness and tranquillity of spirit. Animated and moved with a spirit of love, she talked to her daughters, recommending them mutual charity.

In this way the good Mother bade farewell to her daughters. When her last day arrived, August 30th 1853, she entered into a peaceful agony, without

²⁹ In her declaration in the Process.

³⁰ Act of declaration of Mother Josefa Badenas of the convent of St. Catherine, before Don Marcelino Casado, notary of the Diocesan Curia of Zaragoza, February 11th, 1928. Novitiate Archive.

convulsions or heavy breathing. She closed her eyes, opened them from time to time to look kindly at her daughters. Father Augustine Oliver spent long hours by her bed. He spent the whole of the last day in the Hospital, where he took his meals not to be away from the dying Mother in her last moments. The presentiment of what was about to happen caused to all such sadness that Father Augustine himself wept bitterly.

About 11 a.m. a maidservant came to see her to bid her farewell. She was the same trusted servant, Teresica, who had accompanied her to banishment in Huesca. Though Mother Rafols was very weak, she turned to her and with much sweetness told her, "do not weep, Teresica, do not weep, I am going to heaven... there I will ask for you... May God repay you the good services you have done to me". Teresica was weeping so copiously that the sisters were compelled to take her away from the room.

In the evening of that day, Feast of St. Rose of Lima, Father Augustine again entered the room. She composed herself a little, and looking at him said, "please Father, tell His Grace the Archbishop to pray to God for me". He kindly replied in the affirmative. Immediately Mother Rafols fell into a lethargic state, in a profound silence, interrupted only by the sighs and weeping of the sisters around the bed. Suddenly as if recovering from the lethargy, with a very happy and beautiful countenance, like a mirror reflecting the peace and happiness she was already enjoying, opening again her eyes and looking towards Father Augustine, as if in a trance exclaimed, "Oh, my Father, I see many people, all in white..." These were her very last words. The sisters understood that

at that very moment the servant of God had expired, and cried out, "Father, Father, she is dying..." While Father Augustine was tracing over her the last absolution and blessing, Mother Rafols slightly gaped and expired. It was 5 p.m.

Once certain of her departure, Father Augustine told the sisters, "her soul is on the way to heaven". All the sisters left the room weeping as orphan daughters who had just lost their mother. Mother Oliver and Mother Raimunda²¹ dressed up the corpse with her habit (Mother Raimunda's), which was in better condition than the habit of the deceased Mother.

While this charitable service was done to the remains of that holy religious, Father Augustine went up to the hall where the Mother and sisters had gathered, addressed them with very moving words, encouraging them to imitate always the virtues of their Mother Foundress, since she had given them so great examples of all virtues but specially of humility and charity.

The virtues of the Foundress remained so deeply engraven in the mind of Father Augustine that they became the obligatory subject of his conversations and exhortations to the sisters. Mother Rafols was the mirror in which all had to look at themselves. She who had no courage to look at herself in that mirror, and try to be like her, was not fit to enter into her family.

Mother Rafols died in the novitiate House, in the hall of two rooms, close to the convent of the Incarnation. On the ground-floor there was a big hall where there was a large crucifix. There probably Mother Rafols used sometimes to attend Mass.

²¹ Here the witness certainly erred, since Mother Oliver and Mother Raimunda are one and the same person.

7. Though dead she remained very much alive

The workers of the Hospital brought a white coffin, with some blue lines, poorly decorated. They placed the body in the coffin and took it to the Church of the Hospital. They placed it in the centre of the Church on a large table covered with a red damask brought from the house of the Count of Sastago whose family held Mother Rafols in great esteem.

Mother Maria, though dead, looked very much alive, such was the beauty and peacefulness of her countenance. She looked as if she was asleep.

Besides, her spirit and her charism remains alive in the Constitutions in her Congregation and in the souls of the sisters of Charity. Even if there is not one sister who does possess it in the fulness, we can well say that in the totality of the Congregation, in the collectivity of all the sisters the charism is beautifully made present in the Church.

The doors of the Church were thrown open to the crowds who came uninterruptedly to see the body of Mother Rafols and to pray before it. Her daughters continually went up and down, replacing one another, so as to be able to discharge their duties of charity. They kept watch before the body while reciting their prayers. The crowds were continually moving on. People of all classes of society could be seen filing past, rich and poor, servants and army men of high rank, priests and laymen. All praised her virtues and remembered the heroic deeds of the deceased during the tragic days of the sieges, and other public calamities. Many were in tears. Because of the multitude of people that wished to see her, it was necessary to postpone

to another day the burial of the servant of God. People wanted to show their devotion and pay their respects to that holy religious who for charity's sake had so many times defied death in the thick of the enemy shells, and faced all kind of dangers.

Years later, when Mother Raimunda narrated to the novices and junior sisters these details of the edifying death and burial of the servant of God, and the tribute of gratitude the city of Zaragoza paid on that occasion, her eyes were filled with tears. She had always seen from very near the virtues of Mother Maria. She had assisted her during her last illness, dressed her corpse in her own habit, and watched by her body, day and night when it had been exposed in the Church of the Hospital. Though other sisters kept turns in their watch, Mother Raimunda never departed from the body of her most beloved Mother.

On September 2nd³³, the burial of the servant of God took place. The spiritual directors of the St. Charles' Seminary came for the funeral and Mass which was sung by the Reverend Augustine Oliver, assisted by Rev. Mariano Bayo and Rev. Mariano de Barta. After the exequies the body was lowered into the pantheon where it was buried on the right side. Before the entombment, the sisters wished to bid the last adieu of their Mother. All were full of grief and their eyes filled with tears. The image of the deceased Mother was so deeply imprinted in their minds that after several years, when the senior sisters explained to the younger ones what had happened in those days, they so vividly described the figure of the Foundress

³³ In Doc. LVIII, in the Ordinary Process, September 1st, is mentioned as the day of her burial.

that the young sisters thought they were seeing it³³.

In gratefulness for the many services and sacrifices she undertook for the sick of the Hospital, in all the wards many Rosaries were said for the eternal repose of her soul. She wore the habit of the Sister of Charity for forty-eight years. Her death caused general sorrow and left a void difficult to fill. She left, too, examples of virtue for the sisters to imitate. We all venerate her as a saint³⁴.

³³ Declaration of Mother Josefa Badenas before a notary. February 11th, 1928.

³⁴ Testimony of Sister Magdalena Hecho, superior, in the Ordinary Process, Doc. LVIII.

"BE IMITATORS OF MINE" I Cor 4, 16

The survival after the death of those who have departed is a common phenomenon. It can be explained by psychological laws of repression or autosuggestion. It is not so easy to explain it if the survival stretches to distant periods of times, sometimes even centuries. And it is inexplicable when the survival enters certain mysterious influences that go beyond the laws of nature and psychology. In this chapter the three types of explanation will be intertwined. One thing remains absolutely certain, that the "survival" of the saints and other saintly people is in a category by itself. They *do survive*. Of some of them we know with absolute certainty that they *live on* in heaven, which is to say, here, close to us. Where *else* can heaven be? They are not far from each one of us. Should we, then, be surprised if we suddenly find ourselves walking in their company, thinking of them, "seeing" them, and they talking to us, suggesting things to us? They are THERE whether we see them or not, whether we think of them or not.

Secondly, the saints do not finish their mission when they die. The mission entrusted to them continues after their death, nay more, often begins only then, when liberated from the restrictions imposed by space and time vanish, and they begin to be really active in other places and centuries. Surely they are then fully present, since they are splendidly active, fully involved, desperately committed to the works to which they had dedicated their lives. This "survival",

shall we call it theological, ontological or mystical? Whatever the name and reality may be, it is surely not psychological or imaginary.

The survival of the Founder of a religious Congregation is of this type. The spirit of the saintly person, the charism, the institution, the Congregation that enshrines the soul, the work, the mission, the power, the energizing activity of him or her who departed centuries ago live on. And they are continually sending us not through the waves of ether, but whispering right into our ears, their message, "be imitators of mine."

I. The feeling of her presence

The days following upon the death of the servant of God were sad for the Sisterhood. Every place in the House brought back memories of the good Mother. Every minute they were reminded of the great void they were trying in vain to fill. Here she would work, this was her place in the chapel, in the dining room, in the needle-room. She used to pass this way in her endless rounds along the wards and cloisters of the Hospital. Her presence filled everything. Many things spoke loudly of her exertions, her good taste, her love of Jesus to whom she dedicated her actions and her devotion.

They visited the small and poor cell still filled with the fragrance of her virtuous deeds of the last days. They did not dare to touch or change any object which had for them the value of relics¹. They mitigated their pain by recollecting and reciting her lessons on

¹ Declaration of Mother Josefa Badenas.

perfection and the examples of virtue she had constantly given them during her long life.

"One night Mother Raimunda Oliver was keeping watch in the Hospital. Out of sheer fatigue she dozed for a while. Suddenly she felt some one patting her on her back. She awoke, looked round, but saw nobody there. She dozed again. The patting was repeated, though again she did not see any one. She fell asleep for the third time, and the patting was repeated, and even stronger than on the first two occasions. This made her think that it might be a supernatural warning. Then in spite of her fatigue "she began to make a round of her ward. She found that one of the sick women was in her last moments and was asking for a priest to make her confession. Mother Raimunda quickly sent for one, and he came in time to assist the sick woman who died soon. Mother Raimunda always attributed this happening to the intervention of the servant of God. After her death she was still recommending, as she had done during her life, the care and vigilance of the sick, so that they may not die without the Sacraments"². This was not the only time when the good Mother from her glory continued to warn and correct them in their negligences.

"The same Mother Raimunda and other sisters had delayed in the distribution of broth or medicines to the sick. When they came to do the service, after the prescribed time, they found that some other sister had overtaken them. As this happening was repeated on other occasions, the sisters suspected something extraordinary. When they asked the patients for the details of the sister who had anticipated them in giving

¹ Ordinary Process. Witness IV, no. 8, p. 42-43.

medicines or broth, all agreed in giving a description that fit Mother Rafols. The sisters took it as a warning from their Foundress, who continued to preach charity and the care and concern her daughters should have for the sick"³.

She lived on, among them, invisible to their eyes, but very present to their souls. She continued to infuse in them her spirit, her infinite longings for a total giving of self, her faithfulness to duty. She inspired them with her watchful charity, her tireless activity and burning zeal for the salvation of souls. In this way she completed and gave the finishing touches to her institute.

2. The Congregation grows far and wide

God's infinite wisdom, "rejoicing in His inhabited world, and delighting in the sons of men" Prov 8, 31 had originated that Sisterhood. The grain of mustard seed was to develop now into a majestic tree, manifesting in its flowers and fruits that the infinitely great was already active in the infinitely small.

"Till the year 1885", says a historian of the Hospital, "the sisters never went out to make any other foundation, except that of Huesca, since the Sisterhood had been founded for the benefit of that Royal Hospital."

The foundation of Huesca took place at the request of "His Lordship Joaquim Sanchez de Cutanda Miralles, Bishop of Huesca who came to know of the benefits the Royal Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza was enjoying with the establishment of the

² *Ibid.* Witness III, no. 17, p. 81.

Sisters of Charity. He asked Father Bonal to establish a similar Sisterhood in the Hospital of Huesca and a Hospice, for the benefit of the sick and the feeding and education of these poor orphans." He requested the Sitiada of Zaragoza to send a sister to be entrusted with the government of the Sisterhood to be established. The Sitiada chose sister Teresa Calvet who reluctantly accepted the office out of sheer obedience. She was very acceptable to the Prelate, the regents of the Hospital and Hospice, to the Sisterhood and to the whole city"⁴.

Mother Calvet had kept in her mind the examples and lessons of sublime wisdom she had witnessed in the Hospital of Grace. She carried with her the little booklet of the rules, full of evangelical doctrines, an a most valuable code of spiritual direction, a marvellous blending of prudence and sweetness, good understanding and piety. With the guiding principles given there obedience and subjection were easy to accept, silence became meaningful, words inspiring and apostolic. In that rule faults had their sanction, commands their boundaries, weaknesses their remedies.

This foundation took place as early as May 19th 1807. Father John Bonal presented her and her community to His Lordship. This first colony transplanted from the Hospital, of Grace to Huesca reveals another feature of the charitable work of Mother Rafols. Her institute of charity embraced from the very beginning the work of education. In the Primitive rules of the Hospital of Huesca there was a full chapter dedicated to the high ideals of education.

⁴ Entrances of sisters of Huesca.

Mother Teresa did not fall short of the expectations cherished by Mother Rafols. She lived a saintly life and "died in 1812 with great edification according to the testimony of the Sitiada, and the testimony beyond question, of Father Bonal in a letter to the Archdean of Zaragoza"⁵ where he said that she died "in the odour of sanctity."

This had been the only foundation which took place during the life of Mother Rafols. But this fact had been most beneficial to the Congregation, since the sisters had remained during many years in the cradle of their foundation and under the direction of Mother Foundress from whom her daughters had ample time to learn from her selfless, humble, self-sacrificing and brave example⁶.

After her death, little by little, the high authorities of the Hospital "in view of the great trust they could place on the sisters, and their unparalleled charity, gradually increased their responsibility in the management of the institution. This policy brought about a corresponding increase in the number of sisters. In 1854 the general management was entrusted to them with the obligation of submitting a detailed description of accounts. In 1857 the keys of all the store-rooms, which had always been kept by the Majordomo, were handed over to them.

The hour, fixed by divine Providence, had struck to offer the benefits which had been the privilege of few to all peoples far and wide.

A document of the time says, "in the epidemic of 1855 which so cruelly lashed Spain, Zaragoza and its

⁵ Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 74.

⁶ Guallar, op.cit. p. 131.

province will never be able to forget the heroic deeds accomplished by 22 sisters who were at the time in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. It was a remarkable thing to see how the sisters multiplied their efforts, for though their number was rather small for the needs, yet they gave their assistance to 18 towns in the province, and spent many days and nights without sleep on account of the great number of the plague-stricken. A new Hospital was open for their benefit in the Military quarters called of the Convalescents. The sisters were seen uninterruptedly by the side of the sick, looking after them with the greatest charity and doing kind or repugnant services¹⁷. Heroic deeds, indeed, they were: serving with a smile those of choleric temperament, doing all kinds of menial services without ever going out even for a minute to breathe fresh air, shedding tears of sincerity before the corpse of him who had paid their kind services with insults, and remaining unmoved before the corpse of a dear sister who died a victim of duty. Such was their behaviour during the epidemic¹⁸.

As the sieges of Zaragoza had been a revelation of the potentialities of the new Sisterhood and its Foundress, the epidemic was a revelation of the potentialities of the Sisterhood, even after the death of the Foundress, and of the vitality of the charism faithfully preserved in it. "The Senor Governor, aware of the good services the sisters had offered, specially in times of epidemic when usually people flee from the plague-stricken, thought that it was not fair to deprive other towns of such sisters, who do so much good to

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 132.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 134.

humanity. However, though for the coming of the sisters to this city and their foundation, the Honourable governing Body had obtained Royal approval, since the Hospital was under Royal Patronage, the sisters had no powers to establish new foundations¹⁹.

The Governor saw to it that they would have the necessary powers. He obtained from His Majesty's government, on July 8th 1857, a Royal Order by which the foundation of the Sisterhood of St Anne of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace might be extended to other places provided they be within the territory of the province. They were empowered to govern their institutions¹⁹.

It would have been easy for the Governor to have obtained broader faculties. The Charity Board, as the Sitiada earlier, and now the Governor, grudged that this treasure might be spent in far distant places and the vast province under his rule might lack the precious help.

July 8th 1857 is a remarkable date in the history of the Institute. Nothing could now forbid Mother Magdalena Hecho, president of the Sisterhood, from opening the doors of the Institute to the young girls who from the very first year of its inception were uninterruptedly asking for admission. The Hospital of Grace remained as the mother House and novitiate of the Congregation, with the approval of the Charity Board. On August 23rd of the same year 1857 two foundations were made in Calatayud, a Hospice and a Hospital. The following year two more in Tarazona, a Hospital and a Hospice.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 113.

²⁰ Information of the Charity Board, August 14th, 1857.

Shortly afterwards in 1860, typhoid fevers spread over Zaragoza, and halted for a while the expansion activity. Their behaviour on this occasion was another glorious page in the history of the Institute. "Thirteen sisters contracted the disease, and seven died in a single month". But most remarkable of all, neither the excessive labours nor the death of the dear sisters could dishearten them in the least. They doubled their relentless efforts, multiplying themselves and attending to all the sick with a superhuman vigour that only their heroic charity could infuse in them.

The Charity Board, witness of all their activities, could not but give a magnificent testimony of gratitude and appreciation to the sisters in an official letter of May 22nd, addressed to Mother superior. They acknowledged and were thankful for the ever burning zeal of the sisters of this Congregation who, regardless of the victims the contagious disease was claiming, generously give their attention and comfort to the poor sick¹¹.

Far from being terrified by the number of victims who fell in their own community, the humble sisters looked at them with envy, seeing them march before them with the green palm of victory towards their true motherland. That was the goal of their vocation.

This glorious army of martyrs of charity will go on increasing in striking numbers during the life of the institute. In every new calamity God chose His favourite victims. The Congregation did not diminish on this account but rather increased, as it appears from the two new foundations on August 6th 1861, the Hos-

pice of Tudela, founded by special authorization since this was the first foundation in the province of Navarre, outside the province of Zaragoza, and on September 7th 1864 the Hospital of Caspe¹².

3. The needs of the times

"Such rapid development during the ten years before 1865 made the pious and wise Cardinal Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fray Manuel Garcia Gil, think of the need to modify and enlarge the Constitutions of 1825, for it was not the same thing to govern one House or to govern a Congregation. The sisters were sorry to change the primitive rules they had professed to follow. Hence, the Prelate endeavoured to keep, as far as possible, the early rules, trying to enlarge rather than to reform them. Besides he consulted all the Houses already founded"¹³. The preamble written by His Eminence the Cardinal Garcia Gil says the following: "As the Rule and Constitutions printed in 1824 affirm them to be the same as the ones faithfully kept in this House of Zaragoza since 1805, the year in which the present sisters of Charity established themselves in this House, we would do wrong if we were to try now to reform them, depriving them of their venerable antiquity and moving away from what the experience of so many years has approved and consecrated. Our intention, therefore, in making this new edition of the same is to separate the prescriptive from the doctrinal part, which has grown excessively extensive, and give them a new form to make their understanding easy and their remembrance more effective." After

¹¹ Book of foundations. Novitiate Archive.

¹² Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. op.cit. p. 300

¹¹ Guallar, op.cit. p. 134-35.

having received all the suggestions from the different Houses and their remarks, they were submitted to the examen of the General Director, the Canon of the Cathedral, Reverend Benito Garrido. "The political events that took place at that time were the cause of a postponement in the definitive approbation"¹⁴ though they could not stop the rapid propagation of the institute¹⁵.

God was recruiting them in view of the needs of the coming Civil War. "In 1873 civil war was raging throughout Aragon. A field—dressing station was opened in the Hospice of Zaragoza. The sisters both of the Hospice and of the Hospital offered great services in all the tasks assigned to them, not sparing labours, inconvenience or obstacles of any kind¹⁶. For this reason the County House gave in an official communication a vote of thanks to them, "for their zeal and activity which made smooth all difficulties"¹⁷.

During this war, in the city of Estella specially, the glorious deeds of the sieges of Zaragoza were re-enacted. Feats of superhuman endurance were re-lived. They followed the heroic paths marked by the glorious Foundress. The sisters remained steady at their post without ever abandoning it or retreating even in the presence of death. "Five Hospitals for both factions

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ On April 11th, 1867 the Hospital and Hospice of Estella, the second foundation in Navarre, took place. On April 22nd, 1868 the sisters of Huesca who gradually had separated themselves from the Mother House of Zaragoza, at the request of the Mother superior of the Hospital and the Hospice of that capital, joined the House of Zaragoza, with all the graces, prerogatives and privileges, as if they would had never ceased to belong to it. (General Chronicle of the Institute, Novitiate Archive).

¹⁶ Chronicle of the Institute, Novitiate Archive.

¹⁷ Ibid.

were under their charge". When the sisters came to the Hospital of Anderaz, they found the wounded lying on the ground, without beds or any other help. They supplied them with all necessary things, looking after their health.

In the capture of Estella the followers of one party had a government Hospital in the convent of St. Clare for the wounded officers. Sometimes when victuals and other requirements were needed, the sisters, in the midst of the attack, went to the General requesting him to allow them to obtain whatever was necessary for the wounded soldiers. They obtained what they had asked and the combatants would stop shooting when the sisters had to pass and hold the shooting till they had gone away. Many times they risked their lives when big pieces of shells fell at their feet and even inside the Hospital. There were occasions when the bullets would pass close to their ears. It is impossible to enumerate all the exertions and labours, all the night-watches and privations they bore. God alone, the witness of the concern with which the sisters were assisting them, can repay so many and so great sacrifices¹⁸.

During the generalate of Mother Magdalena Hecho, who died on December 5th 1877, two more foundations were made, a small primary school, started on July 1st 1872 and officially inaugurated in 1881. It was a small beginning in the new apostolate of education, which would grow mightily in the years to come. The second foundation was the Hospital of Praga, inaugurated on February 11th 1876. Before her death she had made an agreement for a Hospital at Jaca,

¹⁸ Ibid.

which was inaugurated few days after her death, on December 12th 1877.

Twenty more foundations were made during the generalate of her successor Mother Dolores Marin, from 1877 to 1889¹⁸.

The new Constitutions were approved on October 28th 1887 by Cardinal Archbishop Francis de Paula Benavides, and they were printed the same year. On April 13th 1889 the Decree of Praise was issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars.

These were outstanding and visible monuments marking the progress and expansion of the Institute, always open to new possibilities according to the needs of the times. But there were many invisible signs and hidden achievements which passed unnoticed contributing even more effectively to the life and well-being of the Congregation. Such were, for instance, "the acts of supreme abnegation with which the sisters went to Almudebar in 1880 to heal and look after the victims of typhoid. Three sisters received the last sacraments, and one died. Other sisters in the same town and in other towns assisted in 1881 those sick of small-pox. Others still in 1885 went to other towns, resolute and calm, amidst the consternation and panic of the people to attend those sick of cholera. There, too, their unbelievable deeds were repeated. Ten sisters surrendered their lives there. It was already a tradition and a privilege in that Institute meant for heroines²¹.

¹⁸ During this time the novitiate was transferred to a rented house in the Pilar square, and later to the building the Congregation purchased in Major street.

²¹ See Galasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op.cit.* p. 229, and Chronicle of the Institute, Novitiate Archive.

There were still other signs of the spiritual progress and in the manifestations of the charism of heroic charity, and not an insignificant one was the growth and spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Holy Hours in the Hospital of Alcanniz became famous in the institute, and the splendour of the Liturgy was noticeable on every First Friday of the month.

On May 7th 1889 Mother Martina Balaguer was elected general. One year later, on August 2nd 1890, she accepted for her religious family the burden and the honour of a very daring enterprise, the Leper Asylum of the Island of Providence of Maracaibo, in Venezuela.

That motto of the Hospital of Grace "Urbis et orbis" had been the distinctive feature of the Congregation. Charity was to be exercised "urbi et orbi" for the benefit of every city in the whole world, according to the demands and needs of the times. In Venezuela the sisters offered themselves with joy to entomb themselves in the prime of life, in a total isolation, in that place of rot and horror. They completely transformed that island. After their arrival, that island of tears became the paradise of hope and of comfort.

The daughters of a great heroine of Spain continued to walk along the routes opened by the many children of that missionary country, during the centuries of faith. They clearly showed, in the self-surrender of their lives and in the hidden sacrifices, that Mother Rafols was still moving the members on in the Congregation, not with her body but with her spirit of heroism and her charism. She had imbibed the spirit of that country, as the mother of heroes and saints, and by infusing it in her Congregation sent it to the

farthest countries of the world²¹.

4. Confirmation of the Institute

The generalate of Mother Pabla Bescos, who is considered to be like a second Foundress, witnessed the greatest expansion of the Institute. She obtained the Decree of temporal approbation of the Constitutions, given on August 3rd 1901, and the definite approbation of the same on March 11th 1904. The dream of the venerable Foundress that her Sisterhood should embrace all the works of charity,—or was it Father Bonal's?—is now a happy reality. There is no kind of pain or need, of wretchedness of any type which the sisters of St. Anne would not welcome. And the more difficult and dangerous the work the more eagerly was it accepted by the charitable Institute.

During the Spanish Civil war of 1936-39 the Institute again won new glory and new victories. Men admiring its heroism have decorated it with insignia and diplomas of gratitude in large numbers. These distinctions are not isolated cases, rather they are the acknowledgement that the Institute carries in its bosom the holy fire enkindled by the ardent soul of its venerable Foundress, which impels them to daring and heroic deeds, without counting the cost and without hesitation. The holy fire is the presence of the charism of Mother Rafols, inspiring the institute to **EVER GREATER HEROIC DEEDS OF UNAMBIGUOUS CHARITY.**

We began this chapter speaking of the survival of the saints. After the reader has finished these lines, he or she can ask once more, is Mother Rafols still alive or is she dead?

²¹ During the generalate of Mother Martina, a Royal Order of November 9th 1893 gave permission to make foundations in all the Provinces of Spain. Before the R.O. was published the Institute had already obtained authorization.

CHAPTER XIII:

"THE BONES WHICH THOU HAST
BROKEN REJOICE" Ps 51, 8

A practical way of showing love for our vocation is by fostering great love and reverence for the Founder of the way of life we follow. The Founder of the religious Congregation to which we belong is the embodiment of an ideal we are striving to accomplish in our lives, the generator of a power of intercession on our behalf, helping us to succeed in the same way as he or she succeeded, and the friend and lover with whom we share our most intimate thoughts and affections.

Founders of Religious Congregations being ideal persons, we owe to them, acknowledgment of their greatness, veneration and imitation. Each being a power, we must have recourse frequently to obtain help and comfort and being a friend and a lover we need intimate union and awareness of their presence.

In this chapter we shall learn about the veneration kept for Mother Rafols by her sisters, her citizens, her town-people. In the next chapter we shall show examples of her power of intercession in manifold needs. In the previous chapter we have made clear the fact of her survival and closeness to us.

I. The veneration of the sisters towards their Mother

From around the tomb of the humble mill-maid of the Molino d'en Rovira rises a song of praise, of admiration and love which sounds louder through the years, proclaiming her a heroine and a saint. The cript of

the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace has become a huge reliquary. New generations of sisters come there in pilgrimage to be comforted with the fragrance of their Mother's virtues exercised for 48 long years in that Hospital. From her example the Sisters of Charity, both novices and professed, found great comfort in prayer before the tomb. They used to kiss the slab covering her remains".

"Father Augustine Oliver often explained to us the meaning of the habit we were about to don with these or similar words, 'see, I am to give you this holy habit; but if you are not to be like your Mother Foundress, and practise the same virtues as she did, especially charity, humility and holy poverty, you, and I say the same to all other sisters, you better go home. Mother Rafols suffered much, underwent painful martyrdom, was outstanding in the practice of solid virtues. One day the secret of her saintly life will come to light, and some of you will be instruments in revealing that martyrdom and those virtues'."

"In the recreations the most frequent topic of conversation was about the virtues of the servant of God. The family life and the poor life we lived at that time in the holy Hospital was conducive to that purpose."¹

"For some funerals I came down sometimes to the pantheon, and Mother Dolores Marin used to tell us novices, 'my daughters, kiss often the slab on the tomb of Mother Foundress, she was very saintly, and ask for the charity and humility she had.' We touched a kerchief to the slab as a sign of our devotion"². All these details

¹ Information of Mother Badenas in the Beatification Process.

² Letter of Mother Josefa Badenas, November 25th 1925 to M. Pabla Bescos. See Gallar, *op.cit.* p. 463-64.

described with the vividness and colourfulness of one who had lived those events, reveal to us how in that little convent of the holy Hospital all the sisters were living by these valuable recollections of her who had become and ideal and a model to be imitated.

We have a weighty testimony of another servant of God, Mother Pabla Bescos. She was outstanding for her great virtues and for the offices she held. She successfully passed on the traditions and spirit of the old Sisterhood to the modern Congregation. She had heard from the sisters who had lived with Mother Rafols that all those sisters affirmed that she had been an example and model of all virtues. She had practised them in a heroic degree. All held her as a great saint"³.

We may like to hear also the description of her human qualities, for by picturing them her figure comes alive and we feel attracted to her and enjoy her "presence." "She was rather tall and not at all stout. In all things she showed herself very demonstrative and charming. Her eyes were modestly cast down and in all her behaviour she commanded reverence and respect. By her side one would feel both reserved and confident. In personal relations she was gentle and tactful, of great sensitivity as regards the greatness of others, on occasions even effusive, wherever charity would demand it. Her life took fire in the flame of Christ's love, and she showed her return of love by loving the sick of the Hospital of Grace and her daughters. They increased in numbers, as God blessed the Congregation, and were being strengthened in spirit. She was a lover of peace and we do not know of any discord between her and the powerful Sitiadas, the doctors or practi-

³ Ordinary Process. Witness I, no. 20, p. 87.

tioners, and least of all between her and her dear daughters. The reason for this was that she never put herself before anyone else. Her most authentic selfhood was her unselfishness.

2. Veneration of the city of Zaragoza for her heroine

"Many women distinguished themselves by their heroic behaviour during the sieges of Zaragoza, but three specially deserve all our respect: the Countess of Bureta, Donna Josefa Aznar and Bourbon, and Mother Rafols"⁴.

"Her name ought to be written in many of the streets of our city, for Zaragoza owes very much to her"⁵. Not only in the streets but in the hearts of all the citizens for whom she lived and sacrificed herself, her revered name was to remain for ever imprinted.

To prepare the celebrations of the centenary of the sieges, "in the year 1908 historical data were brought to light, archives were consulted, the ashes of the dead were sought for as relics and the figures of those who had fallen were brought back to life. Names of heroes were engraven on the slabs of the great avenues, and bronze statues were set up on decorated pedestals. The dead were given due honours by placing them to rest in the pantheons of the fatherland. It was then that among the heroines of the sieges Mother Rafols and her daughters appeared with a halo of glory. Then the unbelievable feats

⁴ Words of the father of Rev. Florencio Jardiel, dean of the Cathedral of Zaragoza, according to the written testimony of the same Florencio Jardiel.

⁵ Don Miguel Ballarin, director of Provincial Charities to Mother Martina Balaguer (Ordinary Process, Witness I, no. 20, p. 87).

of the Catalonian nun were made known among the people. The authorities of Zaragoza decided to join her name to those of the immortal heroes of the brave defence in the centenary celebrations.

Together with the literature on the sieges, the memories of Mother Rafols came to the public light, and from that time her name never ceased to be on the lips of the people and her lively portrait in their grateful souls"⁶. "Then she who had lived only to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor began to be known among the great men of this world and to enjoy great popularity. Famous writers told the citizens of Zaragoza the glories of that outstanding religious woman, pride of Zaragoza and honour of their country. The press reported interesting news and drew attractive profiles of her life so remarkable and so fruitful"⁷.

More information and details were asked from the Institute, and Mother Pabla Bescos, at the request of the director of the "El Gancho", published a very brief sketch of her life, "we can truly say of Mother Rafols that she went about doing good. Specially the poor and the sick were the object of her burning charity. She dedicated her attention to them for half a century, for their sake she very often risked her life, and for their benefit she accomplished during the memorable sieges those feats of bravery and heroism which have placed her on the heights where our most praiseworthy heroines had reached. During the 48 years she spent in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace she suffered all kind of hardships and tribulations, she was unjustly

⁶ Galasanz Rabaza, *Sch. P. op.cit.*, p. 302-303.

⁷ *Life of the servant of God by Mother Pabla Bescos*, Ch. IX, p. 327. Tarazona, 1935.

accused, prosecuted and condemned to banishment, which she bore with unflinching fortitude of soul. Finally her virtue overcame all things and, praised and blessed by great and small, she died full of merits in this Hospital of Zaragoza in 1853.

"It is the great glory of our Congregation to have for its Foundress so outstanding and deserving a sister. Her very name is to her daughters a charm and a safeguard, an encouragement and an ideal in the most difficult and laborious endeavours. May the Blessed Virgin of the Pillar, to whose protection she entrusted our Congregation, help us always so that by imitating Mother Rafols' virtues, we may be worthy daughters of such a holy Mother. Sister Pabla Bescos"⁸.

The celebrations held in Zaragoza in that unforgettable centenary were splendid above all description. The city took part in them with indescribable overflow of enthusiasm. The date specially selected to honour the memory of Mother Rafols was appropriately chosen. It was August 3rd, the centenary date of the bombardment of the Hospital, that magnificent theatre and stage where the heroism of the saintly Foundress and her daughters had shone most strikingly. On that day the most dangerous removal of the sick, amidst the explosions of shells and the horror of the fires, a real Dantesque scene, had taken place. On that day not once but hundreds of times she offered her life and with her calmness, bravery and prodigious charity had given new hopes to these around her and had followed her in her sublime and glorious task.

⁸ Essay published in a special issue of "El Gancho" in 1908, dedicated to the Heroes of the sieges.

At 10.30 a.m. in the Church of the Hospital a most solemn funeral service was held. The organizing Committee made the fine gesture of inviting to these functions the Municipal Corporation of Villafranca del Panades. "The decorations in the Church were most sober and in keeping with the nature of the service, but also of a most exquisite artistic taste. The sides of the main altar, the choir railings, the walls and the balconies were covered with black clothe and drapery. In the centre there was a triple platform, and on top of them a beautiful coffin wrapped with the national flag. Many candles and torches, decorated with garlands, and crowns of laurel were set up around the catafalque which was covered with rich black hangings. In them eight escutcheons were designed, among which were those of Villafranca del Panades, of the County House of Zaragoza, of the Municipal Corporation and of other institutions.

The gathering was a large and distinguished one. In the sanctuary there was seated His Grace the Archbishop of Zaragoza, Juan Soldevita, with other dignities and priests. The benches around the catafalque were occupied by the Major of the town, the Counsellors, the Municipal Corporation of Villafranca del Panades, His Excellency the Captain General, representatives of all Army Forces, Civil Governor, Centenary Commission, President of the County House and other representatives of all the religious orders, and of other institutions.

In the evening, at about 7 p.m. a stone inscription was unveiled. The Parish Committee of St Paul's Church with the authorities who had attended the morning service and an immense gathering of people

were present at the hoisting of the flag in the tower of St Paul, and at the unveiling of the inscription in honour of Cerazo. After this they marched towards the Church of the Hospital. Round about that place a large crowd of people and of the girls of the official schools of the town were waiting for the procession. Municipal guards on horseback and afoot were guarding the entrance from the crowds that were trying to force their way in. At the entrance were the girls singing the Centenary Hymn.

Inside the Church His Grace awaited for the procession. Two long lines of sisters with lighted candles were covering the distance from the gate to the sanctuary. The bells were ringing as for a funeral. His Grace intoned the solemn response which was taken up by the many priests. When the last words of the "may she rest in peace" were recited the mournful tune of the bells changed into a joyful pealing of glory, and in the streets hundreds of girls sang the Centenary Hymn.

Mother Pabla Bescos handed over to the Major of Villafranca the string of the veil covering the stone inscription. Deeply touched by this gesture and almost unable to utter a word, he pulled the string and the stone inscription was unveiled. His Grace, in a loud voice, read the inscription:

"MAY THE VENERABLE MOTHER MARIA RAFOLS REST IN PEACE,

HEROINE OF CHARITY, SUPERIOR OF THE HOSPITAL OF OUR LADY OF GRACE DURING THE YEARS 1808 AND 1809, FOUNDESS OF THE CONGREGATION OF SISTERS OF CHARITY OF ST ANNE. SHE DIED ON AUGUST 30TH 1853. THE MOTHERLAND AND THE CITY WITH GRATEFUL MEMORY

DEDICATE THIS MEMORIAL INSCRIPTION ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST CENTENARY OF THE SIEGES."⁹

The celebration ended on October 29th 1908 with the inauguration of the Pantheon of the Heroes in the Church of the Portillo, and of a monument specially dedicated to the heroines in the square of the same name. During these acts His Majesty King Alfonso and Her Majesty Queen Victoria Eugenia were present. Mother Pabla Bescos was rightly inspired to ask the authorities not to move the remains of their venerable Foundress from the crypt of the Hospital, for she had in mind to transfer them at the proper time, to the novitiate Church, for the spiritual comfort and edification of the sisters. Her request was granted. However, in one of the medallions of the monument of Agustina de Aragon, together with the figure of the Countess of Bureta and of Donna Josefina Amar Bourbon, appears the charming and beautiful image of the peerless and heroic sister Maria Rafols, full of sweetness and goodness.

3. Veneration of Villafranca for her daughter

Villafranca del Panades did not wish to lag behind in bestowing honour on her beloved daughter. In 1908 she honoured her in the presence of an immense and select gathering "placing a stone inscription on the outer wall of the Church of St Mary where she had been baptized. The writing of the inscription was suggested by the Rt. Rev. Torras y Bages, Bishop of Vich, illustrious son of Villafranca, enthusiastic¹⁰ admirer of the virtues of Mother Rafols."

⁹ Chronicle of the Congregation, fol. 418-21.

¹⁰ Ordinary Process. Witness XIX, no. 20, p. 94.

On September 1st, 1924, Villafranca prepared and organized a great act of homage. The authorities were received in the Town House, a Requiem Mass was celebrated in the Basilica of St Mary by the Reverend Dean, and Reverend Father Galasanz Rabaza, Sch. P. pronounced a most stirring funeral oration. At the end of this act a procession was organized with all the authorities and a crowd of people marching to the street which was to be named after Mother Rafols. The stone inscription bearing her name was unveiled. Lastly, the procession moved to the Molino d'en Rovira where another stone inscription was to be unveiled, commemorating the place of birth of the illustrious daughter of Villafranca; as an expression of the great veneration and esteem on the part of the authorities a beautiful portrait of the Foundress was unveiled in the gallery of illustrious sons of Villafranca, in the Assembly Hall. Don Paulino Sarron, representative of the Municipality of Zaragoza, said the following words, "You have done well in placing our heroine among the illustrious men who have placed very high the name of the JEWEL OF PANADES in the world of holiness and culture. From today you have in this beautiful hall a representation of all the great and sublime manifestations of the spirit, having added to this glorious gallery of portraits the delicate figure of an illustrious woman with a white veil, symbol of sacrifice and unconquerable valour, Mother Maria Rafols has had the privilege of establishing a bond of spiritual and inseparable union between Villafranca and Zaragoza. Here she was born, here she was educated. You have for her that delicate and tender affection you would show to a beloved daughter. She lived in Zaragoza, too, and there she accom-

plished her work, healed our sick, looked after the plague-stricken, encouraged us and comforted us in the midst of the horrors of that tragedy. We feel towards Maria Rafols the love, the fondness, the veneration we have for a mother. Blessed be her name. May God grant that the wisdom of the Church place her in that highest place to which human beings can dream of and aspire"¹¹.

4. The bones rejoice

All these magnificent acts of homage were only the prelude of the great feast, which took the character of an apotheosis, of the transfer of her remains on October 20th 1925. On the eve of that day a private and intimate act took place, the Acts of which on account of its historical importance, we wish to copy here:

"In the immortal city of Zaragoza, on October 19th 1925, I, Don Lucas Serrano Millan, lawyer and notary of the illustrious College of this city, living in this same city, by a previous and special request of Rev. Mother Pabla Bescos Espierrez, of required age, spinster, professed religious, superior of the institute or Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, living in this city, and exempt from personal documentation, have visited personally at 10.30 a.m. the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza, where we are to proceed to the exhumation of the mortal remains of two heroes of the sieges of Zaragoza, the Reverend Mother Maria Rafols, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, and the Reverend Father Juan Bonal, co-Founder of the same institute of Charity, and there the following actions took place:

¹¹ Booklet entitled "Homenaje a la Venerable Madre Maria Rafols" p. 64.

"The Rt. Rev. Don Juan Buj, Canon of this holy Metropolitan Church, in representation of His Grace the Archbishop of this Archdiocese, since the Rt. Rev. Provisor and Vicar-General of the same was indisposed, the Reverend Mother General of the institute or Congregation of Sisters of Charity of St. Anne with her Counsellors and a great number of sisters, the Rev. Father Calasanz Rabaza, Provincial of the Province of Valencia of the Order of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, the professors of Medicine and surgery Doctors Luis Fuentes Garcia and Juan Lite Ara, the chaplain of the Hospital, infirmarians of the same, a good number of other people and myself, the notary with the witnesses, entered the Church and went down to the crypt where at the bottom to the left hand of the entrance, to the height of one metre above the ground, more or less, there is a tombstone whereon it is written, 'Here lies Mother Maria Rafols—Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Zaragoza, who died on August 30th 1853, of 72 years of age. R.I.P.'

"And to the right, at the same height, there was another similar tombstone with the inscription, 'Here is buried the benefactor Mosen Juan Bonal, Priest, Passionero, Penitentiary and Founder of the Sisters of Charity of the holy Royal Hospital of Zaragoza, and of the Hospital of the city of Huesca, who died on August 19th 1829. R.I.P.' A mason opened both the tombs. The coffins were completely rotten and the bodies reduced to their remains. These were deposited in two boxes of zinc, with four keys, and on the keys were written the names: Municipality, Prelate, County House, Congregation. One by one, the sisters of St Anne filed past to contemplate the remains and touch

them with their crucifixes. The boxes of zinc were placed within other boxes of wood, artistically carved. They, too, were closed as the previous ones. The wooden box of Mother Rafols has the escutcheon of Villafranca del Panades carved on the lid, and those of the Municipality, Prelate, County House and Congregation. in front. The box of Mosen Juan has on the lid the escutcheon of Terradas and in front those of the same four aforesaid, corporations, the keys of which are in the hands of Reverend Mother general of the Sisters of Charity of St Anne, kept in four key-boxes to be handed over to the representatives of the institutions. With this the Act came to an end.

"At the request of Rev. Mother Pabla Bescos Espiérrez, I draw the present Act, the witnesses being Don Francisco Sarria Carranza, chief director of the Provincial Charity Board, and Don Enrique Moreno Goser, Administrator of the same Board, living in this city. I read the whole act to the petitioner and witnesses, and inform them of the right they have to read it by themselves, which they did not use. They signed, and I, the notary, sign and rubricate it. I vouch for all these things"¹².

Privately, the two boxes containing the coffins were brought to the Church of Our Lady of the Pillar, and were kept there till the following day, October 20th, the day fixed for the transfer.

When that day arrived, at a convenient time commissions and representatives of Brotherhoods, Comfraternities, Religious orders, Clergy, pious associations and charitable and cultural institutions filled to capa-

¹² Novitiate Archive.

city the central nave and the choir, and spreading towards the chief sacristy and chapels of St Antony and St Braulio. The Cathedral Canons welcomed military, civil and religious authorities at the gate. The Captain General, representing His Majesty the King, was received with due honours, while the music band of the Infantry played the national anthem.

Solemn Mass was celebrated by the Rev. Ignacio Laborda, rector of the St Charles' Seminary. After a most eloquent sermon preached by Rev. Father Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P., a response was sung by His Grace the Archbishop and a procession was formed with the participation of all authorities and His Grace. The two coffins, wrapped with the national flag, were carried on a gun-carriage of the artillery. The whole of Zaragoza took part in the solemn transfer of the remains, in spite of the day being a working day. Large crowds watched the funeral procession along the streets with fervour and devotion. The atmosphere seemed to be filled with the religious spirit and the spiritual presence of the holy Founders. The novitiate House was decorated with flags and lances. At the entrance court of the novitiate Church the two coffins were placed in the centre and a solemn response was sung. After placing the urns in the mausoleums, Mother General Pabla Bescos surrendered three keys to the respective authorities, keeping the fourth one in her custody.

5. The final glorification of Vble. Maria still awaited

After that memorable day, few days are still worth remembering as landmarks on the way to the final

glorification of the Foundress. Such are, the publication of the first biography, "Heroismo y santidad," in 1926. The inception of the Ordinary Process for the cause of the Beatification and Canonization, started on July 1st 1926 and in February 1927 was handed over to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. On August 4th 1931 the cause of Beatification and Canonization was introduced. On May 30th 1932 the Apostolic Process was inchoated. On June 25th 1940 the Sacred Congregation approved the informative and Apostolic Process.

In the meantime frequent pilgrimages and devotional visits to the tomb of the servant of God have succeeded one after the other in great numbers. In an album kept in the sacristy of the novitiate signatures and expressions are collected, showing great faith and confidence in her powerful intercession. Most of the expressions are an ardent supplication to the Venerable Mother that she may intercede before God on behalf of the motherland, so that the Christian faith may be renewed in the Spanish people, and their fervour increase.

This current of devotion continues to sway many souls directing them towards God. In the humble Mother Rafols the words of Christ have been fulfilled once more, "the humble will be exalted."

“YOU ARE THE GREAT PRIDE OF
OUR NATION” Judith 15,9

I. Favours soon after her death

The devotion to Mother Rafols has been preserved and nourished with the innumerable favours which she secures from God for the benefit of all kinds of people, helping them in their needs. Soon after her death His Grace the Archbishop of Zaragoza was cured of a sickness in his leg. He himself attributed the healing to the intercession of Mother Rafols.

The sisters, too, recommended themselves to her in all their difficulties and needs, using her as their powerful intercessor in heaven. The universal character of her charity which made her famous seems to have become more universal after her death, for prayers requesting help in all possible needs are addressed to her and are favourably answered. Her power of intercession before God has been shown to be remarkable. All kinds of sicknesses, domestic quarrels, economical difficulties and moral doubts are ended and conversion of sinners are effected by invocation of her help. The number of benefits received from her continues on the increase in an impressive manner, for acknowledgements of new graces and favours are continually reported to the novitiate House.

Don Ricardo Conde, a doctor in the town of Daroca, certified that some time before he was urgently called to give medical attendance to a girl who had fallen from a great height. The doctor could verify himself

that in fact the girl Josefina Garcia Diaz was in a very serious condition from the injuries sustained from a fall from a height of 18 metres. She had suffered skull fracture in various parts with great haemorrhage and also fracture of the femur. Her condition was extremely grave. A few hours later, all feared a rapid end, for she had vomited blood five times. The doctor was convinced that the girl would die soon. Suddenly the doctor could verify that she was on the way to a steady recovery. In a relatively short period of time she was cured without any apparent physical deformity. The reason of this sudden recovery was that the family, aware of the imminent danger of death, had turned with great confidence to prayer, to ask for the intercession of Mother Rafols. A picture of the servant of God was applied to her head. The family truly and sincerely believed that the girl was cured by the intercession of Mother Rafols. The doctor testified that he who had seen the girl immediately after the accident could affirm that the cure of the girl Josefina Garcia Diaz had been truly miraculous.

A letter was received from the Pious Schools of Peralta de la Sal: “Very dear Mother and sisters in Christ, Before I begin my Spiritual Exercises I wish briefly to salute you all and at the same time congratulate you on the great miracle that took place in my village through the intercession of Mother Rafols. I have shared my joy with my dear novices and all the persons I have come in contact with. The case is the following:

“In my village seven doctors had given up all hope of saving the life of a 13 year old boy. Human knowledge found itself powerless, so all felt, and only a

miracle could save the boy. He was suffering of an acute peritonitis and was on the point of dying. The boy was fully aware of his condition and to the admiration of every one present, himself asked for the Sacrament of the sick. All were waiting for the final moment. As a friend, I approached him and took from my pocket a holy picture of Mother Rafols with a relic, convinced that the heroine of the sieges was to repeat one of her great heroic deeds. And it happened. As I was giving the picture to him I told him these words, 'take, dear, pray hard everyday to Mother Rafols, she will save you, preserve it and have trust.' Ten days later, they wrote to me from home and told me, 'the boy of the peritonitis is absolutely alright, he walks in the streets, plays with his mates and has a very good appetite. The opinion in the village is that Mother Rafols has saved him, and this is the truth.' I communicate this news to you for your own satisfaction and enjoyment for I believe you will rejoice seeing the power of intercession your Foundress has before the Almighty. To me it has given one of the greatest satisfactions of my life. Yours, Benito Aizu."

2. In recent years

During the Spanish civil war against marxism the resolute and courageous heroine seemed to have taken charge of protecting the young men who so bravely fought for the ideals of God and motherland. Her name became very popular among the young men who saw in her their guardian angel. Many of them carried a picture of her and kissed it before entering into battle. It worked for them like a charm, for it would deviate the bullets so as not to be wounded, or halt the advance of the enemy, or protect them

from the raids of the aeroplaines. Few testimonies will explain her beneficial influence even now.

"Berani, July 3rd 1938. Reverend Mother Superior, I am very pleased to fulfil my duty of acknowledging the extraordinary protection that in my enterprises and among the troops under my command your Reverend Mother Foundress is granting us. The most clear and recent case of this protection we have experienced in the place of the 'Mongote de Piedras de Aolo.' In an encounter there our troops won a great victory, and were recommended to the highest distinction for bravery. Our troops, without any protection, repelled more than thirty desperate attacks of the enemy. We had placed a picture of Mother Rafols on a tree in the most dangerous place. She presided over our movements, instilling an unexpected heroism in the combatants, making all attacks fail, though our position was by no means advantageously placed.

"Besides this, I wish to make known to you that in one of the most dangerous and difficult moments, precisely when I had asked from my aide-de-camp another picture of Mother Rafols, a group of soldiers maddened with the shower of shells and the explosion of a box of shells close to them, were abandoning the parapet, for all resistance had become impossible. I marched towards them, holding aloft the picture of Mother Rafols, and shouting victory to Our Lady of the Pillar. The soldiers who were suddenly electrified, quickly and without any hesitation returned to their posts where they continued to fight in all earnest.

"In this case which I faithfully narrate and in which there were no other orders given or any other actions than the ones enumerated here, we have a sufficient

proof of the good Mother's intervention. For men, in a stampede, led by the natural instinct of self-preservation, cannot be easily halted and made to reflect and be led like meek lambs, without threats and orders, unless by a special grace from on high. All the more so as this happened at night, and no one hesitated for a moment.

"It remains, Reverend Mother, to request you to remember us in your prayers, as I had requested you before, and to be kind enough to give my aide-de-camp a few more pictures of Mother Rafols to keep alive our faith and courage until the day of the final victory of this war we have undertaken for God and for Spain. I remain, sincerely yours, Luis de la Puente."

Another testimony:

"It happened on July 25th, Feast of St James the Apostle, the Patron of Spain. Commanding a convoy with mountain batteries, I betook myself from Caspe to Gandesa along the road. A similar convoy was ahead of us. Suddenly the enemy planes, as if aware of the important material we were carrying, were seen in the sky. Three jet-fighters were gliding as the masters and lords of the sky. Soon they came over the first convoy, and making use of their machine-guns they vomited their hatred against the defenceless group. Six mules were killed and several soldiers wounded.

"Satisfied with their success they tried to repeat the same feat against the convoy I was commanding. They were now coming straight against us. The danger of death was imminent. There was no place along the open road to take shelter. We offered an easy target to them. At that moment, with all the fer-

our of my soul, I invoked the saintly Mother Maria Rafols, to whom I was very devoted, requesting her with all trust, and being certain that God would listen to my prayer through her intercession. Indeed, the servant of God heard my prayer and soon we could verify it. The jet-fighters, eager to accomplish their purpose, rushed hastily against us. In that haste two of them collided and caught fire. The third fled from the danger. Not far away from the place we had halted, and speechless as we were, we saw the jets falling down all in flames. The pilots had not been able to make use of the parachutes. The feeling of wonder at the sight of this occurrence cannot be easily explained. It paralysed us for a time, until sentiments of gratitude towards her burst from my heart. Desirous that everything might be known for her greater glory, I make it public. Vicente Noguera Tur. Zaragoza. 13th Division, 12th Mountain battery.

A final testimony:

"On the 10th of this month I was wounded in the Mountains of Espadan, between Artana and Uson. I felt myself wounded in the shoulder and in the side. Two stretcher-bearers and the practitioner on duty came to my rescue. After giving me first aid for my shoulder they proceeded to attend to my side. But they saw no wound there. I was surprised for I had felt the impact of a bullet as I felt the one in the shoulder. Before I was made to lie down on the stretcher, there and then I handed everything I had with me to the stretcher-bearers. One of them said in surprise, 'your purse is all torn.' I had kept it in the back pocket of my trousers. They examined it and saw that the covers had been perforated, as well as the papers inside,

and the few bank notes also. There was the bullet, smashed between two pictures of the servant of God, Mother Maria Rafols, which my mother had given me when I left for the army to fight for God and my dear country. The stretch-bearers collected the purse and everything in it with the bullet and wrapped it in a kerchief.

"When we arrived at the field-dressing station I showed everything to the doctor lieutenant and to the assistant who were amazed to hear the story. They ordered me to preserve everything. After the Hospital of the Saviour in Zaragoza was evacuated and when I was about to show those objects which I consider to be witnesses of a favour of the saintly Mother Maria Rafols, I saw with regret that the bullet was not there. Yet, the purse and the other objects remained as a testimony of the protection of the great servant of God, to whom I shall be always highly grateful. I was born at Santa Cruz de Nogueras, Teruel. I belong to the Regiment Carros de Combate, no. 2, 5th Battalion, 1st Company. Sergeant Luciano Lazaro Simon."

Such happenings took place frequently. Mother Rafols seemed to live in the trenches, protecting the soldiers, and in the Hospitals alleviating their sufferings. Her presence was so clearly felt that all were led to have a blind trust in her intercession. Many times they experienced how powerful it was.

The non-combatant population had the same trust, and they, too, frequently invoked her, asking for the final victory. Those Christians who lived in the places occupied by the marxists had her as a beacon of light in the sad hours of religious persecution, and as an

anchor of hope for better days to come. Those sighing in the dungeons and chambers of torture had her as a comfort and an example: hers had been an inspiring example, for she had experienced the horrors of a prison, the threats of death, the bitterness of banishment for the very same ideals of God and motherland.

Her figure grew mightier as the trial lasted longer. Her voice, like that of the prophets, sounded soft and awful proclaiming the power and worth of suffering for truth and justice.

3. The pride of our nation

The Sacred Heart of Jesus was pleased to glorify in this manner His faithful servant. We are confident that God will allow us to witness one day her supreme exaltation to the glory of the saints. Her innumerable devotees wish it and are praying for it, to the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of Holy Mother the Church and of Spain that already now acclaims her with the words, "you are the great pride of our nation".

They said that in her outward appearance she was very much like St. Teresa of Avila. Be it as it may, (those who say it never saw the great Teresa, except in pictures which are questionable reproductions of the original), the fact is that inwardly Mother Rafols had many of the spiritual features of that great mystic and revolutionary nun, world-trotter and contemplative of the highest rank. Besides Teresa of Avila was a compendium of everything good, noble and "quixotic", if we are allowed to say so, that can be found in the Castillian people, so also Maria Rafols was the compendium of everything practical, down-

to-earth, of the constancy and doggedness, the organizing genius and cautious behaviour of the Catalonian people to whom she belonged. The Castillian features of the mystic of Avila and the Catalonian genius of the daughter of Villafranca contribute to the variety existing among the peoples and races of the Iberian Peninsula.