Ursuline Network

Ursuline Sacred Heart of Jesus - Asola

History of the Ursuline Sacred Heart of Jesus - Asola

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Istituto Suore Orsoline del Sacro Cuore di Gesù

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History

The Congregation of the Ursulines of the Sacred Heart was founded in Gazzuolo (Diocese of Cremona and Province of Mantua) on September 5, 1893, by Sister Maria Ignazia Isacchi (1857-1934) with the help of Sister Maria Margherita Lussana (1852-1935).

Previously the two nuns had belonged to the Congregation of the Somaschan Ursulines. Then, in 1892, a noblewoman of Gazzuolo asked the bishop of Cremona, Monsignor Bonomelli, to look for some nuns to open an elementary school for both girls and boys; he communicated with the bishop of Bergamo, Monsignor Guindani, who agreed to send seven nuns from Somasca to Gazzuolo, thus establishing another branch of Ursulines. From the beginning the bishops and superiors agreed to make that new Congregation independent.

On December 7, 1893, it was established according to canon law as a diocesan institute, with the name "Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus". The Rule of the Ursulines of Somasca was modified, according to the needs of the new diocese, and approved by Bishop Bonomelli on September 5, 1894.

On October 20, 1894, the first general chapter was held, in which Sister Maria Ignazia was elected general superior and Sister Margherita the general vicar.

Besides teaching in the elementary school, the new Rule involved the nuns in Sunday school and catechesis in the surrounding areas, in visits to village families in order to comfort and help them, in watching over sick people free of charge, and in training women to embroider and to mend clothing. Soon an orphanage and a girls' secondary school were opened. The Ursulines also offered private lessons up to the point of the final examinations and evening school for working-

class women. "The education of youth was always my ideal", wrote Mother Margherita, who was in charge of all the educational works of the Institute.

The education they imparted was inspired by the Rule of Saint Angela: to have great esteem and respect for the students, as they are a valuable treasure, daughters of God, redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ. The Ursulines were to love all of them with mothersÂ° hearts, with no shadow of difference or partiality. They were to draw inspiration from the examples of charity, humility, and patience left by Jesus Christ, instilling into their souls the seeds of the main virtues: purity, simplicity, innocence, abhorrence of lies, respect and love towards parents, relatives and superiors..." (Item 63 of the Rule, 1894).

Charism

During the long periods when Mother Ignazia prayed before the crucifix, she would read in that pierced Heart, as in a synthesis, the drama of God's love for humanity and would find His most meaningful and eloquent representation in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She gazed upon the living image of the unlimited love through which the Son of God had loved His Father and had sacrificed His life for humanity (cf. John 15:12-13). The charism the foundress had received from God, the task she realized she would have to carry on in the Church, can be expressed as, "to make known and to communicate to all, far and wide, the ineffable richness of light, of mercy, of holiness and of life with which the Heart of Jesus is filled to overflowing."

Works

After 1900 the congregation spread chiefly in the provinces of Bergamo and Mantua, with the opening of pre-schools and nursing care, including home care. Thus, at the deaths of the venerable mother-foundresses, there were 19 houses with 120 nuns. “Our dear institute will be charged to do so much good through its variety of works!” Mother Ignazia wrote. “How Jesus will be consoled in seeing this dear squad gathered in his name, which acts for the glory of God! This is a great source of hope for the Church.”

Since 1975 the Ursulines of Asola have opened a mission in Lybia, in the service of sick people, working among the Muslims, who admire and respect them, as they are AllahÂ°s brides. Since 1991 two houses opened in Burundi carry on the activities of the institute in their particular

cultural contexts. There new vocations have also been born. They are the “great source of hope for the Church” foreseen by Mother Ignazia.

Today

The Ursulines of the Sacred Heart of Jesus have 13 houses in Italy and 3 abroad, with a hundred nuns. During the course of the years, in Italy, nursing and educational activities have been transformed into spiritual counseling in hospitals and retirement homes, parish work, teaching of Catholic religion in high schools, social commitment together with “Caritas” and “Centers for listening and for assistance throughout life.” For some years the institute has opened itself to lay people too, in order to respond to the many signs of the times and the instruction of the Church (cf. Vita Consecrata, no. 5,4), with the lay fraternity “Friends of the Sacred Heart”, in order to share special moments celebrative of the charism.

Significant Dates

Since 1917 the Motherhouse of the insitute has been in Asola, in the Diocese and Province of Mantua. The institute has been of pontifical right since 1947. In 1985 the mortal remains of the venarable Mothers were transferred from the cemetery of Seriate to the Motherhouse chapel, to be more united to their spiritual daughters. In 1988, the causes of beatification and canonization were introduced for both at the same time. The prescribed diocesan inquiry “on the life, virtues and reputation for holiness” was completed in 1996 “and for Mother Ignazia even a “super miro” and is now being studied by the Congregation of the Causes of the Saints.

And so it is that Angela Merici’s dream, like a “seed” deeply rooted in the soil, has produced new fruits and continues to germinate and develop, adapting to times, cultures, and different environments.

THE URSULINES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS IN ASOLA

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