

**A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO:  
Sor Mariana de Jesús Torres**



**Oil painting of the Servant of God Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary made important revelations about the twentieth century.**



**A SPANISH MYSTIC  
IN QUITO:**

**Sor Mariana de Jesús Torres**

**Msgr. Luis E. Cadena y Almeida**

**THE FOUNDATION FOR A CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION, INC.  
New York**

This book was originally published in Spanish under the title  
*Madera para Esculpir la Imagen de una Santa.*

The Foundation for a Christian Civilization, Inc.  
P.O. Box 341, Hanover, Penn. 17331  
[www.tfp.org](http://www.tfp.org)

© 1990 by The Foundation for a Christian Civilization, Inc.  
All rights reserved. Published 1990  
Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-82119

ISBN 1-877905-18-6

# CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
1. THE GIRL MARIANA FRANCISCA	1
Her Childhood	1
Her First Communion	2
Religious Vocation	5
2. THE OVERSEAS JOURNEY	9
The Perils of Maritime Travel	9
On American Soil	12
3. IN THE ROYAL CONVENT OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION	17
The Long Awaited Days	17
An Account of the Ecstasy	19
The First Years of Profession	20
First Assignments	22
4. BEFORE THE PERSECUTION	29
Death of the First Abbess	29
First Apparition of Our Lady of Good Success	31
Revelations and the Four Degrees of Prayer	35
Second Governing Period	38
5. IMPRISONMENT OF THE FOUNDRESSES	41
Historical Background	41
The Place of Mother Mariana's Confinement	43
The Imprisonment of Mother Mariana	45
The Intervention of a Canon	49

6. A HEROIC ACT	53
Punishment for the Rebellious Nun	53
The Supreme Holocaust: Five Years in Hell	54
A Successful Outcome	57
The Love of the Cross	58
7. I AM MARY OF GOOD SUCCESS	61
Apparition of the Blessed Virgin, January 16, 1599	61
Our Lady Announces the Date of Mariana's Death	64
The Infant Jesus in the Arms of Mother Mariana	67
Apostolate for the Salvation of Souls	68
Authenticity of Visions	71
8. MOTHER MARIANA AND THE FUTURE OF ECUADOR	73
The Child Jesus of the Cross of Pichincha	73
Reconciliation Between Feuding Families	76
Cause of a Violent Earthquake	78
Mariana Bilocates to Save a Soul from Damnation	79
9. THE PIETY OF MOTHER MARIANA OF JESUS	83
The Passion of Holy Week	83
Harassment from Demons	86
Feast of Corpus Christi, 1623	86
Holy Thursday, 1624	88
The Popularity of the Names Mariano and Mariana	89
Poetry of Mariana of Jesus Torres	90
10. PROPHEPIC PREDICTIONS OF MOTHER MARIANA	97
Another Apparition from Our Lady of Good Success	97
The Pre-election of Zoila Blanca	102
Prediction about the Society of Jesus	102
The Approaching Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1634	103
The Last Apparition	104
11. AN ENTIRE LIFE OF SANCTITY	109
Last Months on Earth	109
Last Christmas	111

The Nun Who Died Three Times	111
The Second Death	113
The Third and Definitive Death	116
12. THE TESTAMENT OF MOTHER MARIANA	125
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.	125
First Clause	126
Second Clause	127
Third Clause	129
Fourth Clause	131
Fifth and Final Clause	133
Obligatory Practices	134
13. POST MORTEM	139
A Look into the Death of Saints	139
The Wake in the Lower Choir	143
A Blind Girl Is Healed	145
Presence of the "Lily of Quito"	146
14. THE BIOGRAPHERS OF MOTHER MARIANA	149
Autobiography	149
The "Cuadernón"	149
Diego Rodríguez Docampo	150
Friar Alácana, O.F.M.	150
Friar Manuel Souza Pereira, O.F.M.	151
Friar Francis de Anguita, O.F.M.	154
15. SOLEMN PLEDGE	155
Last Chapter	155
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	157
<i>Brief Curriculum Vitae of the Author</i>	159





## FOREWORD

After having read the book *Sister Mariana of Jesus Torres: A Spanish Mystic in Quito*, written by the director of the Archiepiscopal Archive of the Curia of Quito, Monsignor Luis E. Cadena y Almeida, I formed the certainty that this work is destined to do great good not only to the cherished Ecuadorean nation, but also to the entire West and perhaps the world.

For the defense of the remnants of Christian civilization in our time, it is highly desirable that this book reach the hands of all those persons invested with some responsibility in the destinies of Christendom whether in the spiritual field of the Church's action or in the temporal sphere.

\* \* \*

The work of Monsignor Cadena y Almeida presents the biography of a Conceptionist nun of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mother Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa. Born in the province of Vizcaya of noble Spanish lineage, she sailed the seas with a group of six cofounding religious to settle in the distant royal province of Quito, a territory which in those days still maintained the rugged characteristics of a frontier settlement.

It was their intention in taking this great step to attract the mercy of God through the means of prayer, penance and the contemplative life for the expansion of Spanish America, both in the spiritual and civil fields which was facing considerable obstacles and risks.

Mother Mariana received precious graces from the Blessed Virgin to assist her in reaching the high plateau of mysticism. The story of

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

her spiritual journey will produce great benefit for our souls and will in some measure generate the enthusiasm of imitation. Her most unusual spiritual life, I am certain, will make this book one of the most important sources for the study of Catholic mysticism in Spanish America during the time in which she lived.

Mariana of Jesus Torres was the most eminent of the foundresses who by the order of King Philip II arrived in San Francisco de Quito in 1577 to found the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Her life there from beginning to end was a succession of trying sufferings and terrible difficulties. They reached their intensity when a group of native nuns from Quito who lacked an understanding of their vocation caused a revolt. This resulted in a persecution of Mother Mariana and her orthodox followers. On four occasions, the holy mother foundress was unjustly incarcerated in the prison of the convent, which has been preserved as a monument to the soul-rending martyrdom endured there by Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres.

\* \* \*

However, Divine Providence asked still more of Mother Mariana. Our Lord asked her, who was the target of this unjust conspiracy, to suffer as an expiatory victim and accept a terrible penance in order to move the rebellious leader to final contrition.

Mother Mariana of Jesus accepted. This expiatory sacrifice consisted of the holy nun suffering for a five-year period the torments of hell reserved for the rebellious nun had she been condemned there.

Such heroism of soul certainly accounts for the special predilection of Divine Providence for Mariana of Jesus Torres and the mystical favors granted her by heaven as well as the miracles that graced her life. These truly marvelous miracles are especially covered in chapters 4, 7, 8, and 10 and will be of great interest to the readers.

Also of special interest are the prophecies of Mother Mariana and the amazing precision of those which have passed into time. Monsignor Cadena has written another work with the sole purpose of demonstrating their accurate fulfillment.

One of the prophecies is a glorification of the great Gabriel Garcia Moreno, head of state and martyr of the faith who was assassinated in Quito in 1875 by the order of the Freemasonry of Peru and Ecuador. The cause of his canonization is now open in the appropriate

office of the Holy See. This prophecy which is reproduced here from the text was fulfilled to the letter and is common knowledge in Ecuador.

“In the nineteenth century a truly Christian president will come, a man of character to whom God Our Lord will grant the palm of martyrdom in this very square where my convent is. He will consecrate the republic to the Sacred Heart of my beloved Son, and this consecration will sustain the Catholic religion throughout the following years. During those years, which will be ominous for the Church, the accursed sect of Freemasonry will take over the civil government. A cruel persecution will rage against all religious communities and will descend upon this convent with special fury. Because of those wretched men the convent would perish, but God lives and I live and We will raise powerful defenders from their own midst. We shall place insuperable difficulties in their path; the triumph will be Ours.” (See Chapter 7.)

But the prophecies of Mother Mariana not only refer to facts then pertaining to the future which have already occurred, but also include important descriptions of our present time and into the future toward which the world advances, amidst sins, blasphemies, and the general degradation of civilization. I cannot refrain from relating a part of these prophecies here in the foreword. As the quotation begins, Our Lady is explaining why the sanctuary lamp mysteriously burned out.

“The sanctuary lamp that burns before Our Lord in the tabernacle and which you saw go out has many meanings:

a) “The first is that toward the end of the nineteenth century and throughout a great part of the twentieth many heresies will be propagated in these lands, which will then be a free republic. With these heresies in control, the precious light of faith will be extinguished in souls because of an almost total corruption of customs. In those times there will be great calamities, both physical and moral, public and private. The few souls who remain faithful to grace will suffer a cruel, unspeakable and prolonged martyrdom. Many of them will descend to their graves due to the violence of suffering and will be counted among the martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the Church and the country.

b) “Secondly, my community, which will be reduced to a small number, will be submerged in a depthless sea of unspeakable troubles. Many true vocations will perish through a lack of good judgment and prudence concerning their formation by the mistresses of novices, who

should be prayerful souls well-versed in the ways of spiritual guidance but who will allow many innocent novices, after having been in the secure haven of this blessed convent, to return to the Babylon of the world to become agents of evil for the corruption of souls.

c) “Thirdly the lamp was extinguished because of the poisoned atmosphere of impurity which will reign at that time like a filthy sea. It will flow through the streets, squares and public places with such an astonishing lack of restraint that there will be almost no virgin souls left in the world. It is well-known that the vice of impurity extinguishes the light of faith.

d) “The fourth meaning concerns the power of sects and their ability to penetrate homes and families, thus destroying the beauty of innocence in the hearts of children. In this way, vocations to the priesthood will diminish.

“In the regular clergy, because of the observance of the rule and the practice of the virtues, there will be no lack of holy priests; not so with the secular clergy, who will become attached to wealth and riches rather than their priestly ministry. How the Church will suffer during this dark night! Lacking a prelate and father to guide them with paternal love, gentleness, strength, wisdom and prudence, many priests will lose their spirit, placing their souls in great danger.

“Therefore, clamor insistently without tiring and weep with bitter tears in the privacy of your heart, imploring our Heavenly Father for the love of the Eucharistic Heart of my Most Holy Son to put an end to these ominous times by sending to this Church the prelate who will restore the spirit of her priests.

“We shall endow this dear son of mine with a rare capacity, a humility of heart, a docility to divine inspiration, the strength to defend the rights of the Church, and a tender and compassionate heart, so that, like another Christ, he will assist the great and the small, without despising the less fortunate who ask him for light and counsel in their doubts and hardships.

“Into his hand the scale of the sanctuary will be placed so that all may be carried out in due measure and that God be glorified. However, the lukewarmness of souls consecrated to God in the priestly and religious states will tip the scales in the opposite direction, thus allowing the cursed Satan to take possession of this land. He will achieve his victories by means of foreign and faithless people so



numerous that, like a black cloud, he will darken the pure heavens of the then republic consecrated to the Sacred Heart of my Divine Son.

“With these people every type of vice will enter, calling down, in turn, every kind of chastisement, such as plagues, famines, internal fighting, external disputes with other nations, and apostasy, the cause of perdition of so many souls so dear to Jesus Christ and to me.

“In order to dissipate this black cloud, which impedes the Church from enjoying the clear day of liberty, there will be a formidable and frightful war, in which both native and foreign blood will flow, including that of secular and regular priests and other religious. This night will be most horrible, for, humanly speaking, evil will seem to have triumphed. This will mark the arrival of my hour, when I, in a marvelous way, will dethrone the proud and cursed Satan, trampling him under my heel and chaining him in the infernal abyss, finally freeing the Church and the country from his cruel tyranny.

e) “The fifth motive for the extinguishing of the lamp is the negligence and carelessness of those possessing great wealth who will indifferently stand by and witness the oppression of the Church, the persecution of virtue and the triumph of evil without applying their riches in a holy way for the destruction of evil and the restoration of the Faith.” (See Chapter 10, pp. 97-100.)

\* \* \*

These reproduced prophecies—the first concerning Garcia Moreno and the second explaining the extinguished sanctuary lamp—form two parts of a whole. The accuracy and fulfillment of the first lends support and veracity to the second. If Mother Mariana of Jesus foresaw so well events in the nineteenth century, we should have confidence in the accuracy and the certainty that what she foresaw for the twentieth century will also come to pass.

Such predictions may perhaps be a cause for panic for some readers. But, if analyzed in depth, they become encouraging and enlightening words. In fact, they guarantee us that in the end, after the predicted general collapse of systems, institutions and even nations, a great light will shine forth.

It is noteworthy that in their own way these words are but one with those spoken by the Blessed Virgin Mary to Sister Lucy in Fatima in 1917: “To prevent it [the war] I will come to ask for the consecration

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and the Communion of reparation on the first Saturdays. If they listen to my requests, Russia will convert and there will be peace; if not, it will spread its errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and several nations will be annihilated. Finally, my Immaculate Heart will triumph'' (Antonio A. Borelli, *Our Lady at Fatima: Prophecies of Tragedy or Hope for America and the World?* The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, 1985, pp. 51-52).

\* \* \*

On writing this foreword for the worthy book of Msgr. Luis Cadena y Almeida, it has been my intention to furnish the reader with elements of hope, and thus stimulate him to read it.

Finally, I close these lines by lifting my soul to Our Lady of Good Success of Quito, asking her to bring to a good conclusion the process for the beatification of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa, which has been recently initiated in the diocesan phase. At the same time, I also recommend that all the faithful reading these lines consequently ask Mother Mariana of Jesus all the graces that they may need and desire, for the granting of these graces can only help the process of canonization of this great mystic.

JOSÉ LUIS DE ZAYAS

# 1

## The Girl Mariana Francisca

### HER CHILDHOOD

Mariana Francisca was the name given at the baptismal font to the only daughter of a pious and noble couple. Both Diego Torres Cádiz and Maria Berriochoa Alvaro descended from illustrious families from a small Spanish village in the Basque province of Vizcaya.

When Mariana was seven, a terrible fire destroyed the church that her family attended, the parish house and all of its archives. This unfortunate accident has deprived us of a precious source of information and historical details about the family and birth of the girl whose biography unfolds here.

Of her birth and early childhood, we know only that she was the oldest of three children of this holy marriage. The other two were boys named Diego and Santiago. Certainly devotion to Saint Francis of Assisi led the parents to add the name Francisca to that of Mariana, itself chosen, perhaps, in memory of some illustrious lady of their ancestry in accordance with Spanish tradition.

The family had established itself in a small village in Vizcaya which drew its main income from the cultivation of its fields and the abundant harvest of grapes. Although not counted among the rich families of the village, the Torres could not be said to have lived in poverty. Both their house and lands abutted the church and the parish properties. This fortunate closeness gave little Mariana the opportunity to run over to the church and spend some of her playtime in front of the tabernacle of Our Lord. There at an early age her heart had found the love of her life.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Many times the loving child escaped from her own surroundings to the humble palace of the Lord of heaven and earth. There an unsuspected happiness flooded little Mariana's soul as she offered Jesus the canticles that she had learned, spending many hours imagining and meditating on visions of heaven. However, happiness on earth frequently comes to an abrupt end, especially to the young.

She was only seven years old when this intimate friendship was tragically interrupted. The parish priest, away on family business one morning, had left the church in the care of the sacristan. The sacristan, deciding to take advantage of the beautiful morning to accomplish some farming tasks in the fields, had filled the sanctuary lamp to the brim with oil so that our most holy Lord would be well-served with a long-lasting vigil.

On returning from the fields late in the afternoon, he found that, by a tragic misfortune, both the church and the parish house as well as adjoining properties had succumbed to the mercilessness of a terrible fire. There had been a slight tremor and the vigil lamp, filled to overflowing, overturned on the altar and caused it to be enveloped in flames. Everything was reduced to nothing more than some miserable ashes.

When the flames and smoke broke through the walls and became visible from the outside, the priest, who was visiting his sister within sight of the church, rushed headlong to rescue the sacred Body of Our Lord in the tabernacle. Disregarding any thought of his own safety, the priest, Fr. Luis Jaime de Berriochoa, Mariana's uncle, flew into the church as the treacherous flames were already licking at the frail doors of the tabernacle and about to diabolically devour the Lord of all created things. Without hesitation and with the valor of the martyrs, he crossed his breast with the Sign of the Cross and advanced fearlessly through the flames. He took the ciborium, and placing it on the tabernacle of his chest, carried it to safety in a nearby church. Here was Spanish valor at its best, full of faith and dauntless courage; here was a perfect knight of his King and a perfect priest of his God.

### **HER FIRST COMMUNION**

Misfortune never travels alone. Seemingly compelled by some morbid fear, it looks for company in order to compound human misery,

thus forming an avalanche of grief. The devastating fire that consumed the parish church and all surrounding properties brought to Mariana's peaceful existence two great sufferings. Mariana could no longer experience the spiritual joy of visiting Our Lord in the tabernacle, for their former Neighbor was taken to a distant church where Mariana was unable to visit because of her young age. Secondly, the treacherous fire had wiped out her parents' house, outbuildings and other property and thus reduced their once promising fortune to almost total poverty.

For this reason the family was obliged to leave Vizcaya and move to Santiago in Galicia with their three children. Mariana did not allow herself to brood over this misfortune and from her new dwelling began to visit the new home of her Lord. Soon she came to the attention of the townspeople who marveled at her piety, penetrating seriousness and fervor.

A Franciscan friar took it upon himself to prepare that delicate and angelic soul for the reception of the Holy Eucharist. She was soon ready for the supernatural act of her First Communion, which she received in an aura of purity and innocence at the age of nine on December 8, 1572, in a church of Santiago.

A saint's life can only be seen through the light of faith and can only be known and understood through a luminous radiation of the supernatural. From a physical viewpoint a saint, of course, is just a human being limited by anatomical specifications. However the material aspects of his nature are capable of receiving an extraordinary gift where the darkness that surrounds him gradually recedes and is replaced by a light that grows in brightness and vitality.

It all starts when grace, which is a free and communicative gift of God, takes possession of a man or a woman who is readily disposed to generously correspond to the divine plans. It is as if human nature were the dough and grace the yeast. Once the yeast penetrates into spheres of human action, it starts expanding, thus stimulating the dough to reach gigantic proportions and making it something very special.

The First Holy Communion should be especially observed in this spiritual process, for the lives of these predestined and privileged souls are from the early stages constantly progressing and developing. The Catholic soul that receives God under the appearance of bread, an



effuse mixture of divinity and humanity, and that provides lodging and assimilates Him is almost changed into a God.

One cannot minimize the immensity of this gift that God makes of Himself to man because, on giving Himself, He does not do it in the form of a spark, but in the form of an ardent fire of love which takes over the whole of the man and spreads to the farthest recesses of his being. Thus, in a certain sense, it could be said that man in his smallness becomes the miraculously preserved vessel of the potential and overwhelming majesty of the divine Visitor. Man disappears so that God may shine forth in all the transparency and splendor of His glory and love.

Thus, looking at the First Communion of little Mariana Francisca in this light, one may easily understand and believe when she and her confessors reveal what happened on that supernatural occasion. When Mariana with a great effusion of humility and love in her heart received the Blessed Sacrament, the Divine Guest opened up to her His inaccessible channels of communication. He did this to show her how far He will go in embracing with His loving tenderness the souls of those who know how to correspond to Him. As a first step in this divine intimacy, He suspended her earthly faculties. He then placed her in the hands of His Blessed Mother. This heavenly Lady impressed upon her the grandeur of the grace of purity and the priceless merit of the merits acquired by those who vow to keep it all their lives; especially if done in imitation of her who, promising this at the age of three, merited the supreme dignity of the Mother of God.

Following this, God Our Lord granted her an extraordinary light so that she could discern the marvels of the Eucharistic mystery. She was able to admire and adore the glorious coexistence of the Holy Trinity whose three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost are inseparable in essence and nature. While acting in accordance with Their specific attributes of power, love and wisdom, the Persons of the Holy Trinity form the moving elements that germinate in the souls that have the ineffable happiness of receiving, assimilating and partaking of this heavenly Bread.

So that Mariana Francisca could better understand the grandeur of the gift of gifts, she beheld the Son in His human nature asking the consent of the Father for a mystical betrothal with this privileged creature. This was done so that she could be taken through the luminous

path of love and sacrifice, which would be her precious dowry in order that one day she could be made His queen and sit on a throne of eternal glory.

The Father gave His consent and presided over the nuptial ceremony, and the Holy Ghost, as a wedding gift, endowed the girl with the most sublime virtues. Also present were Our Lady and Saint Joseph, the two great loves of Mariana. It is from this unforgettable feast of her First Communion that Mariana derived the Eucharistic fire that enveloped her soul and which was to make her the firm and untiring guard of the tabernacle.

## **RELIGIOUS VOCATION**

What is commonly known as a vocation is the choice that God makes among His creatures in the plan of salvation so that the chosen person may fulfill a specific mission in collaboration with the divine design. This attraction that we feel from our earliest years to spiritual things becomes with the course of time more and more accentuated and molds and defines our personality.

Since the early dawn of her life, Mariana's future was very clear to her. She would be a religious of the Order of the Immaculate Conception. There was nothing nor anyone that could dissuade her from the decision of giving herself to the life of love and sacrifice for which she felt inspired and destined by God.

In 1556, only seven years before Mariana's birth, in Quito, Ecuador, then a Spanish colonial city in the early stages of development, there were some pious ladies who, along with the city's first bishop and the town council, sent a fervent request to Philip II, King of Spain. They, sharing the same ideals, were seeking to found the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Their request was an essential step since the order was under the King's patronage and only he could grant the required authorization.

Philip, a thoughtful, responsible, pious King who was concerned for the interests of God and for the eternal salvation of his vassals in the distant colonies of the Americas, decided to personally prepare and to administrate this religious enterprise. He could see in it a new and faster way for thousands of souls to enter the path of sanctity.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

The Spanish King chose five Franciscan Conceptionists from the province of Galicia. The chosen nuns, who had been tried in austerity and monastic observance and were under the direction of Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada, would carry to Quito the spirit and organization of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, an order founded in the previous century by Beatrice da Silva.

When little Mariana heard from Mother Maria of Jesus, who was her aunt, about the delicate mission entrusted to her by the King, she judged that the moment which Jesus had foretold in the Blessed Sacrament had arrived. She would now give full expression to her pent-up desire for sacrificial love so that she could totally return the generous love of her Divine Spouse.

She pleaded and obtained from her aunt, Mother Taboada, permission to go with her as a religious aspirant, forming part of the founding project in the city of Quito. Neither her mother's arguments nor the pleadings of her father and brothers succeeded in causing her to waver even slightly in her decision, much less to step back on what she knew with certainty was to be her vocation. In fairness to her family, it must be said that they were not opposed to her entrance into the cloister so long as it was on Spanish soil.

Unfortunately, the trip was delayed because of a dispute between the Royal Court and high ecclesiastical officials over the funding of the project. The latter declared that the project should not begin until the necessary finances were obtained. However as the complications increased, Mariana's determination strengthened, a rare thing in one so young since children, because of their immaturity, tire even of their own games, especially if they are often repeated.

Since the solution of this conflict depended only on the acquisition of the necessary funds, a priest, one Father John Gomez, remedied the situation by donating three thousand pesos. With the financial dispute settled, the Royal Court and the Council of Bishops solved the problem of living quarters for the nuns when they purchased two large adjoining buildings in Quito. These were connected by means of corridors and colonnades, with principal streets forming all four sides. Thus the convent occupied an entire block.

Although one Spanish historian claims that the founding nuns were native to Ecuador, a study of all available information derived from reliable sources reveals that King Philip II inaugurated the enterprise

from Spain. He chose five Galician nuns—as has already been stated—of the Order of the Immaculate Conception and they were prepared to sail to Quito under the leadership of Mother Maria de Taboada.

Had the convent been founded only by native South Americans without any previous monastic formation or experience, a new religious order would have been established and not a community already dependent on an existing order which had been founded a century before.

Furthermore, had the foundresses been native, they would have lacked all knowledge and experience in the administrative and disciplinary characteristics of monastic life. The project would surely have failed for it would have been completely deprived of the spirit and the orderly, holy way of life that are necessary in a convent.

In any case, a special ecclesiastical recognition either by the Pope or the diocesan bishop would have been necessary for the founding of a convent without any spiritual link or any form of dependence on the original one. But of these documents, no records exist either in history or in the chronicles of the convent.

Thus, we have our first picture of those authentic Conceptionist Franciscan nuns who left the cloister in Galicia to enter it again in Quito in accordance with the requirements of Canon Law. As we describe this first scene of little Mariana's offering of herself to God, we should imagine what a sacrifice it was for her to abandon her sweet home at an age when a child has a special need of the assurance of her mother's tenderness and her father's direction. Also impressive was her detachment when she renounced the love of her native land. When she left behind the shores of Spain for an adventure filled with so many uncertainties and human fears, she showed that only lively faith and immense charity could furnish the strength to reach for the splendors of spiritual conquests.





## 2

# The Overseas Journey

### THE PERILS OF MARITIME TRAVEL

The separation from her parents, her homeland and the numerous small possessions that fill a child's pleasant and innocent existence caused Mariana great sorrow. Even greater was the emotion she felt when she offered to God the enormous sacrifice of placing her entire future into His hands. By renouncing those human ties that she loved so much, she became the sole property of Our Lord, enabling her to pick up the cross that God had designed for her and to follow His path of sorrow and sacrifice. With the weight of human affection lifted and the fire of divine love burning in her heart, she started for distant America where Jesus awaited her.

She and her companions traveled from Galicia along various winding roads to Madrid, and from there to Seville where in accordance with the law they received authorization from the customs officials to leave Spain for the New World. They set sail from the seaport of Cádiz, probably in one of the galleons left from the Invincible Armada. Out in the vast ocean they sailed, sometimes driven forward by the wings of their sails, sometimes by the propelling action of their oars which dug forcefully into the waters.

Nature shows its magnificence when the sun first rises over the sea, giving one the impression of reliving the first moments of creation. Light gradually overtakes darkness in a delightful play of colors that envelops everything: the sky, the stars, the foaming waves, people and things. Then the regal star begins its grand cycle, distributing light, warmth, energy, and life. How marvelous is the spectacle of

its setting in the evening as it disappears beyond the sea, tinting the waves with its crimson reflections until the whole panorama is enveloped in the dark mantle of night as it rolls over the sun like a tombstone.

But little Mariana was far from entertaining herself with just those maritime panoramas! Her mind, which transcended the natural beauties, contemplated the mission she had received from God of sacrificing herself for the salvation of Quito and its souls. And so the delightful days of her childhood fascinations began to merge with the days of renunciation and detachment from earthly things. Those contemplations were preparing her for the bitter chalice of tears and the voluntary, total isolation behind the grille of a cloister that many people with their mundane preoccupations view as forbidding and inhuman. God deigned that the entire sea voyage be a crucible wherein the iron strength of this girl's character might be tried. Despite her small size and young age, Mariana was an unconquerable giant in the purity of her love for God and neighbor which burned within her young soul.

Mariana had to face not only that wrenching feeling of homesickness that many youngsters suffer on their first trip away from home, but also—and this was the main battle—the hatred of the devil. Still possessing the angelic intelligence that he had never lost, the devil perceived that little Mariana was predestined to wage an unrelenting battle against him, thus rescuing many victims from his infernal claws by the merit of her great virtues and the humble power of her prayers and penances.

The evil one, through his powers of threat and seduction which God had never revoked, assumed the appearance of a formidable sea monster. By splashing and writhing around in the water, he placed the ship that carried the nuns and the girl in great danger of capsizing.

Night and day lightning snapped and thunder raged in the black, stormy sky. The wind roared and the waves swelled to form huge mountains that crashed against the frail vessel. The creaking wooden frame threatened to come apart at any moment. In all, everything indicated the imminence of a terrible shipwreck.

The experienced sailors trembled with fear. The passengers were crazed with panic; the innocent nuns wept and moaned, but Mariana, unshaken and serene, was deep in prayer. She invoked the Star of

the Sea, placed herself in God's hands and comforted the other sisters by her words and example. These religious were receptive to the grace of guidance, for they were imbued with the theological virtues of faith in Divine Providence, hope in the Lord's paternal mercy, and charity, which is love and conformity with the Divine Will in all circumstances of life. Here we see the religious aspirant transformed into the teacher of her teachers.

There were instances when Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada herself, the leader and superior of the nuns, thought of giving up the project and returning to Spain at the first opportunity. However, little Mariana reasoned with her and showed that she was committed before God and the King to proceed with the founding of the convent of the Immaculate Conception.

Mariana Francisca Torres was undoubtedly the heroine in this great battle against the Prince of Darkness. He spared no effort to prevent the apostolate that was being prepared for Quito, sensing that it was destined to render to God much glory by populating heaven with many holy religious and providing the opportunity for spiritual advancement to many thousands of souls.

In this long and dangerous crossing, all the travelers, the sisters included, recognized that they owed the undeniable triumph over the devil's power to the girl's incredible tranquility, innocent candor, and robust faith. Surely they thanked God for having sent them this visible and human guardian angel who protected them and sustained their courage.

The source of Mariana's unshakable confidence was revealed by her confessors. The Mother of God in her intimate dealings with Mariana appeared to her at the peak of Lucifer's attacks. The Blessed Virgin showed her that the battle foreseen by God in paradise in which the Woman would crush the pride of the infernal dragon was carried out on a daily basis in the history of salvation. One of those battles had been fought that day while the devil tried with all his power to prevent the founding of their convent.

She also showed Mariana her future life as a religious and the progressive development of the Conceptionist convent, sometimes caressed by the breeze of spiritual beneficence, at other times afflicted by the constant stabbings of human misery, but always with the special love and presence of her motherly heart.

## ON AMERICAN SOIL

Where did they land? Perhaps on those emerald-like beaches that were traversed many times by Pizarro and the Thirteen of Fame and their adventurous successors. Or perhaps at the old ports which had already seen the arrival and departure of so many intrepid visitors who, after they had braved the foaming waves of the sea, now scaled the rough slopes of the Andean mountain ranges.

When the nuns set foot on firm ground after having tossed about the sea on pounding waves, they felt a certain relief on being freed from the torment of constant danger. However, instead of looking forward to a rest, the religious expedition faced a steep, mountainous climb that caused fear and anguish in their already battered hearts. To reach Quito, the nuns valiantly scaled a rough and arid mountain range over 9,000 feet high through brush, over creeks, up depthless precipices.

During this exhausting trek, they encountered countless hardships and dark sleepless nights spent in fear amid the howling of wild animals. As they struggled through the terrain and up the mountain-side, they felt their strength slowly ebbing away and became distressed over their slow progress and the small amount of ground that they covered daily. The tremendous effort and courage that emerged from their ordinarily weak and feeble nature, so prone to inconstancy and discouragement, reached proportions of great heroism. But probably little understood at the time in their seemingly endless journey of dozens of miles from the vastness of the coast to a valley just below snow-capped Mount Pichincha was the miraculous assistance of God Whose power could turn all into either frustration or the greatest of successes.

At last, on the morning of December 30, 1576, the nuns, with worn-out feet and aching bodies, trudged into Quito. The joy of the people and the sound of trumpets and drums that resounded throughout the countryside proclaimed the triumph of the frail maidens. With full and joyous hearts ready to scale the mountains of love, the Conceptionist sisters sang a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for this second battle won for God. Other nuns would soon follow and assist in the establishment of the convent and in the distribution of divine gifts which always enrich the country where convents are located, a goal that King Philip II had in mind.



**View of the first cloister of the convent where the stone cross which blessed its foundation on March 13, 1577 majestically arises.**

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Mariana Francisca, the youthful aspirant to the religious life, whose courage had not wavered in this extremely hard trial, became the focal point of admiration and respect. The town marveled at the virtues and graciousness that shone from her beautiful soul: her excellent example, the strength of her will, rare in one so young, her manners and gestures imbued with a supernatural grace yet at the same time accompanied by the simplicity, spontaneity and attractive grace which was quite evident when she spoke.

By January 13, 1577, which was the date set for the official founding of the convent of the Immaculate Conception, Father Anthony Jurado, provincial of the Franciscans in Quito, had already taken canonical possession of the house and properties destined for the chapel and cloister. There the first convent in the Royal Territory of Quito was to be installed, located in the very center of the city facing the palace of the royal governor.

According to the rule of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, spiritual guidance had been entrusted to the direction of the Franciscan friars. Beatrice da Silva desired that her order have the spirit of the sons of Saint Francis.

Thus Father Anthony Jurado presided at the official founding ceremonies of the convent. He celebrated Holy Mass; received the religious profession of seven ladies, both Spanish and native, who on that occasion chose the religious state; renewed the vows of the Spanish foundresses and installed Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada in the office of abbess for the service of God in that new convent.

Along with the first abbess, a wise, experienced nun who was well acquainted with the struggle for perfection, five other religious formed around her a crown of joyful and promising stars to assist in the supernatural task of consolidating the founding work. They were Lucy of the Cross (Lucia de la Cruz), Frances of the Angels (Francisca de los Angeles), Anne of the Conception (Ana de la Concepción), Magdalen of Saint John (Magdalena de San Juan), Catherine of the Conception (Catalina de la Concepción) and Mother Maria's niece, Mariana of Jesus Torres, that morning star who, at the very beginning of the history of the convent, had already illuminated it with the light of her virtues although she was scarcely thirteen years old.

The founding sisters, convinced of their mission, were forged for the spiritual battles that the religious life entails and possessed an

ardent desire to repay God for all His charisms and gifts. With such a group as this Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada could rest assured that the seeds of love and sacrifice would soon spread deep roots in the heart of Quito's life and that the invigorating freshness of its fruits would challenge the severe and merciless storms of the coming centuries.





### 3

## In the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception

### THE LONG AWAITED DAYS

Mariana's soul, absorbed in divine love as it was, could not rest until it was completely divested of all earthly things and clothed in the blue and white habit of those virgins who were consecrated to the praise of the Immaculate Conception. Immense happiness flooded her heart when, on September 8, 1577, at the age of fourteen, she entered the novitiate after having served the required time as an aspirant.

Her joyous moment came in a simple but moving ceremony during the Offertory of Holy Mass celebrated by the provincial, Friar Anthony Jurado. Her aunt, the Mother Abbess, symbolically divested her of all the youthful feminine attire that accented the freshness and innocence of her youthful face. Although her countenance beamed with joy, it still exhibited the calm, self-possessed quality of one who lives a life of virtue, especially purity.

Following the symbolic divestiture of all human ornament and the pleasure it affords, came the clothing in the austere habit that, despite its mild colors of blue and white, would be a constant reminder of her spiritual death to the world and her confinement in the hallowed cloister of the convent.

Now in her holy confinement, Mariana's undefiled eyes found the adorable presence of the chaste love of her life. Her heart overflowed with happiness when she considered with blessed joy how fortunate she was in exchanging the fascinations of the world, filled with false

riches and completely void of God, for the effective possession of another state of life which, although lacking in comfort, was rich in God's gifts.

Having taken the habit, she was officially initiated into the religious life which she had desired and awaited for so long. She was no longer just an aspirant—that period was over—she was now part of the community, participating in all acts of prayer, penances, work, and reflection. For all practical purposes, she was a nun.

The novitiate months passed quickly. Mariana spent this time studying and practicing the rule of her order, that essential element which not only regulates, but instructs and molds the characteristic spirit of every religious community. After two years, the time came for her to take the simple vows which allow the novice the option of repeating them at a later date or not, depending on whether she, after serious reflection, feels the necessary moral strength to continue fulfilling them for life.

The young novice received the approval not only of her superiors and spiritual directors, but also of the community and, above all, that of her divine Spouse Who had furnished her with abundant graces for her ascent to the heights of sanctity. She prepared herself through spiritual exercises for the decisive ceremony of the final profession which was celebrated with the greatest devotion on October 4, 1579, the day when the Church honors and exalts the *Poverello* of Assisi, the seraphic Saint Francis.

The Church liturgy make use of its brightest lights, its most moving symbols, its best and most inspired expressions to introduce the candidate to an atmosphere of supernatural reality without, nevertheless, allowing her to forget the world's misery which surrounds her. As is usual with the majority of mystics, the most difficult spiritual battles are waged with both feet on the ground, but there are times when the soul is transported to the very borders of our material world where the specially favored individual penetrates the eternal immensities of divine nature and experiences a more intense love of God. In Mariana's case the experience resulted in a mystical marriage with Our Lord.

With the pronouncement of the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and monastic seclusion (cloister) in the presence of the officiating priest, Father Jurado, and the abbess, Mariana completed her consecration

to God. Then suddenly her sensible faculties became suspended and she entered into ecstasy. There she beheld Our Lord Who lovingly confirmed His pleasure in accepting her as His spouse, and disclosed to her the future development of the convent through the centuries and the several vicissitudes that Mariana would experience in her own religious life. She learned that within a time span of about fifty years significant crises would occur in the convent, crises that by various means were meant to uproot the source of human misery that interferes with the quest for Christian perfection.

She was also prophetically shown that in the nineteenth century there would be a nun who would be tried in virtue and holy integrity by the terrible disease of leprosy which would force her to exchange her beloved cloister for a wretched leper colony. There she would provide a most edifying example of holy and joyous resignation to the divine will. Our Lord in His unfathomable designs had chosen this soul as an expiatory victim so that through the merits of her martyrdom the convent would be protected from anti-Christian governmental corruption in that century.

### **AN ACCOUNT OF THE ECSTASY**

When Mariana emerged from the ecstasy, she was urged in obedience to her spiritual director to describe in detail all that happened to her during the solemn and moving ceremony of her religious profession.

“The ceremony was nearly over,” she tells us, “and while the Mother Abbess lovingly and maternally addressed me with the liturgical words, ‘If this thou keep, I offer thee eternal life,’ the Eternal Father repeated the same words in heaven.” She saw Our Lord Jesus Christ Who, while exhibiting infinite majesty and graciousness, performed the spiritual marriage by placing on her finger a ring with four precious stones representing the four vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and cloistered seclusion. The sponsors were the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. As a wedding gift, Our Lord presented her His Cross with all the burdens and sorrows that He bore during His mortal life.

“My spouse,” He said to her, “I wish you to lead a life of immolation. Your life will be a continuous martyrdom.” He made known

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

to her all the tribulations, temptations and persecutions of all kinds that she would suffer, preserved only from temptations against purity. He told her that she would suffer not only for less sanctified souls, but also for the souls of the just. She was shown all the spiritual desolations: the abandonment by God, the withdrawal of consolations, in short, all the prolonged martyrdom of her crucified love.

To this most painful vision of the future, the neophyte religious offered herself in readiness to accept joyfully every suffering as a precious gift and asked only for the necessary grace not to weaken. Her body while in ecstasy remained flexible and able to correspond to all the procedures of the ceremony.

At the end of this vision, Our Lord withdrew the ring that He had placed on her finger, causing her such pain that it seemed like her finger had been wrenched. This symbolized that Mariana's formative period was not yet over. For the fervent nun who had just been professed, there were still two years of vocational trial remaining. The purpose of the training was to prepare the neophyte, physically and spiritually, for the life-long journey which leads to the knowledge and possession of the one, true love. The beginner spent her time developing the reflective and contemplative ways to perfection.

For this end, the fleeting human realities of self-love and life's three temptations, the world, the flesh and the devil, had to give way to the delicate, silent and subtle march of humility. Nothing that is grandiose and lofty can be erected until one's heart has been cleared of the wretched thorns of all vanities. In their place the reinforced foundation of the structure which is humility is built on the solid ground of self-knowledge.

### **THE FIRST YEARS OF PROFESSION**

Mariana had to tread daily on the painful path of humility throughout the first two years after her profession, but not only then, for, in reality, she followed this path from beginning to end during all the days of her life.

Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada, with the insight of a saint, had already perceived that this girl was the finest material with which to carve the image of another saint, so she took totally upon herself the

task of forming her in humility. Thus, in even the best things that Mariana did, she had always a word of reproach, a humiliating remark and a suitable punishment. Mariana always received these gestures with the utmost graciousness and a sweet, ingenuous smile.

Many times when the youthful, tender soul suffered such a rebuke, the holy foundress so felt her heart bleed within that she fled to the confidant of all supernatural souls, Our Lord in the tabernacle. There she would humbly pour out her affliction saying, "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I only wish to lead her to Thy meek and humble Heart, so that Thou canst make of her a saint. Forgive me the offense, knowing that I have only her welfare at heart."

In the direction of souls toward the highest sanctity, the Church in its ascetical theology has always placed humility at the top of the moral virtues; without it there is no solid virtue, but with it all other virtues grow in depth and perfection. Even the pagan philosophers believed they found the secret of their philosophical happiness in the application of the repeated maxim "know yourself."

If we are to look at the bare truth, we cannot help but admit that we are nothing but a handful of nothing. We were nothing before God created us and we attain nothing through our own effort, but only through divine help or, in times past, through the solidarity of the Church Militant. Nothingness has no right to raise itself above others even though, individually, it may feel gifted with special qualities.

A sincere understanding and recognition of our contingency should increase our dependence on and gratitude toward God, for we will be judged solely on the extent of our love for Him. Before all else this should be the motivation in our obligations to our neighbor and ourselves. This tripartite relationship taken to its perfection engenders mutual love which is the beginning and end of all sanctity.

Mariana generously corresponded to the divine grace of her vocation and swiftly climbed all the steps that brought her to a complete realization of Christ's desire and command: "Be thou perfect as thy heavenly father is perfect." And she was perfect within human limitations in the fulfillment of her vows.

The strict observance of the monastic rule was the goal of her actions. She entirely observed the severity of the cloister, and her charity with her sisters was inexhaustible. Her tolerance of others' weak-

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

nesses, the sweetness of her manner, the special care for the sick, her reverential respect for her superiors and spiritual directors and, in general, the practice of all Christian virtues in order to achieve sanctity seemed to have no limits in her heart.

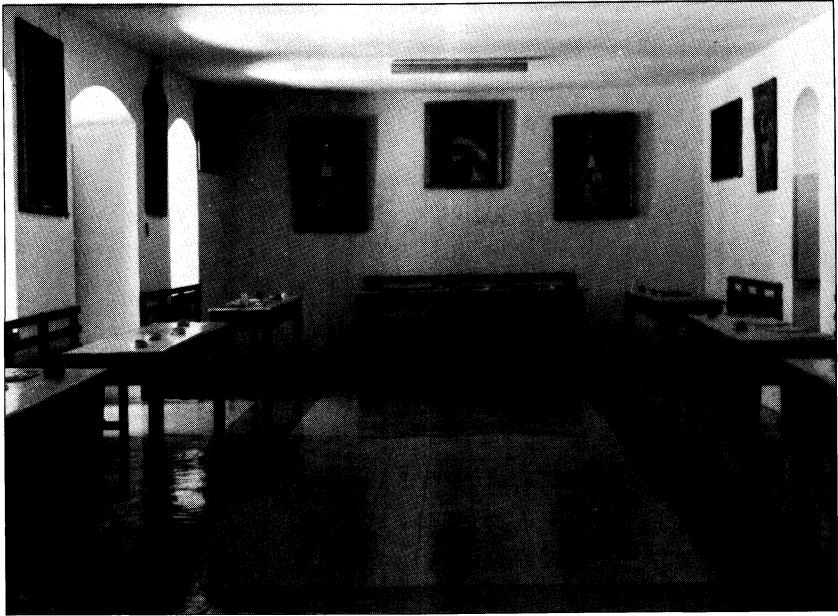
Speaking on the subject of Sister Mariana's outstanding virtue, her confessor, the austere and eminent theologian Father Anthony Jurado, said under oath in a certified document: "In Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres there shone all the virtues and in her was to be found an extraordinary religious spirit."

Her spiritual beauty harmoniously agreed with the natural beauty that God had given her. A visitor to the convent of the Immaculate Conception in Quito can observe that beauty in an oil painting, done in 1922 by an anonymous painter, that hangs in the refectory. Another picture hanging alongside portrays the Spanish beauty of her aunt Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada. In Mother Taboada's portrait one can discern the qualities of spiritual and physical maturity, an attractive sweetness of virtue and its resulting calming effect.

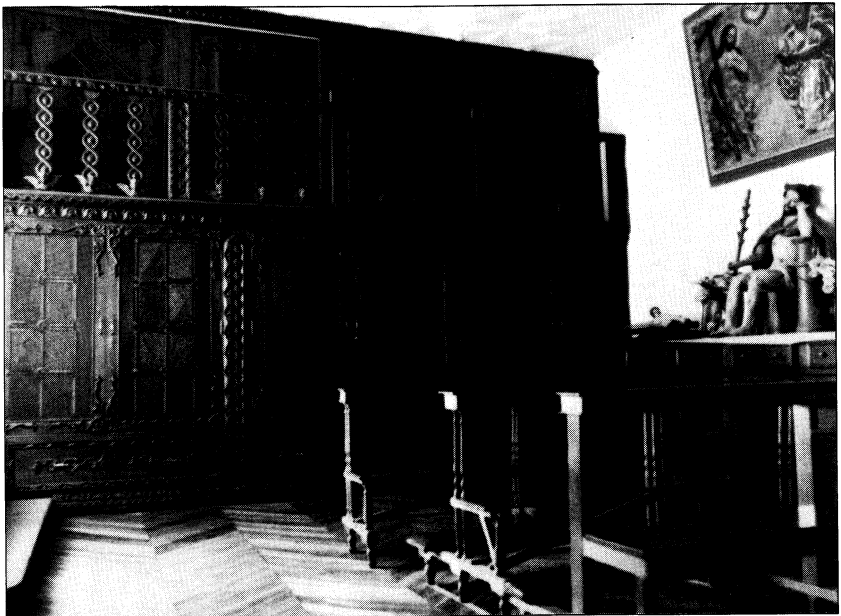
Glancing back to Mariana's picture, the observer will be impressed by her long oval face with an immaculately white complexion; large peaceful eyes, long lashes, perfectly arched eyebrows, a perfect nose, white even teeth, and a wide forehead which, receding into a white wimple, takes on an angular look. All this combines to form an angelic face. The white tunic and blue cape veiled a well-proportioned body, neither tall nor short. The tunic and cape allow one only to observe the impeccable whiteness of the hands with their long, aristocratic fingers which modestly show. In all, a magnificent ensemble of beauty that impresses us morally and exalts the grandeur of this masterpiece of God Who predestined her, created her and adorned her with the choicest gifts of soul and body.

### FIRST ASSIGNMENTS

After her years of preliminary formation had been completed, Mariana was assigned several successive offices in the religious community. Rather than dryly explain her duties in these various assignments, perhaps we can better illustrate the great sanctity that caused



**Present-day photograph of the refectory of the convent of the Conceptionists in Quito. The paintings on the front wall are of the foundress, Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada, and of her niece Mother Mariana of Jesus.**  
*Below: Partial view of the entrance to the lower choir.*



## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

her canonization process to be opened by recounting a little anecdote in each task.

### **Nurse**

The first task received was that of nursing. One day a young maid who did domestic work in the kitchen had an unfortunate accident in which she burned half her face and all of one arm. In the opinion of the doctor who attended the nuns, her case was hopeless. The damaged members had been burned to the bone, and gangrene would soon do its devastating work by ending the girl's life. Fortunately, in Sister Mariana's charity there were no barriers between human impossibilities and divine possibilities. She set out to cure the girl with the generous dedication of a true mother by combining care and attention to detail with gentle tact and tender love.

When Mariana knelt by the bed, she would look into the patient's face and, seeing there the likeness of the suffering Christ, beseech with great intensity the goodness of God for the girl's total cure. She would mix her tears of compassion with those of the patient and when they fell on the ulcerated wounds they had the effect of the purest ointment. After only a month of treatment, the servant girl was restored to complete health and to the youthful joy of life without the slightest trace of any disfigurement. This caused the learned physician to exclaim with admiration: "Sister Mariana is a saint. If the people outside were to hear of this, she would soon be taken to all the hospitals to cure the sick."

### **Purveyor**

From the very onset, the convent suffered from a great deal of scarcity. However, this afforded God an ample opportunity to illustrate His tender care for His virginal spouses by providentially seeing to their subsistence. When the quantity of bread was not sufficient for the whole community, it was enough for it to pass through the hands of Sister Mariana to be miraculously multiplied. At other times, having absolutely nothing to prepare for the approaching meal, she would



confidently go to the tabernacle and tell her worries to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. After this, on returning to her duties, there would be someone calling at the parlor to either leave an opportune donation or a savory gift from some good lady in the neighborhood. How faithfully were the words of Jesus Christ fulfilled: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

### **Sacristan**

We may easily imagine the delightful hours that this religious, with a heart ablaze in the flame of Eucharistic love, spent near her Lord, especially when He was present at the liturgical ceremonies. The preparation of the ornaments and candles and of the hosts and wine used in the celebration of the Holy Mass for the Transubstantiation into the body and blood of Christ became the perfect occasion to pour her heart into the emanating torrents of divine love. With that clear insight into the events of life that a person has when he or she looks at them in the light of faith and the royal presence of Jesus Christ, Mariana deeply penetrated into the secrets of sanctity. Thus we should not be surprised at the innumerable apparitions of Jesus and Mary to her nor of their choice of her as the confidant of their revelations and messages about the fortunate country of Ecuador.

In that quiet retreat, so far from the world and so close to heaven, how could the young religious not feel transformed and elevated, oblivious of the earth and its madness and firmly lodged in heavenly peace. In those heavenly heights, she learned to mingle with the angels.

With innocence and simplicity, she would urge her guardian angel to make certain that the sanctuary lamp was always lit. When, at one time or another, sleep would overtake this angelic nun in her long vigils, her angel would gently arouse her to inform her that the lamp was extinguished. Awakening promptly, she would reprimand him with sisterly affection saying: "Why, instead of awakening me, did you not light it yourself with the fires of your glowing splendors?" At other times, she would rush into the sanctuary and find her Beloved in the dark. With nothing to light the lamp, she would make her angel light it.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Of course, when we recall this beautiful scene, we should remember the words of the Psalmist: “Thou hast made him a little less than the angels” (Ps. 8:6). Although it is true that an angel is superior to man in his nature and his intelligence, this difference disappears in the face of that elevating action of love for God, the Beloved of both angels and men.

### **Liaison with the Outside**

In order to prevent unnecessary worldly distractions, the strict rules of cloister prohibited not only any physical contact but also visual contact. Since objects and communications frequently had to pass back and forth between the nuns in the cloister and their benefactors and those who purchased the nuns’ handiwork on the outside, a revolving wooden box with four chambers was constructed in the convents. It was placed in the wall that separated the public area from the cloistered section. Objects for transfer would be placed in one compartment; the turn would then be rotated and the object retrieved by the recipient. Although the parties involved were not able to see each other, they were able to maintain a conversation.

Obviously the nun who was placed at this post would have to possess well-practiced virtue and uncommon discretion. An imprudent word, a thoughtless answer or lack of patience to the demands of certain social elements who, although good and pious people, were often uncultured and did not know how to express themselves could lead to an unfortunate confrontation. A person was needed who had a way with people, a tactful handling of human relations and a combination of extreme patience with unlimited charity—virtues that are found in true saints.

Young Sister Mariana possessed all these required virtues. Thus both poor and rich, just and sinners, ignorant and learned openheartedly flocked to her, each asking for his share of a consoling word or some advice in his life full of domestic problems or guilty consciences. For all she had a word which, sweetly springing from a heart on fire with divine love, was always an appropriate counsel or a soothing word to alleviate those in spiritual anguish. We shall never know how many conversions she effected of tormented sinners who had recourse to

her or how many were edified through her secret but active apostolate at the wooden turn.

### **Assistant Abbess in Charge of the Choir**

Mariana, a soul who lived with one foot in heaven and the other on earth, eventually accepted the responsibility for the choir. Since in her mystical ecstasies she had witnessed the fervor with which God is praised by the blessed in heaven, the enraptured nun constantly felt herself in glory during the time that she fulfilled this delightful task. With what fervor she looked after the smallest detail while chanting the liturgy of the Divine Office. How punctual she was in calling the community for the recitation of the canonical hours and the Little Office of her loving Mother. She seemed in the praise of her God and creator more an archangel than a saint.

One day when assiduously cleaning the stalls of the high choir, she saw the souls of deceased nuns sitting in the seats. They confessed that they were in purgatory; some for faults against silence in the choir, others for voluntary distractions in the recitation of the Divine Office or for negligence in prayer. Sister Mariana showed great concern in delivering each of them from their painful and forgotten imprisonment with her prayers.

She had learned the expressive and inspiring art of Gregorian chant from the Franciscan fathers. Gifted with a melodious voice and an artistic talent for music, she sang and played the organ beautifully herself and also alternated with her sisters whom she had taught and prepared. There can be no doubt that the seriousness of the chant and the sweetness of the voices transport both mind and heart to higher regions in search of the Supreme Good. These human acts go a long way in helping us in our journey for perfection and sanctity.

### **Mistress of Novices**

The most important office in a community is not necessarily that of the superior for, although of great hierarchical importance, it is, nevertheless, fulfilled in accordance with certain laws and statutes

which help to lead the community to its pre-ordained goals. Frequently the most important office is that of mistress of novices, since this involves both a great responsibility before God and also the spiritual future of the convent, dealing as it does with the formation and direction of young aspirants to the contemplative life. The mistress of novices should be an open book where her disciples are capable of reading the code of all the virtues in the living pages of her example. If words move, it is, nevertheless, example that attracts. Speeches may sometimes fall flat, but what must not fail is the living example of the Gospel and practice of Christ's doctrine.

As in every training process, the mistress takes the place of the mother and must know how to set her daughters securely on the path of faith and good works. If the mother herself is mistaken or insecure, then she will fulfill her duties poorly. The mistress must be gifted with psychological insight and be able to discern the characteristics of the neophytes both individually and as a group. All have the same ideals and the same goal, but each must arrive at the knowledge of his own capacities and limitations so that in the resultant of these two factors a solution may be found for the inevitable problems that every religious faces. In short, both the temporal and eternal future not only of the novices but of the whole community is placed in the hands of the mistress of novices.

And so it was that this most difficult office was assigned to the young and virtuous nun, Sister Mariana of Jesus Torres. The abbess had in mind not her young age but the psychological maturity and deep ascetic and mystical experience of the gifted mistress.

With much love, dedication and spiritual insight, Mother Mariana carried out her assignment. Having a soul already advanced in virtue and possessing a great sense of responsibility, she devoted herself entirely to the task of forming and directing the novices. That the latter proved to be good, holy and worthy of their mistress is shown by the persecutions that they endured without ever wavering in their fidelity and observance of the rule. Against all adversity, they perpetuated the life of the convent through the good fruits of their virtue, secured at the cost of many sacrifices, penances, prayers and tears. The exemplary mistress could well see herself reflected in the impeccable conduct of her pupils.

## 4

# Before the Persecution

### DEATH OF THE FIRST ABBESS

Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada was thirty-three years old when she founded the convent. During the ensuing sixteen years, the holiness of her life, her patience and humility and her experience in the governance of the community, marked by a mixture of austerity and kindness, vigilance and charity, combined to make her irreplaceable. The nuns, in their enthusiasm for her leadership, obliged her to retain the role of abbess until the Franciscan fathers, because of her illness, advised that another abbess be elected.

Those sixteen years served to deeply establish the religious spirit of the cloister and to envelop the convent in an aura of respectability. This spirit of prayer, penance and sacrifice placed its human but powerful intercession before the Divine Justice for the salvation of Quito and its inhabitants until the end of time.

The terrible weight of the responsibilities, anguish and worries inherent in Mother Maria's position of foundress and abbess had severely undermined her health. Her heart could no longer keep pace with her spiritual vigor. She frequently felt oppressed and asphyxiated because of the extreme altitude of the city, and heart attacks began to occur at closer intervals, followed by acute pain, fatigue and insomnia. Her physical resistance virtually ceased and her condition threatened final collapse.

From September 17, 1593, her ailment steadily worsened until October 4, when all human and medical resources were exhausted. On that day, the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi, her holy soul

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

escaped the feeble prison of her body and flew to heaven, which joyfully opened its gates to receive her for all eternity. (Coincidentally September 17 is also a feast day of the *Poverello*, commemorating the impression of the stigmata.) The hands of time had kept her on this earth for only forty-nine years. From that point on, the resplendent star of her virtues and the precious treasure of her merits constituted the beneficial inheritance left to future generations of religious that would inhabit the chaste cloisters of the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception in Quito.

This human separation was felt intensely by all the sisters, who found themselves suddenly deprived of the maternal tenderness, wise care and the great joy of being spiritually taught and guided by the holy foundress herself. Nevertheless, we may well suppose that the sorrow of the whole community could not equal that felt by Mariana of Jesus since she was doubly linked to her by ties of blood and spirit. By the ties of blood, she was an aunt who had had Mariana in her care since the tender age of nine. The child had left Spain with her and had suffered indescribable hardships during the journey until they set foot on American soil and founded their beloved convent. By the ties of the spirit, she was a spiritual mother who had introduced her to the supernatural life: the love of her Divine Spouse and His Blessed Mother. Mother Maria had provided a systematic formation in the contemplative life and had been devoted to the service of her sisters in the quiet solitude of the cloister.

While this enormous sadness was penetrating the monastic atmosphere and the first tears were beginning to swell the sorrowful hearts of the nuns, a conventual chapter was called to choose a successor in accordance with the constitution of the order. Unexpectedly, in a unanimous and undisputed election, the chapter chose the humble person of Mariana of Jesus Torres as the new abbess.

On hearing her proclamation, Mother Mariana fell to her knees and with folded hands begged the community to excuse her from such an office, but she was forced to accept under obedience. There was no other way but to take this great responsibility and oppressive weight on her shoulders. While the community enthusiastically celebrated the election, Mariana was so baffled and surprised that she hardly knew where she stood. The humility which was so deep-rooted in her soul had caused her to think that she was always the least of the religious.

When the new abbess received the obedience of the whole community, she experienced a deadening of the senses as if she were entering a dark tunnel of the surreal, yet she was to finally emerge on the other side with a clear understanding of reality.

The struggling nun considered herself inadequate to fulfill this most important office of spiritual director of these virgins forged for the life of the Cross and destined for the splendors of heaven and the sublime love of God. While tears flowed down her cheeks in torrents, flooding her soul to the depths of her insignificance, her lips repeated the resplendent and loving words of the Immaculate Virgin; "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

The happy days of what may be said to have been the religious childhood of Mother Mariana, days filled with innocence, simplicity and pure youthful joys, days spent full of tenderness and spring-like sanctity of God, were now coming to an end. From this point on, in an about-face in divine plans, she began her ascent to the Mount of the Cross.

## **FIRST APPARITION OF OUR LADY OF GOOD SUCCESS**

Mother Mariana was elected and installed as abbess in 1593 at the age of thirty. Her capacity and performance as spiritual leader progressed normally and successfully with that satisfaction common to all religious who are united in a sisterly fashion and assiduous in prayer and penance. This is especially true when obedience and cordiality to one another is caused by fervor for the service of God and a holy desire to progress in sanctity. Although the young abbess could be well pleased with the spiritual progress, she had no lack of financial difficulties to worry her. Added to the inadequacy of proper support was the threat of separation from the direction of the Franciscans.

To preserve the spirit of union and concord that then existed and to prevent the more mundane preoccupations from entering the hallowed cloister the young abbess knew of no better recourse than the tabernacle of Our Lord. There at the divine resting place, which always attracted her irresistibly, she felt very much at home.

On February 2 of the following year, Mariana, prostrated with her forehead touching the ground, was praying in the upper choir at one





The miraculous statue of Our Lady of Good Success in the church of the convent of the Immaculate Conception. The statue has an abbess' crosier in her right hand.



o'clock in the morning. She was beseeching God, through the intercession of His Blessed Mother, to put an end to the privations of her beloved convent and, above all, to mercifully forgive mankind so deeply engrossed in sin and so far astray from the path of His commandments.

Preceding this prayer, she had engaged in a long exercise of penance. Continuing to pray with ever-increasing fervor, she suddenly felt the presence of someone else. Her heart quivered, but then she heard her name being sweetly called. Quickly rising, she found herself before a very beautiful lady bathed in a sea of glory and splendor. This lady was clad in the white tunic and blue cape of the Conceptionist habit and held in her left arm a child of indescribable beauty while in her right hand she carried the staff of an abbess, made of polished gold and set with precious stones.

According to the account she later gave to her confessor, her soul was flooded with a holy and ineffable joy and an intense love for her Lord and God which reached such heights that, had it not been for special protection, she would have expired then and there. While in a transport of joy, she found the courage to ask, "Beautiful Lady, who art thou and what dost thou wish? Dost thou not know that I am only a poor nun who loves God and is extremely afflicted with His bitter suffering?"

To which the Lady answered, "I am Mary of Good Success, Queen of heaven and earth. It is precisely because you are a religious soul who loves God and your Mother that I now speak to you. I have come from heaven to console your afflicted heart. Your prayers, tears and penances are very pleasing to our heavenly Father who imbues you with His consoling Spirit. God the Father, Who is the support of the just in their tribulations, has formed from three drops of blood from my heart the most beautiful child of man, whom I carried for nine months in my most pure womb. Giving birth to Him in the stable of Bethlehem, I laid Him on the cold straw and remained a virgin and Mother of God. As a Mother, I carry Him in my left arm, and in so doing, I may hold back the arm of divine justice which is ready to unleash punishment upon this ungrateful and guilty world.

"In my right hand I carry the crosier that you see because I wish to govern this convent myself as its abbess and mother. The Friars Minor are about to withdraw their participation in its guidance;

so my support and protection could not be more opportune than in this hard trial that will last some centuries. By this separation and by using my ungrateful daughters, Satan is planning to destroy the work of God. But he will not succeed because I am the Queen of Victories and the Mother of Good Success, and under this invocation I wish to work prodigies throughout time for the preservation of my convent and its inhabitants.

“In all times until the end of the world, I will have holy daughters, heroic souls who in the hidden life of their convent will suffer persecution and calumnies from their community. They will be the object of the loving attention of God and of His Mother. I shall personally console them, for they are destined to receive the privilege of many apparitions from me. Like strong and stout columns, they will sustain the community in troubled times. Their life of prayer, self-denial and penance will be most needed during each period. After having lived on this earth unknown, they will go to heaven to occupy a prominent throne of glory and receive the palm and crown of virgins and martyrs as a reward for their penance and love of God.

“Now I want to give you strength and encouragement; do not allow suffering to discourage you. Yours will be a long life for the glory of God and for your Mother who speaks to you. My most holy Son will grant to you a gift of sufferings of all kinds. In order that you may receive the necessary strength, take Him from my arms and embrace Him in yours, press Him against your so feeble and imperfect heart.” As soon as the holy Virgin had placed the Divine Child in the arms of this fortunate nun, she pressed Him close to her and covered Him with caresses, feeling from then on a great strength and a desire to suffer.

This encounter with the Queen of Heaven lasted until three o'clock in the morning when the heavenly vision ceased. Until that moment, Mariana, who had been illuminated with the light of the divine dawn, Mary Most Holy, and with the plenitude of the light of the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ Our Redeemer, felt herself flooded with indescribable splendors. However, when the vision disappeared, she found herself in the darkness of the morning of a new and routine day. Arising from the place where she had been praying, she walked the few steps from the grille of the upper choir to the right of the church where she took her seat in the abbess' chair. There she awaited her sisters

who were already entering the choir to begin their daily activities with the recitation of the Little Office, which is so pleasing to the Blessed Virgin.

One can easily imagine the admiration of the sisters on beholding the resplendent face of their abbess, similar, no doubt, to the experience of the Israelites when they beheld the shining face of Moses after he had talked with God. Without knowing why, the nuns' hearts were filled with an extraordinary love for God and His Blessed Mother, causing them to recite their morning prayer with unusual fervor.

### **REVELATIONS AND THE FOUR DEGREES OF PRAYER**

One of the duties of abbess that Mother Mariana fulfilled daily with the greatest of pleasure was the care of sick nuns. Solicitous of their pains and sufferings, great and small, she personally looked after them, giving them their medicine and washing and surrounding them with care and affection.

She encouraged them to place all their confidence in the power and goodness of God and with gentleness exhorted them to accept the suffering that illness caused. She taught them to place themselves above pain with a joyful love, always keeping in mind that physical pains are not only a remedy for the patient's soul but also a means of obtaining merits which alleviate and cure the sufferings of others. In order to strengthen their charity, she would unveil the secret chest of her revelations and say to them, "You know that of the two leprous sisters that we shall have in our convent, one will die here and will be buried with us in the lower choir; the other will crown her martyrdom by exchanging the convent for a common leper colony. How much will this brave and dear sister have to suffer! Her beautiful soul will be the delight of the Holy Trinity and by her action she will hold back the arm of Divine Justice which is offended by so many secret and public crimes. God will not punish her country with worse chastisements that would have fallen upon this ungrateful land had it not been for this sacrifice."

Those who are versed in ascetical and mystical theology are well acquainted with the different categories of human relationships with God: prayer, sometimes restricted to vocal prayer; meditation; con-

temptation; and the prayer of quiet. *Prayer* in general is an elevation of the mind to God in order to converse with Him. Vocal prayer is any form of prayer which is expressed in words, whether written or spoken. *Meditation* or mental prayer is the application of the mind to some supernatural truth (e.g., the life, passion or death of Our Lord, His teachings, death in general, destiny of the soul after death, etc.) in order to penetrate its meanings, love it, and carry it into practice with grace; all these aim to promote God's glory and our advancement in virtue. The next plateau in spiritual advancement is *contemplation*, which is defined as a simple, loving, protracted gaze on God and divine things through the gifts of the Holy Ghost and a special actual grace which takes possession of us in a passive manner. The *prayer of quiet* is an advanced type of contemplation in which the soul experiences an intimate awareness of God's presence that fills the soul with an ineffable sweetness and delight. The latter two are usually listed under mystical theology and the first two under ascetical theology.

From early childhood, Mother Mariana of Jesus had exercised the secrets of prayer. She was an industrious little bee who daily built her honeycomb with the pollen of her virtues. She loved her relationship with God and found in Him strength for suffering, stimulation for perfection, skill and valor for confronting the forces of evil and, finally, repose and sweetness in the toils of her exile.

Two years after she took her vows, God illustrated to her the method of prayer and the points of meditation that she should use to arrive at sanctity. These were changed on a daily basis, with each week considered a unit which would then be repeated.

In the morning:

Monday: The washing of the apostles' feet and the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Tuesday: Our Lord's prayer in the garden and in prison.

Wednesday: The presentation of Our Lord to the high priests and the judges of Jerusalem and the lashes that He received at the pillar to show His love for us.

Thursday: The crowning of thorns, the "*Ecce Homo*," and how He carried the Cross on His shoulders to His crucifixion.

Friday: The holy mystery of the Cross of Our Divine Redeemer, the seven last words, and His death.

Saturday: The lance thrust that Our Divine Redeemer received after his death, His Holy Mother's sorrow and tears, and the funeral services.

Sunday: The descent of the soul of Our Divine Redeemer into limbo, His glorious Resurrection, and His apparition to Our Lady, Saint Mary Magdalen and His disciples.

In the afternoon:

Monday: Knowledge of self and remembrance of sins committed and their seriousness.

Tuesday: The condition and misery of human life.

Wednesday: Death.

Thursday: The final judgment.

Friday: Hell.

Saturday: The blessed happiness of heaven.

Sunday: The general and particular benefits that are daily received from God and our infinite debt of gratitude toward our loving God.

Mariana was faithful in meditation on these truths, with which she was totally imbued, and converted them into convictions, love and good actions as this form of prayer requires. It is easy to understand why she scaled the high peaks of sanctity so quickly to the point of being able to make her own the words of Saint Paul: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

She understood, felt and lived her life of prayer in the same spirit as those angels of Jacob's heavenly ladder who ascended and descended in constant praise. This resulted in a delicate familiarity with the angels. In particular, she always saw her guardian angel in the form of an eighteen-year-old youth of great beauty who carried on his chest a precious reliquary inscribed with the names of Jesus and Mary. The splendor emanating from the sacred ornament cast its rays on Mother Mariana, enlightened her, gave her heavenly inspirations, and infused in her the virtues of prudence and fortitude.

Frequently the timid maiden had to confront the evil spirit who never tired of waging battle against her and who appeared in the form of a hideous serpent threatening to take her life. Her guardian angel, who was always ready for combat, would then defend his charge and bring her out victorious. Mariana could be sure that the darts of prayer and penance caused the serpent to squirm and finally flee in defeat before the exorcising action of her love for Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the altar to Whom the holy religious always appealed.

## SECOND GOVERNING PERIOD

As 1597 drew near, Mother Mariana viewed it as the year of liberation, for her three-year tenure as abbess would be completed. Despite her success and the community's satisfaction with her leadership, Mariana felt it interfered with the practice of humility. She counted the time to the minute when she could step down and vacate the post. But the Divine Will, inscrutable as it is even to those souls who are closest to His Heart, had a more bitter phase of the same cross in store for her. And so it happened that when the chapter convened to select a new superior, Mariana of Jesus Torres was again chosen. The tears of supplication that she shed to be excused were to no avail. Once more she had to accept the staff of abbess along with the homage and obedience of the community. However this time the weight of responsibility that this office carried harbored a darkened future of unprecedented persecutions and humiliations.

Unfortunately, in that convent where the Divine Sower had sown the golden wheat of the choicest virtues on good, fertile soil, there also grew the green stalk of the thornbush. A native nun, small in body but big in ambitions and swollen with pride, began to foment trouble. This nun, known only by the name of *La Capitana*, The Captain—charity had obviously spared her of others—secretly conspired with a priest, a relative from the chancery office, to separate the convent from the spiritual government of the Friars Minor and to place it under the direct authority of the bishop. This was the first spark that was soon to set off the terrible fire of monastic disunion. This resulted in the confusion of changed decisions, orders and counter-orders, conflicting opinions and anxious feelings; in short, a virtual hecatomb. Where a heavenly peace had once made its home, there now waved the spirit of strife and discord.

Who would have believed it! But these are the barren paths of human life that have to be trodden, with bleeding feet, by the soul that wishes to prove her fidelity to her Lord.

The community was not then as structurally well organized as it is today. It had, besides the true contemplative religious who had received the habit and had taken vows to follow a specific rule, a good number of women who were dedicated to the material work and domestic chores. These were simple folk without any schooling, culture or reli-

gious formation. They had simply chosen to lead a life of total dedication in the service of the nuns. They, however, proved to be fertile ground for the sowing of the stalk of thorns, and there La Capitana established her reign.

Little by little, she began to work on those less-gifted minds and childlike mentalities and, when least expected, this Trojan horse took possession of the convent and imposed on it a disorderly and revolutionary will. In astonishment, the good nuns began to see the abbess' authority crumble under the pernicious action of La Capitana, who never ceased or wavered in her intention of dissolving the unity of the community.

In those years, the diocese of Quito was governed by its fourth bishop, the Most Reverend Luis López de Solís, an Augustinian most zealous for the glory of God. Bishop López was credited with the founding of the Royal Seminary of Saint Louis in 1594 and the convening of the Diocesan Synod in Loja in 1596. He was further praised for his wise decisions in administering the government of the Church in this immense royal territory that was the diocese of Quito.

The apostolic zeal of this eminent bishop moved him to visit and personally attend to his faithful, even in the most distant parishes. This frequently caused him to be absent from the chancery, during which time his authority was exercised by the vicar-general.

Unfortunately, this prelate appears to have had little experience in dealing with feminine communities and believed the passionate accusations that La Capitana dared to make against her holy superior. The rebellious nun accused Mother Mariana of stubbornly defending the spiritual government of the Franciscans in defiance of La Capitana who pretended she was trying to improve it by handing it over to diocesan control.

Thus the instructions of King Philip II placing the convent under the authority of the Franciscans and the canonical reception of Fr. Anthony Jurado were declared null and void and the convent was transferred to the secular jurisdiction of the diocese of Quito. As a consequence of this drastic change, Mother Mariana of Jesus was deposed from her position as abbess. As if this were not enough, the vicar-general ordered the holy religious, the model of all virtues and most especially loved by God and His Blessed Mother, to suffer the humiliation of monastic imprisonment. "The gift of suffering" that

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Our Lord had presented to His chaste spouse on the triumphant day of her religious profession began to emerge in the tortured silhouette of her crucified earthly existence. On the rough peaks of the Pichincha a cross had arisen which, with wide open arms, awaited the immaculate offering of her days.



## 5

# Imprisonment of the Foundresses

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Once a handful of brave Spanish adventurers founded the city of Quito over the ruins of an Inca city, the life of a colony began in these lands of the Southern Hemisphere. The pious intention of the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, and their special envoy, Christopher Columbus, was to offer their Divine Creator a new world from which He might receive due adoration. This royal ambition, which sprang from hearts that truly loved God, was an expression of the desire of these monarchs to use their power to expand the heavenly kingdom to the farthest corners of their domains, so that the redeeming blood might wash the greatest possible number of souls, thus sanctifying and saving them.

But if this was their thinking, it was not exactly shared by the majority of the conquistadores who spiritedly rode the winged horses of their dreams of material and prestigious enrichment. The island and coastal settlements and interior regions of these lands of Columbus were soon overridden by unholy people, outlaws, knaves, and men full of greed for whom the salvation of souls was of absolutely no importance. They had thrown their religious consciences overboard and kept only—for political convenience—a superficial, although advantageous, semblance of the Christian faith. The material had overpowered the spiritual.

The majority of those rough adventurers left a Spain, with its laws, farms and cities that eloquently spoke to them from over the centuries of great sanctity and heroism. Disregarding their heritage, these men

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

as a group certainly were not seeking the beauty and vastness of a sinless nature that stimulates the contemplation of spiritual marvels.

These conquistadores, with body and soul filled with greed, suffered from an acute color blindness that caused them to see the brilliance of gold in everything. The world must have sounded to their ears like a happy tune of frivolities and bravados and seemed like a dream-land paradise that offered the three delights of temporal life; power, money and sex. And this was the goal they intended to reach.

In fairness, there were notable exceptions to this state of affairs. Fortunately, the history of the early days of the colony in Quito also records the presence of those lofty souls who brought credit to the Spanish name and Christian culture to the native population, men who followed Our Lord's instruction: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). These souls dedicated themselves to the improvement of the Indians through education, religious formation and prevented, as much as possible, the cruel exploitation of the more venal settlers and explorers.

But, few were their numbers! And almost all were behind the doors of a monastery or convent. After several years of the debauchery and corruption of the first Spaniards, the laws of the Indies obliged the Castilians to bring their legitimate wives from Spain, thus restoring the shattered homes. South America began to be purified with the perfume of Christian virtues that emanated from the hearts of those authentic Spanish women, and from their feminine hearts the flower of the Catholic religion bloomed in Quito and the surrounding territory.

South American Catholicism owes a great debt to these zealous ladies whose typically Castilian combative piety contributed not a little to the total failure of the Protestant Revolution in Spain. Carrying this same courageous spirit with them to their new land, they spread the love of Christ and His Church through the observation of Christian practices that illuminated all that was good, moral and just in religious aspirations. Their example did much to draw the native Indians from the dark tunnels of paganism to the light of religion and civilization.

The task of sanctifying and civilizing the natives was complemented by the apostolic work carried out by the missionary priests who, though their efforts were quite rewarding, did not attain complete success.

In order to drive out the pagan aberrations from the mentality of the Indians, it was necessary through patient effort to teach and impress upon them the logical purity of Catholic truths. Unfortunately time and numbers worked against the missionaries; for, as in North America, there were just too few for the amount of work. Furthermore to assimilate a pagan population into Western culture takes much time, in many cases more than a generation.

The unschooled, lackadaisical Indian mentality found it difficult to absorb doctrinal teaching. Because of this, the overworked apostles could only enlighten their minds with the basic principles of religion and content themselves with distributing the sacraments to the multitude, which increased daily, without their having much knowledge or understanding. It is certain that, given these impositions, the ultimate triumph of Christianity can only be attributed to the strength of divine grace and its cultivation by the dedicated missionaries and the pious and persevering Spanish women.

Given the difficulty of establishing a solid doctrinal foundation in just a few years, it is not surprising that the South American nuns were an easy prey to the clever maneuverings of La Capitana. They fell victim to the allure of a religious slackening which agrees so well with our fallen nature. Two realities were found in the convent: the strong faith carefully cultivated by the intelligence and will of the Spanish nuns, who were the successors of holy and wise educators and bearers of a centuries-old religious civilization, and the incipient faith of the native sisters that should have been properly nurtured instead of vilely exploited.

## **THE PLACE OF MOTHER MARIANA'S CONFINEMENT**

On the ground floor of the convent, off to one side, a small, impregnable prison had been constructed some years before, not for the punishment of any cloistered nun, but for the incarceration of either heretics or witches. Occupying a space of about thirty by fifteen feet and containing two rooms, it was isolated from the rest of the community by a wall of brick and lime.

The dark and grim interior, where daylight hardly penetrated through the heavy iron grating on the outside windows, was some-

what softened by three wall paintings. Two of them, quite appropriate for such a forbidding place, show scenes from Our Lord's passion: one, the Crucifixion; the other Christ in prison manacled with heavy chains while weeping angels contemplate the humiliation of their Lord and God Who stands on a bed of roses and lilies. An inscription, "Death is the echo of life," is accompanied by a stanza from Saint Teresa:

Remember that God watches you.	<i>Mira que te mira Dios</i>
Remember that He is watching you.	<i>Mira que te está mirando.</i>
Remember that you must die!	<i>Mira que debes morir!</i>
Remember that you know not when.	<i>Mira que no sabes cuando.</i>

The third painting depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary being greeted by the heavenly messenger Saint Gabriel, who brought her the news of the divine Incarnation.

Hanging from the ceiling on animal sinews were three candles used to provide lighting at night. Also located in the first room were chains and manacles to secure unruly prisoners more tightly. During the Middle Ages and the next few centuries, it was not uncommon for some religious to use a scourge or discipline in order to serve God more perfectly or to calm down their unruly concupiscence. It seems that one of the two columns in the middle of the front room was occasionally used for that purpose. The second room was for sleeping.

When someone hears the word "prison" and learns that an individual is to be sent there, he usually develops an unfavorable opinion of the prisoner, no matter who he is. But when the humiliated prisoner was the abbess and foundress herself, a nun whose reputation for sanctity and excellence of virtue was recognized by all, the response was one of great surprise and astonishment.

When informed of the sentence, Mariana, not allowing passion to obscure her reason, fell prostrate to the ground to adore the hidden designs of God and enter into an ecstasy of admiration; such was the virtue of Mariana of Jesus Torres. Only a saint could have suffered as she did, undisturbed and full of benevolence in the face of such injustice and irreverence for the moral principles of the religious common life and so much aberration, rottenness and evil passion in a holy place against a holy person!

There, to that sordid prison, Mariana of Jesus was taken more than three times, either alone or accompanied by the six Spanish cofoundresses. That nun, who was the model of all virtues and the column of monastic life, preferred to allow the wicked ambition to crucify her dignity as a woman and her authority as an abbess.

## THE IMPRISONMENT OF MOTHER MARIANA

When we speak of the shameful punishment inflicted on Mother Mariana of Jesus, care must be taken so that her heretofore spotless reputation is not unjustly compromised. It is so easy to say, “Well, the bishop would not put a nun in jail for no reason at all!” Thus it is by all means necessary to discover the cause of this scandal against the illustrious foundress.

The business started with the infiltration among the nuns of a spirit of relaxation that was totally contrary to the austerity, recollection and strict submission to the rule and constitution of the order. An ill disposition became rooted in the souls of four of the native nuns and began to spread, thanks to the nonassertive character of the new abbess, Mother Magdalen of Jesus Valenzuela, who, although pious, lacked authority and was easily swayed. Because of her indecision, she fell into a trap which had been cunningly set by the rebellious nuns.

It has already been mentioned that, due to the underhanded dealings of La Capitana with her relatives in the chancery office, the relationship between the Quito convent and the Franciscans was dissolved. Once the treachery was made official, it gave great joy to the dissidents; but for the Spaniards and the rest of the faithful nuns, it was a cause of profound sadness. Incapable of holding it in, the observant nuns—those who wished to remain faithful to the original rule—gave vent to their sadness with a torrent of tears. Of course, as one would expect in such a trial, the virtuous sisters humbly accepted the news, trusting in Divine Providence. They were confident that God, Who knows how to take good from evil, would lovingly hasten to the defense of the vital interests of the convent.

History records with numerous examples that, when a heroic few attempt to resist a slackening of moral standards and advancing corruption, an irrational persecution of the good then follows. For that

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

very reason, Henry VIII slaughtered Carthusian monks by the dozens. So it was that the suffering, weeping and obedient observants became a reproach to the indifferent conduct of the dissidents. Consequently, a complaint was lodged with the new abbess; she relayed it to diocesan officials who then issued an order for Mother Mariana to be deprived of the veil and imprisoned for three days. At mealtime during this period, she was to be taken to the refectory and made to eat on the floor.

Naturally, to the satisfaction of the rebellious nuns, this absurd sentence was carried out to the letter. Mariana saw it as an excellent opportunity to unite herself intimately to the sufferings of Christ, her divine Spouse, in imitation of the virtues of patience, humility and charity, which Our Lord Himself had taught and practiced. It also provided an occasion to prove the consistency of her virtues to the faithful religious.

No doubt, these humiliations caused intense suffering; however, the real mystical agony came in the morning when she saw herself deprived of Holy Mass and Communion which were such a great source of sanctity and fortitude. After three days, she was taken from the prison, still bereft of her veil, and confined in a room on the ground floor where she was still forbidden any contact with the community.

This last inhuman and unjust measure caused such a crisis of grief that the faithful nuns could no longer withstand the pain. They all ran to the arms of the suffering victim and gave vent to their sorrow. As can be expected, this act of solidarity with Mother Mariana was cruelly punished by the bishop who not only ordered a new imprisonment for Mother Mariana but also for all the Spanish foundresses for the duration of a month.

The grim doors of the prison were opened once more to admit that innocent bouquet of lilies whose virginal perfume would soon impregnate the cold walls of that dungeon. These walls lacked, from a material perspective, the light of the sun; and from the spiritual, the warm glow of sisterly charity which cannot coexist with the disrespect of human dignity and the violation of the rights of the children of God.

This handful of martyrs, deprived of liberty and the consolation of the sacraments which enrich the soul with the precious Blood of Christ, were also under the constant threat of losing not only the veil but the habit itself. Humiliated and calumniated by the agents of Satan, they

gave, nevertheless, great proof of the strength of their virtue. Although the object of oppression and derision, these virgins were not frightened by the specter of evil but, on the contrary, showed great fortitude and inexplicable endurance in adversity. They sought peace and prayer, and there they found the Divine Martyr who consoled and comforted them so that they might follow Him in the ominous path to Calvary.

The seven Spaniards were the first victims of this ineffable martyrdom. They were soon joined by eight observant native religious who had been educated and formed by Mother Mariana. They did not wish to be deprived of the virtuous company of the Spanish foundresses because of human injustice. Little by little, other compassionate nuns who approached the prison grating to express their sorrow were also imprisoned, thus increasing the total number to twenty-five.

Just as in the Roman Coliseum during the first era of Christianity, the love of Christ caused the host of martyrs to increase daily, so also in this monastic prison, each day brought new additions to the guard of honor. With this brave contingent, a true community of observant Conceptionists was formed. Charity being a communicative virtue, each of these souls forgot its own bereavement and thought only of consoling and strengthening the others.

If all religious communities were made of such a nucleus of prayer and love, certainly their convents would be made the most sought-after places. Although deprived of natural light, those pure maidens possessed the greatest interior charity, enabling them to look into each other's soul and into the eyes of God which illuminate everything, no matter what the time of day. Although lacking in material goods, they possessed an abundance of the spiritual; peace and perfect concord calmed the waves of tribulation.

The oppression continued. The consolations of the Holy Mass and the Eucharist were denied them, and once a day they were led to the refectory like ignominious criminals and forced to take their scant nourishment while kneeling and listening to the mockeries and invectives of their accusers. However, these innocent victims remained faithful in the recitation of the Divine Office, in their meditation and discipline, as well as in the manual work they performed on behalf of their persecutors by sewing their clothes.

God's reward to these just souls was not long in coming. Along with

a magnanimous spirit to love and forgive their persecutors and great peace and tranquility in their sufferings, He showered them with heavenly consolations and apparitions that made imprisonment and humiliation most enviable.

Chronicles written about Mother Mariana's admirable life that have come down to us relate that one night while she prayed on her prison cot and the other nuns slept, a most vivid light illuminated the dark prison with an extraordinary splendor. It aroused those who slept and gladdened the heart of Mother Mariana, who greeted all the religious saying: "Let us give thanks to God Our Lord Who thus consoles those who suffer persecutions for justice' sake."

All the religious present were treated to a supernatural ecstasy during which each had a special vision. While Mariana saw the cross with the Son of God agonizing on it, beset with insults and blasphemies, Anne of the Conception saw the Immaculate Mother putting out the vigil lamp of the tabernacle. Our Lady indicated that the observant spirit of some of her daughters would be extinguished, but that it would soon be lit again and that this light would burn throughout the centuries because the daughters of the Immaculate Conception had been founded for the purpose of appeasing Divine Justice in relation to the sins committed in that city.

When the non-observant nuns went to Mass the next day, they saw that the sanctuary lamp was extinguished; and no matter how much the faithless sisters tried, they could not light it again. For a day and a half, they worked at it, even changing the oil and replacing the wick, but to no avail. On the second day the lamp relit itself.

In great amazement, Mother Lucy of the Cross admired the mystery of love of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. She saw that this love was so intense that it caused the veins of His Heart to break and the precious Blood to pour forth in such abundance that all the patios and cloisters of the convent were inundated with it. She heard the voice of Jesus say: "In this sea of blood, I am ready to wash all those who are guilty and who come to Me with a contrite heart." She was also shown all the religious who would inhabit those cloisters until the end of time.

Mother Magdalen of Saint John saw an apparition of her holy patron, the beloved apostle, who told her that among the sublime secrets that were revealed to him when he reclined his head on the Heart of



his Master were all the sacrileges that would be committed in the world against the Holy Eucharist. Among them, he predicted the horrible crime that would be perpetrated in the city of Riobomba in central Ecuador.

This prophesy was fulfilled on May 4, 1897, when a body of soldiers entered the church of Saint Philip and sadistically murdered the Jesuit priest, Father Moscoso. Opening the tabernacle with blows from the butts of their rifles, they took out the ciboria, emptied the hosts on the ground and trampled them underfoot. They completed their desecration by drinking liquor from the emptied vessels. In 1900 Sister Frances of the Sacred Wounds founded the Congregation of the Franciscans of Mary Immaculate as a national reparation for this unforgivable sacrilege. Mother Magdalen was privileged to see the soul of Father Moscoso, martyr of the Holy Eucharist, fly to heaven even before the soldiers had finished their iniquitous profanation.

As part of the apparition, Mother Magdalen also saw one of the desecrating soldiers, who was walking down the streets of Riobomba the day following this immense crime, bragging to his friends that he had had "the most enjoyable night in his life, catching friars." As he went a little further a wooden beam crashed down upon his head, killing him instantly; at the same moment his soul plunged into hell. Because of this sacrilege that was to occur only three centuries later, Mother Magdalen was shown the reparations, tears, penances and prayers by which the holy nuns of the Royal Convent appeased divine justice. These acts of piety would succeed in holding back the avenging arm of Our Lord and provide expiation for the sins that would inundate not only Quito, but also all the towns and cities of the future republic of Ecuador. The convent was to be a great lightning rod deeply cemented in the depths of Ecuadorian soil.

## THE INTERVENTION OF A CANON

The insurgent nuns performed a remarkable job in keeping all the irregularities as quiet as possible—a task that even good women find difficult. A tomb-like silence was drawn over the secret of their insurrection and the humiliating imprisonment of Mother Mariana and her Spanish companions.

Because of the aura of prestige and sanctity that surrounded Mother Mariana, had any news of this iniquity leaked through the walls of the cloister into the city with its excitable and inquisitive temperament, there would certainly have been a furious wave of protest and indignation. However, because of the lack of information and consequent incredulity, only the slightest suspicions were whispered about.

Nevertheless, this slight rumor reached the ears of a certain canon who promptly appeared at the convent, not once but several times, asking to speak to Mother Mariana. He received only excuses; she was sick, or busy or simply could not come out. These repeated evasions only helped to accentuate the canon's suspicions that something was definitely wrong inside.

Not obtaining from the turn what he had asked, he threatened to do all in his power to clarify the mystery. He effectively carried out his warning by going to the diocesan officials. The energetic canon complained of the terrible injustice done to the pious nuns and alerted the officials to the scandal and potential uproar if this vile business ever came to light.

The intervention had its effect. The bishop acknowledged that he had acted rashly and listened to the information given by such a qualified witness as the canon concerning the holy reputation of the persecuted religious in question. He made note of all the facts that preceded the controversy, as well as those that occurred as a consequence. As a result of his investigation the bishop issued an order to Mother Magdalen Valenzuela, who was then superior, to announce the following instructions:

1. The immediate release of the unjustly imprisoned nuns and a proportionate and proper reparation of the great offense committed against the holy abbess.
2. The incarceration of La Capitana in the same prison.
3. Mother Mariana's simultaneous assumption of the office of abbess with new homage, submission and obedience on the part of the entire community, so that she could finish the time in office that still remained.

As soon as the bishop's order was received, it was carried out in all its points by Mother Magdalen with great rejoicing on the part of the observant nuns and renewed submission from those ingenuous sisters who had been the victims of La Capitana's deceit.

Everything returned to normal. The wounds were charitably healed and the community activities and ceremonies resumed, all showing the signs of sisterly love. With the reestablishment of justice, those recently agitated cloisters were perfumed by peace and harmony once again. Only La Capitana, who withdrew into an antagonistic silence, refused to accept the new order of things.

It would hardly be necessary to expound on Mother Mariana's attitude of humility and simplicity. The beauty of her soul had not felt the winds of resentment and its accompanying bitterness. If her heart heaved with any emotion, it was that of deep gratitude to her Jesus, Who, on presenting her with the gift of sorrow, had allowed her to resemble Him and share in the sweetness of the Cross which is such a delight to chosen souls.

Many times she looked for her unjust rival to seek reconciliation and to shower her with her own abundant treasure of maternal love. As the days passed, the wretched Capitana only hardened in her attitude and became more haughty and prideful. Concerned about her increasing stubbornness, the mother abbess, who had doubled her prayers and penances, begged her Jesus for the salvation of that soul whom she knew to be very near perdition.

The ruining effects of the rebellious nun's frustration began to affect her health, especially as her ravings increased. She refused all nourishment. With nerves on edge and in fits of madness, she screamed, blasphemed, cursed and hit her head against the wall. The vigor of her nature rapidly declined, giving way to violent, high fevers that seemed to consume her. No one dared to face her.

The nuns fled from her, frightened by that almost demonic sight. At first the supplications of the abbess in seeking the end of the one-month imprisonment was to no avail because of the bishop's inflexibility. But, in the end, both the entreaties of Mother Mariana and the strange illness of La Capitana allowed the latter to exchange the forbidding doors of the prison for the peaceful doors of the infirmary. Mariana again assumed the office of nurse, lavishing on her patient much care and attention and applying the gentle tact that only mothers have toward their own children.

But La Capitana in her stubbornness refused her nurse's sincere manifestations of tenderness; on the contrary, she took advantage of her closeness to insult her, slap her across the face and spit on her.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

She threw at her mother superior the hot water that was brought for washing and dumped onto the lap of her serene but suffering companion the food and medicine that was given her. Thus, the weeks and months of the spiritual and physical illness of this wretched nun passed and the merits from Mother Mariana's patience, tolerance and loving magnanimity accumulated.

What an eloquent example of practicing the virtues God gave through the person of Mariana of Jesus Torres; and this was done without any ostentation or human vanity but, on the contrary, with the greatest simplicity and naturality. Having completely forgotten the offenses committed against her, Mariana, inflamed with the love of God and neighbor, offered to her recent persecutor the sweetness of a generous, sincere and total forgiveness. In the heaven of her soul only one thought marred her happiness: the closeness of the death of the miserable sister and the terrible consequence of eternal damnation that awaited her. At some point during this time Mariana of Jesus entered into negotiations with her Lord to obtain the salvation of La Capitana.

## 6

# A Heroic Act

### **PUNISHMENT FOR THE REBELLIOUS NUN**

After the accusations against La Capitana had been confirmed, the bishop condemned her to life imprisonment as a lesson to others and to avoid any further contamination from her bad example. The list of the offenses she accumulated during her several years in the convent was a long one. Among her offenses were:

1. that she promoted the dissolution of the convent through constant effort by means of insubordination and breach of both discipline and religious observance.

2. that she instigated an unjustified campaign to stigmatize the Spanish nuns as foreign intruders, leading to a demand that they be expelled as such.

3. that she was guilty of offenses against the authority of the abbess, thus causing a grievous scandal to the community.

4. that she was responsible for the repeated imprisonment of Mother Mariana of Jesus, the Spanish foundresses and the other observant nuns because of her clever falsehoods and cynical calumnies, and that she deliberately deceived the diocesan officials, obtaining their support and the resulting unjust sentences.

5. that she was solely responsible for the wayward and seriously culpable conduct of those who followed her Machiavellian plans, the work of a lively intelligence that the others did not have.

Also included in the list of charges was her attempt to violate the papal confinement by leaving the cloister with a group of her followers. With all the disobedient nuns carrying torches and La Capitana in

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

the lead holding a crucifix on high, they planned to form a procession to march through the streets to the bishop's residence to pressure him to expel the Spanish foundresses.

However, an extraordinary occurrence frustrated this crazy attempt. When the escaping nuns inserted the key into the lock and attempted to open the doors to the outside, they would not budge. The misled sisters tried every possible way, even forcing the doors with iron bars, but to no avail. Suddenly a deafening sound attracted the fugitives' attention to a statue of Our Lady of Peace brought to Quito by the foundresses. To their surprise and mortification, the statue, which stood in a small wooden niche by the door, had turned her maternal face to the wall, thus giving her back to the escapees in a reproachful attitude. Meanwhile, Mother Magdalen Valenzuela, who was then abbess, showed great courage by taking the candles away from them and putting a stop to the escapade. Mother Mariana lent her assistance by gathering the candles, snuffing out their flames and placing them back into the box.

Years later, La Capitana and her sympathizers accused Mother Mariana of keeping a tin box where she had hid all kinds of valuable collectibles and sweets. Mother Magdalen, knowing the sanctity of the accused, decided to put an end to the imputations by ordering Mother Mariana to show her the contents of the mysterious box.

When it was opened, the whole community gasped with astonishment. Inside were several shin bones, each inscribed with the name of a religious who had tried to leave the cloister. According to Mariana's explanation, the extinguished candles that had been taken from the escapees on that memorable night had been transformed into their own bones when they were placed in the box.

For these reasons, the bishop required immediate fulfillment of the sentence. And so, La Capitana, who had already been deprived of the veil, faced jail for the rest of her life, from which sentence entreaties or threats were of no help.

## **THE SUPREME HOLOCAUST: FIVE YEARS IN HELL**

While the wretched creature was taken to prison, Our Lord showed Mariana how the devil possessed that sinful soul and communicated to

her the diabolical spirit of revolt, blasphemy, hate and despair. She was soon to die and to be cast into the depths of hell.

At the supplications of Mother Mariana and her unlimited anguish at the thought of the eternal condemnation of her sister, Our Lord consented to allow Capitana's salvation with the condition that Mother Mariana allow herself to suffer on earth for five years the pains of hell that were reserved for La Capitana. To hear and unconditionally accept Our Lord's proposal were the same thing for Mariana of Jesus Torres.

Generally speaking, only two parties usually collaborate in the salvation of any given soul: the individual who tries to save himself by corresponding to divine grace, and God, Who truly and efficaciously saves man through the merits of Jesus Christ and the action of His infinite mercy and great love. However in the case of La Capitana, because of her incapacity and obstinacy, her representation was taken up by the heroic Mother Mariana of Jesus.

She well knew, through faith, the teachings of the Church and revelation from Our Lord how terrible is the suffering of the damned and its double predicament: the pain of the senses and the far worse pain of loss. When the soul, at the moment of temporal death, is cut loose from the impediments of the senses that prevent spiritual vision, it fully sees and knows God, its own essence and the reason for its existence. On seeing God, the soul loves Him and wishes to possess Him as the ultimate and only reason for its temporal and eternal existence. From the humility of its smallness, it tries to fly to the possession of that Supreme Being for Whom it was created and Who consists of its total and only happiness.

But if the soul is in a state of sin, an excruciating pain is felt at the violent rejection by God, powerful enough to tear the soul in two. This traumatic illumination allows the soul to understand the infinite impossibility of approaching God while it is guilty of obstinate and recalcitrant sin which opens up an irreconcilable abyss between its satanic hate and the sacrosanct love of God. Although it is truly known through declarations under oath from her spiritual directors that Mariana neither knew nor committed any sin, she assumed, for the sake of La Capitana's salvation, the representation of this sinner who haughtily despised divine love. Thus, she justly deserved to be deprived of this love which is the true heaven of the blessed.

According to this heroic agreement, Mother Mariana became La Capitana in the eyes of divine justice. She had to expiate the sins of La Capitana by submitting to a double punishment: the pain of loss and the pain of the senses about which numerous Catholic theologians have spoken. Although her body did not feel the pain of sense in all its intensity, still, from the moment of her heroic acceptance, the filthy stench of hell tortured her sense of smell; her sight was constantly tormented with the presence of the devil; her hearing was pierced with the blasphemies of the damned; her touch was chastised with the most acute pains by everything that she came in contact with; her sense of taste was embittered by every morsel of food that she swallowed.

But this suffering, as terrible and unimaginable as it was, was far less than the pain of loss. Our Lord had warned her that if she were to accept this unheard-of sacrifice, she would not be privileged during those five years with the apparitions she had previously had on numerous occasions. This warning, which was fulfilled with undeviating accuracy as soon as she said yes, was enough to tear apart such a delicate soul. Nonetheless, without ceasing to love Him with all the intensity of which she was capable, she felt the unbearable absence of her most amiable Jesus, Who was her very life and heaven on earth.

The reception of the Holy Eucharist which before had been a heavenly joy for her, now became the cause for unrest, fear and dreadful anguish. Prayer, heretofore the place of refuge in the loving arms of her Father and sweet Mother, now turned into a source of interior disturbance and sterility of all affectionate feeling. Suddenly experiencing abandonment by God and man, she felt that heaven had been definitively closed to her while great dark clouds of desolation, discouragement and aridity of spirit closed over her soul. Her body suffered the agony of death.

At every moment hell came to the surface of her soul, but her charity immediately repressed any outward sign of agitation provoked by the evil one. Her lips smiled and her hands caressed her irritable patient who returned her kindness with blows and her smiles with daring offenses.

Although her soul suffered unspeakable pain that tore her to pieces, she never lost her lovely calm and her expression of peace and serenity. Her angelical face never betrayed her internal suffering. Ever obedient to the rule and monastic discipline, Mariana maintained her schedule



and acts of penance and continued to set the example for her sisters as if she still enjoyed the spiritual consolations of old. During those ominous five years of heroism, she kept in check any demonstration of bitterness, showed herself, as always, sweet, cheerful and willing to serve, and edified everyone with her incredible miracles of sanctity.

## A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

Those five years of hell lived on earth by Mother Mariana of Jesus passed slowly, giving the exhausting feeling of lasting forever, an eternity of hell deserved by La Capitana. Every day that passed increased the hope for the latter's salvation and for the glory of the valiant nun who offered such an unbelievable sacrifice of heroism and charity.

The patience of man is capable of taming the most unruly animals, conquering them with courage and perseverance, and in some cases making them the best of friends. One day Mother Mariana saw the fruit of her efforts of patience and charity when that indomitable and antagonistic nun began to open her eyes to the reality about herself. She saw herself morally shattered and despicable because of all the evil that she had committed. Forsaken by her former followers, La Capitana understood, at long last, that she was justly punished. Her vile actions, which she now realized had caused a scandal beyond the walls of the cloister, added an enormous weight to her guilty conscience. But for her the most painful recognition was the immensity of her sin. The reforming penitent was astonished at the malice that she displayed toward God, He being the Father of goodness that He is.

Along with the extraordinary penances that Mariana endured, she also contributed much to La Capitana's spiritual recovery through the ministrations of her nursing. The encouraging words that this charitable nurse gently whispered in her ear, the affability despite the imbalance of her mind, the kindness and, most of all the forgiveness, all rose together before Capitana's conscience and obliged her to acknowledge her errors and miseries. Mother Mariana Francisca's beautiful eyes no longer made her jealous but, on the contrary, silently spoke to her of God.

One day—a blessed day for both—that iron heart, once incapable of feeling, suddenly felt conquered by the goodness of God, Who had

placed at her side an angel of sweetness. La Capitana's heart had been touched by God's merciful grace, calling her to a change of life and a submission to the mandates of a Christian conscience. Gone were the poisoned days of her revolts and disorderly ambitions, the ravings of her human passions and the hellish dance of her scandals. She begged forgiveness from the offended victim, the savior of her soul, and prepared in humble repentance for the sacraments of penance and Holy Eucharist. After receiving the Blessed Host, the seed of eternal life, the spiritually transformed nun obtained forgiveness from the whole community.

She lived the few months of life that were left to her in recollection, prayer and penance. She died piously in the Lord in the year 1636, one year after the death of Mother Mariana whom she assisted in her last moments and whose body she had the honor of preparing for burial.

It was revealed to Mother Mariana that, after a long time of purification in purgatory, the soul of La Capitana would finally and happily enjoy the mercy of God. This was accomplished through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the immense charity of Mariana of Jesus Torres. Hers was a cross unique in the annals of God's plan for our salvation, for her cross of sorrows and humiliations was given to her by the very person who was the major benefactor of her sufferings. However, through this immense charity, Mariana was able to reach the heights of her own sanctity and to fulfill her enormous capacity for the love of God.

## **THE LOVE OF THE CROSS**

If the cross is to be our guide to salvation, and it is the means by which we shall reach our final end after this lifetime of battles, then we should not be surprised at the love that the privileged soul of Mariana bore toward the cross, especially after Our Lord apprised her of its worth. This explains her use of those voluntary expiations that we call penances. She offered them to the Divine Majesty strictly in reparation for the offenses of mankind, since throughout her life she herself was guilty of none.

No one in those early days of Ecuador's history loved God more, nor for His love chastised her delicate body to the extent Mariana of

Jesus did, as many of her biographers have recorded for our admiration. Speaking of her austerities, the Franciscan Father Manuel Sousa Pereira, one of her biographers, says that she used instruments of penance over her entire body, including her tongue.

She wore a crown of thorns upon her head; on her ears, iron rings; around her neck, an iron chain; on her arms, waist and legs, hairshirts with sharp nails; and in her shoes, small stones. Only her face and hands were free from these penances.

At night, she only slept for three hours and always upon a piece of bare leather that covered a hard, austere bed. She used a terrible discipline three times a day; and six other times would scourge herself with nettles. Still not satisfied with such rigor, she would entreat a strong maid to scourge her harshly. Moreover, every day after the community recited Vespers and Compline, she would lock her cell door and crucify herself by means of ropes while meditating on the Passion of Our Lord. Every Friday she deprived herself of all nourishment and chastised her palate by placing something bitter in her mouth.

On those days the passages in her throat would close, making it impossible for her to take any food. On observing this phenomenon, both the mother superior and her Franciscan confessor decided to have her examined by a physician. The doctor, examining her but finding no explanation for the phenomenon, said, "This is something supernatural. Leave her alone."

It is certainly to be expected that a soul so ardently inflamed with the love of God and of His Blessed Mother and purified of all possible stain of sin by her extraordinary penances would be the special object of God's favors. The greatest of these favors was the direct and frequent communication with God Who, in His divine and human nature, visited and showered her with the consolation of His paternal tenderness and the limitless abundance of His goodness.

Our merciful Lord had chosen this small creature from all eternity to be the recipient of such graces that would carry her to the heights of sanctity. Through her correspondence she became His chaste spouse and the fruitful mother of other innumerable virgin souls who filled those monastic cloisters for endless generations with sanctity and offered themselves in perpetual expiation for their city and country. Mariana of Jesus Torres followed in the same tradition as the Apostle Saint John who reclined his head on Our Lord's chest and Saint

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Thomas who touched His wounds so as to conquer his own disbelief and bathe his soul in the waters of faith which resulted in the memorable exclamation: “My Lord and my God!”

Our Lord appeared visibly to Mariana, and with the same naturalness of two morning drops of dew that merge together on a petal of a flower, the almighty Creator and tiny Mariana shared the future. Our Lord unfolded before her eyes the behavior of mankind throughout the centuries, events that could never have been foreseen; global and atmospheric phenomena of which science had no idea, miseries, depraved customs, and sins that would defy eternal justice. Crushed by such inscrutable secrets, Mariana begged forgiveness with heartrending cries and expiated the fall of mankind with frightening penances.

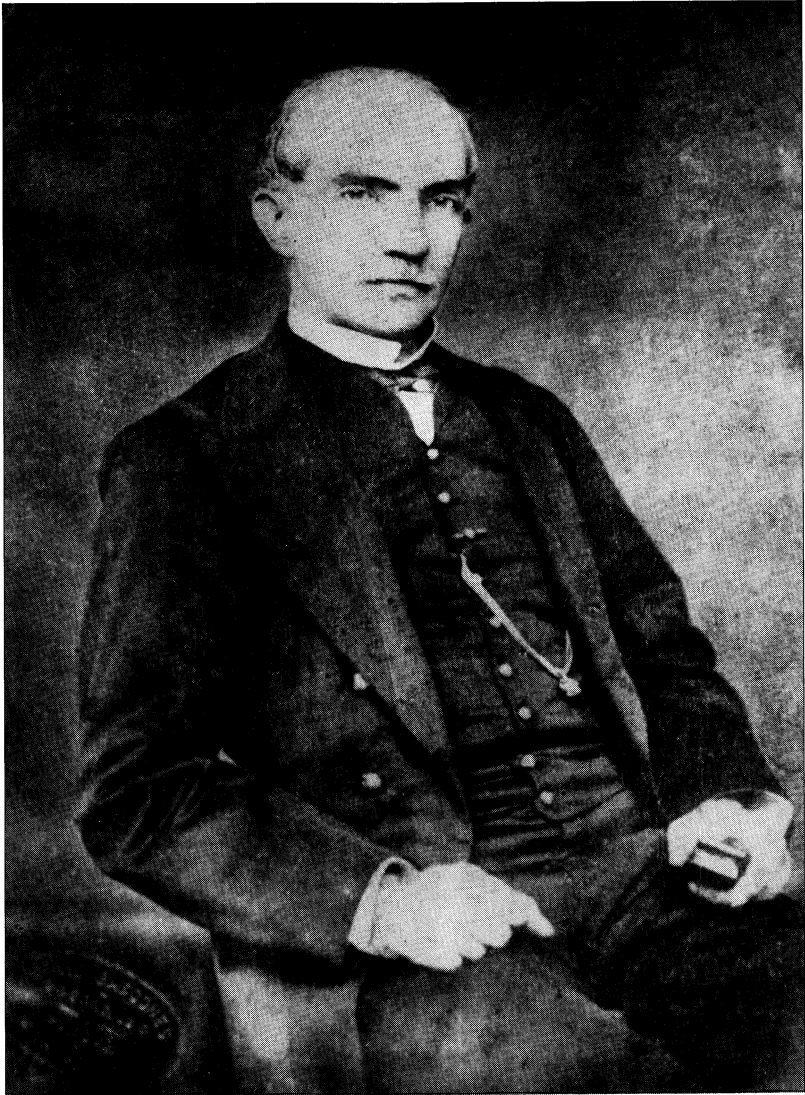
These apparitions of Our Lord were so frequent and revealed so many secrets and mysteries that her every word became imbued with prophecy.

## I Am Mary of Good Success

### APPARITION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, JANUARY 16, 1599

During Mother Mariana of Jesus' third imprisonment in the convent's prison, the divine Lady had appeared to her a second time under the invocation of Mary of Good Success. She explained to her that the suffering that both Mother Mariana and her faithful nuns were undergoing was a heavenly gift which would beautify their souls and enable them to expiate many hidden crimes that were being committed in the ungrateful colony. It was for that purpose that the convent had been founded in Quito. She went on to explain that the devil would use all his power to destroy the convent and that there would be a time when even "people of authority and dignity, many of them under the pretext of improving the situation," would indeed carry out the diabolical plan. However, since God and our Blessed Mother had chosen this place for the fulfillment of their designs for salvation, "no creature can oppose Him without bringing a divine curse upon himself."

Our Lady continued, "Here I shall live manifested in the persons of some of my daughters in every century. Here amidst the tumult of the ungrateful world, God will have contemplative souls and spouses worthy of His Majesty. Those chosen souls will be powerful in appeasing divine justice and obtaining great goods for the Church, the country and its souls, without which Quito could not continue to exist. In a short time this country where you now live will no longer be a colony but the free republic of Ecuador which will need heroic souls in order to endure so many public and private calamities. Here in this convent, God will always find them like hidden violets. No



**The martyred president of Ecuador, Gabriel Garcia Moreno, a glory of Christendom in the nineteenth century. Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres prophesied his martyrdom 250 years before.**

powerful monarch on earth with all his treasures will be able to construct new buildings in this place because it is the possession of God, just as Julian the Apostate with his fraudulent power could not rebuild the temple of Solomon. Vain are the efforts of men against God!

“I shall watch with maternal solicitude over this place and its dependents. If necessary, I will safeguard the walls that guard the cloisters with miracles. God and His Mother, who now speaks to you, will bless all who strive to edify, support and preserve this beloved place. Their names shall be written on the shining star of rubies that you see in the center of this crosier, the symbol of my power and authority in this my house. As for those who work to destroy it, I shall take the lives of some when they least expect it; others will undergo many ordeals, and all will receive in eternity what they deserve.

“In the nineteenth century a truly Christian president will come, a man of character to whom God Our Lord will grant the palm of martyrdom in this very square where my convent is. He will consecrate the republic to the Sacred Heart of my beloved Son, and this consecration will sustain the Catholic religion throughout the following years. During those years, which will be ominous for the Church, the accursed sect of Freemasonry will take over the civil government. A cruel persecution will rage against all religious communities and will descend upon this convent with special fury. Because of those wretched men the convent would perish, but God lives and I live and We will raise powerful defenders from their own midst. We shall place insuperable difficulties in their path; the triumph will be Ours.

“Therefore, in this convent there will be beautiful souls who will attract the mercies of God upon their convent, upon their unworthy country and upon the embattled Church. These souls will not know how their God and Lord is forming them. Thus, it is the wish of my most holy Son that you command a statue of me to be made, just as you see me. Place it on the seat of the abbess so that from there I may govern my convent. In my right hand place the crosier and the keys to the cloister as a symbol of ownership and authority.

“You will have my divine Child placed in my left arm so that, in the first place, all mortals may understand that I am powerful in appeasing divine justice and obtaining mercy and forgiveness for every sinful soul who comes to me with a contrite heart, for I am the Mother of Mercy and in me there is only goodness and love; secondly, so that

my daughters may understand that I am showing and giving them my most holy Son and their God as the model of religious perfection, as an illustration. Let them come to me for I will lead them to Him.

“When the tribulations of the soul and the pains of the body oppress them and they seem to be drowning in a bottomless sea, a look at my holy statue will be for them like a star for the shipwrecked; I shall always be ready to listen to their cries and dry their tears. Tell them to ever hasten to their mother with faith and love, for it is my desire to live with them and in them. With their manifold sufferings they will preserve their convent for all time. Tell them to imitate my humility, my obedience, my spirit of sacrifice and my absolute submission to the divine will. These are the wings by which my daughters who venerate the mystery of my Immaculate Conception throughout the ages will soar with mysterious agility to the highest peaks of sanctity in the silent retreat of the cloisters, seen only by the gaze of God.”

Insistent in her command that a statue be made, the Blessed Virgin said to Mother Mariana: “Measure me yourself with the Franciscan cincture that you wear around your waist. Place your cord in my right hand and touch the other end to my foot.”

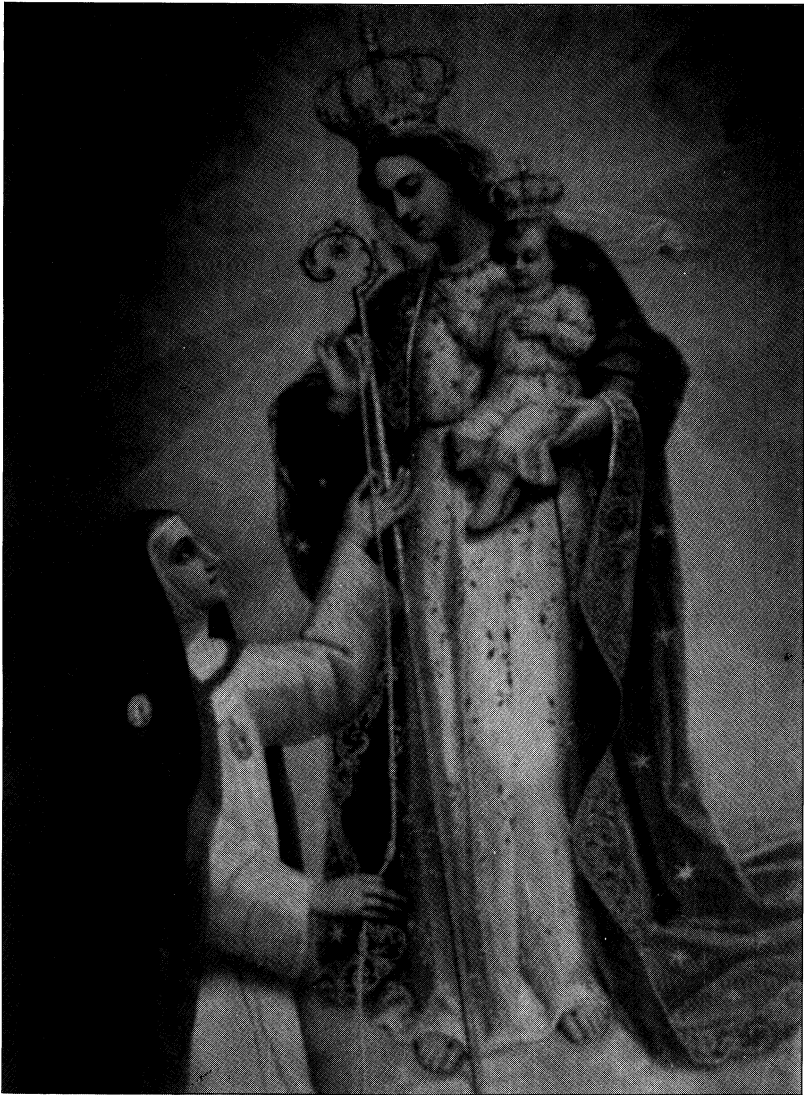
The happy religious, trembling with joy, love and reverence, did what Mary Most Holy ordered. The Blessed Virgin continued: “Here, my daughter, you have the measurement of your heavenly Mother; give them to my servant Francisco del Castillo and describe to him my features and bearing. He will do the exterior work, for he possesses a delicate conscience and scrupulously keeps the Commandments of God and of the Church. No other will be worthy of this grace. You, on your part, help him with your prayers and humble suffering.”

## **OUR LADY ANNOUNCES THE DATE OF MARIANA'S DEATH**

It had become a tradition since 1610 for Our Lady to grace her feast of the Purification and the Presentation of the Infant Jesus on February 2 with an apparition to Mother Mariana. In 1634, while Mariana was praying at midnight in the upper choir, as was her custom, the Blessed Virgin solemnized the feast with an extraordinary event.

This delightful and comforting apparition, besides once again affording Mother Mariana an occasion to renew her humble, reverent and





**This painting is kept in the church of the convent and portrays the moment when Our Lady gave Mother Mariana the cincture that was used to measure the height of the statue to be sculpted.**

loving intimacy with her sovereign visitors, had two outstanding features: First she was shown the dates of her own death and that of her companion and cofoundress, Mother Frances of the Angels, and the proclamations of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin and the Assumption of her body and soul into heaven. Secondly, the Blessed Virgin, in a gesture of immense maternity and trust, placed the Infant Jesus in the arms of the fortunate nun.

From the humble and simple account of the apparition that Mother Mariana gave under obedience to her confessor, we learn that the name of this holy foundress and abbess would remain hidden and unknown to public veneration until the twentieth century. Then it would be duly publicized as an incentive and example to those souls faithful to God and the Church. In the apparition of 1634, she was clearly told the day and the hour of her death as well as that of Mother Frances. Of the sisters who had left the cloister of Galicia for the New World, they were the only two still alive. So united by their vocation and the habit, the sanctity of their lives, their all-encompassing love of God and tender devotion to the Immaculate Mother, the two lives seemed to be merged into one.

They had been together in the days of peace and spiritual calm and together in the troubled days of persecutions and humiliation. Each was the joy and support of the other, two hearts always together in sisterly union, waging spiritual battles and sharing by divine permission the happiness of the heavenly apparitions. Mother Frances of the Angels, already overburdened by the years, quite elderly in body but joyous and enthusiastic in soul, was to anchor at the eternal port on October 4, 1634, at five in the afternoon. Her voyage of eighty years, during which she sailed on the serene waters of the theological virtues, was to abruptly change three months before reaching life's destination. From July 1 to October 31, she felt her little boat rocked by waves of the most violent temptations against all the virtues, but especially against those of faith and chastity.

God's mysterious designs prepared a purgatory on earth for her that would have the added advantage of gaining merit and completely sparing her the purely expiatory one hereafter. In this difficult and dark trial, the helping hand of Mother Mariana of Jesus was always there to guide the endangered little vessel with the sure compass of her prayers, advice and penances.

Mother Mariana's death would follow her companion's a little over three months later, on January 16, 1635. Our Lord assured Mariana that He would not allow the two religious who loved Him so much on this earth to spend as much as a single moment in the flames of purgatory and be deprived of the personal union with Him. He showed her the world of sorrow and weeping, of fire and torments where the souls destined for heaven are purified. He asked His chaste spouse to promise Him that she would dedicate the rest of her life to obtain from God their deliverance and eternal glorification.

Our Lord also revealed to her that in the nineteenth century Pope Pius IX would be humbled and made a prisoner in the Vatican by the arrogant pride of men. Yet during those most troubled times for the Church, His Vicar on earth would proclaim the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of His Blessed Mother. In the same way, 316 years from that date (1634) another Pontiff, Pius XII, would add to the Blessed Virgin's crown by proclaiming, as a dogma of the faith, the Assumption of her body and soul into heaven, borne there by the angels.

## **THE INFANT JESUS IN THE ARMS OF MOTHER MARIANA**

There are two phases in what could be called the second part of this apparition: the prophetic and the glorious. In the first, certain aspects of the history of the Church unfolded themselves. One vision focused on the religious life in Quito with its many pious religious communities, churches and convents. The majority of these would sow seeds of sanctity, but there would also be, unfortunately, a small minority that would be lax and decadent. Sister Mariana saw and understood with exactness the troubled times that the community would undergo, especially around the middle of the twentieth century.

It was then that she interrupted the divine dialogue, saying, "Queen and Lady of Good Success, during those times there will be need of my presence on earth so that I may live and die with my daughters as every mother should. Let me be a breath of life at your feet from where I may be able to share the anguish and affliction of my nuns, consoling, encouraging and strengthening their hearts."

"It is not necessary, my daughter, that you live materially in those times," said the Blessed Virgin, "because you shall be able to assist

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

your community more freely and with greater authority from heaven. Today the Holy Church celebrates the mystery of my Purification and the Presentation of my Infant God. It is my desire that you take Him in your arms as a pledge that a year from today you shall already be living in the temple of glory where all weeping and sorrow shall have ceased. Remember, this date has always been a day on which I granted you great gifts and favors, the greatest of which is to have me living here, governing my convent through the miraculous statue that you had made and placed in the upper choir above the abbess' chair. This beloved house of mine is thus secure and well grounded. You should leave this mortal life calmly, bequeathing to your followers this precious treasure which has been granted to no other convent."

With what astonishment and ineffable joy Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres heard the Blessed Virgin say, "Receive my sweet infant in your arms as a sign that I love this convent very much and that I will guard it always." Then the Immaculate Mother, having pressed the Infant God to her virginal heart, gladly placed Him in Mother Mariana's arms, happily extended like a throne of love to receive Him.

It was an indescribable scene, only barely envisioned by the human mind. How her religious heart must have leaped from its place in her bosom in an ecstasy of joy before the magnificent, tender smile of the Divine Infant! How is it that she did not die then and there when she heard Him say, "My dear spouse, how beautiful is your soul in my eyes! Throughout your long life, I have been your only love. You have loved the cross as I have loved it, have carried it in peace and prized it as your treasure and wealth. It is just that in heaven I will give you the eternal happiness that I have prepared for my chosen ones who have followed me very closely. I love this convent, for it is the work and property of my Immaculate Mother, and I love it because you have lived in it. I shall see you here in all the ages, and in troubled times I shall sustain it. The day of its liberty shall one day dawn just as, one day, the colony will be free from the yoke of your beloved country."

## **APOSTOLATE FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS**

A year before Mariana died, Our Lady of Good Success appeared to her and said: "My dearest daughter and faithful imitator, your mortal

days are ending; I desire that you live the few that are left more perfectly in the love of God and neighbor. Apply all your efforts in praying, working and suffering to gain souls for God. Oh! if the religious only knew the merits that they accumulate for eternity in this secret apostolate, they would not spare any means to practice it.

“It is indeed a great charity to work, suffer and pray for those poor brothers who have gone astray, who like prodigal sons have abandoned their good Father’s house and gone far from their God through sin, wasting the abundant inheritance of divine graces. Left in extreme spiritual misery, they beg from the world—a harsh and cruel lord—the husks of false honors and pleasures. These vices and unruly passions, which are left over from the swine, cast a great number of souls into hell, thus rendering the blood and merits of my Redeemer Son fruitless.

“Our good and merciful Father daily leaves the tabernacle to enter into purified and clean hearts, where with His loving gaze He scans the horizon looking for any prodigal children so as to receive them with open arms. Once reconciled and cleansed in the holy tribunal of penance, He will take them back into His friendship and favor, bestowing on them grace and abundant rewards in heaven. It was precisely for this conquest of wayward souls that He established the contemplative life in His Church. Our Father wanted His chosen souls, hidden from all human eyes, to be active and fervent apostles through constant prayer and penance. Woe to the religious souls who are careless and idle and do not wish to fulfill their sublime mission!”

The contrast between the absolute perfection of God and the terrible offense caused by the sins of man produced a repugnant horror in the noble soul of Mariana. How could insignificant man, swollen in pride, dare to offend His most magnificent Majesty, the beginning and end of all creation and truth? The specter of this depthless imbalance between God and man which is the cause of all evil and the loss of the Supreme Good brought about in the holy nun an ineffable feeling of bewilderment and anguish.

As a remedy for these evils, she chose three methods that were suggested by Our Lord Jesus Christ in His frequent apparitions: prayer, penance and lamentation. Her prayer was uninterrupted. She began at four o’clock in the morning with the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin and, apart from the hours spent in attending to her

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

administrative obligations, spent all her spare time, until as late as three in the morning, praying before Our Lord.

When she retired to her cell, it was not to rest but to take the discipline to her whole body. Many mornings, she only lay down on her bed to rest from three to four. Since she did not spend a single instant outside the presence of God, she was truly immersed, night and day, in the profundities of the contemplative life. The magnitude of Mariana's penances defy comprehension, especially in today's world of self-indulgence. Yet some consideration of physical and spiritual sufferings reveals the enormous sanctity of this great mystic.

At the top of the list, we place the imponderable internal sorrow that she felt at the offenses perpetrated against God by sinners and her deep solidarity with the sufferings of Christ in His passion and death. We continue with the torments of hell that were heroically endured for the period of five years to save the soul of her greatest enemy and unrelenting persecutor; the humiliations, calumnies, ingratitude and contempt of her religious sisters; then the physical torture that she endured during her constant illnesses with neither complaint nor any demonstration of impatience. We may add to all this her great fasts, the life-long abstinence from meat and at times complete abstention from all food; the bloody disciplines with which she lacerated herself, the multiple instruments of penance used on every member of her body from head to foot; the powders used to embitter her food; the deprivation of rest and sleep. Her responsibilities as abbess increased the burden: the thousand pressing worries for the support of the community, the selection of aspirants, the direction of novices, the constant vigilance so that monastic observance would not slacken. There was also the glorious burden of the apparitions that revealed to her events that would involve either her or her future daughters, events laden with sinister forebodings of religious and ecclesiastical ruptures and threats on the part of civil authorities.

All this was enough to break down the best of dispositions and the strongest of constitutions. We can imagine, then, the effect on the fragile structure of a delicate maiden who was deprived of all human aid and thus had no other recourse than her unshakable faith and confidence in her divine Spouse and her Blessed Mother of Good Success.

Indeed, not only was this prolonged martyrdom of Mother Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres a cross on which she remained nailed all

through her life, but it was also a piercing cry that reached the eternal throne of God, moving His merciful heart and appeasing His divine justice. Heeding the entreaties of this crucified nun, He granted the salvation of many sinners who would have been lost were it not for her meritorious intercession.

## **AUTHENTICITY OF VISIONS**

The ultimate vision that man can attain is, of course, the beatific vision whereby the souls of the just, through a perfect union with God, receive all that constitutes the happiness of God Himself, an endless joy. This beatific vision will cause the soul ineffable happiness, completely satisfying all its aspirations and longings. However, the unaided natural human intellect is incapable of this vision, and only through sanctifying grace in this life and the light of glory in the next can we see God face to face, that is, to contemplate the divine essence.

In his quest for sanctification and perfection, the earthly pilgrim can participate to some degree in the life of God through sanctifying grace. As he enters more deeply into this process, his soul becomes immersed in a supernatural environment. While practicing the virtues, especially faith and charity, to an extraordinary degree, it should not be difficult for him to come face to face with God in any instant of his life.

Under these circumstances, visions can easily be explained. Although supernatural visions can appear directly to the imagination or intellect, we are primarily concerned here with corporeal visions in which the eyes perceive an object which is normally invisible to the sight. These are frequently called apparitions.

Nothing can prevent Our Lord, considering His sacred humanity, from showing Himself in a vision to man. Nor on man's part is there any obstacle to seeing God in a vision so long as his physical ability to see remains unimpaired. Thus, for the just soul, who lives so near to God because of the action of grace, there exists no impossibility of seeing God, even while still in this mortal life and, for the ordinary believer, there should be no obstacles to believing in the visions and apparitions with which God favors the just souls.

The Church is quite cautious in accepting apparitions, and they are approved only after careful investigation has proved their authenticity.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

In this way the faithful are protected from being victimized by impostors and deceits. Once the Church has given her approval, we can be assured that the apparition has been accepted as true and its revelations may be used for the edification of all believers. In fact, once this process has been completed, not to accept them would be unreasonable and irreverent.

Many apparitions are recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. At the very beginning God appeared to Adam and graced him with conversations. Angels appeared to Jacob (Gen. 32:25); Abraham was visited by God Himself before He unleashed His chastisement on Sodom and Gomorrha.

Saint Luke relates in his Gospel that the angel Gabriel appeared to both Zachary, the father of John the Baptist, and Our Blessed Mother at the Annunciation. Our Lord Himself appeared after the Resurrection on eight different occasions.

The apparitions of Our Lady form a spectacular list, and many have occasioned feast days. Our Lady of Mount Carmel appeared to Saint Simon Stock and granted many privileges to those who wear the brown scapular. Anticipating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Blessed Virgin appeared three times to Saint Catherine Labouré and during the second visitation showed her the arrangement of the Miraculous Medal. Among the wonders worked by this medal was the conversion of the Jew Alphonse Ratisbonne, who beheld the Blessed Virgin exactly as she was represented on the medal when he entered a chapel in Rome in 1842. Too well known to require any explanation are the apparitions at Lourdes, France, where Our Lady appeared again as the Immaculate Conception, and at Guadalupe, Mexico.

The apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima in this century are of such monumental importance that some Catholics consider them to be the century's greatest historical event.

The brown scapular and the Miraculous Medal represent two of only three feast days that celebrate a sacramental with a special Mass. The third, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, was instituted to commemorate the victory of Christendom over the Moslem Turks at Lepanto in 1571, a victory attributed to the intercession of Our Lady through the recitation of the Rosary. An apparition of Our Blessed Mother also figures in the story, as the soldiers of Mohammed were terrified at seeing a vision of her above the highest mast of the Catholic squadron.



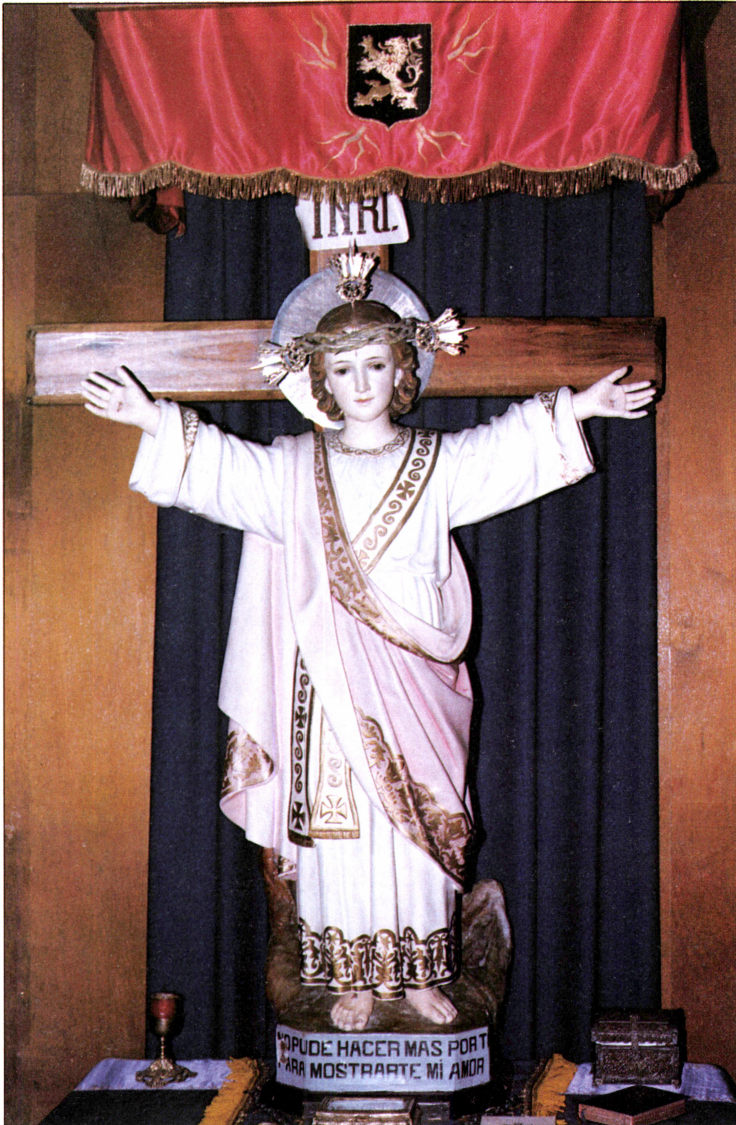
## **Mother Mariana and the Future of Ecuador**

### **THE CHILD JESUS OF THE CROSS OF PICHINCHA**

Sometime during 1628, Mother Mariana, while at her customary midnight prayer in the upper choir, was privileged with a vision of a great upheaval that was to occur in the Spanish colony. Seeing God in His eternal essence, where past, present and future blend together, she saw a great convulsion caused by forces seeking independence from the dominion of Spain.

Dazed by the din of battles, the modest nun who lived within the confines of love and peace, watched the repeated wars with their subsequent acts of heroism and holocaust, their triumphs and defeats, their orphaned children and their deceits, martyrdoms and mutilations. She saw the death-like spectacle of fields laid waste, no longer producing grain to make flour. She heard the catastrophic roar of drums and trumpets, the crack of cannons and artillery, the piercing cries of death, and the hysterical sounds of voices of both soldiers and innocent civilians.

In deep anguish, Mother Mariana turned to the mercy of Our Lady of Good Success for consolation, beseeching her that in that hour the divine will might be fulfilled. In her ecstasy she saw the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael remove the divine Child from the arms of Our Lady and carry Him to the heights of Pichincha, the mountain that overlooks Quito. There He appeared as a lad in His early teens with an expression of sweet majesty, His divinity barely veiled by the innocence of youth. At the very place where the archangels left Him, the pivotal battle for the independence of the Republic of Ecuador was to be fought.



Statue depicting the apparition of the Crucified Child Jesus of Pichincha. At the base of the statue are words the Child Jesus spoke during the apparition: "I could not do more for thee to show thee my love."

Kneeling on the hard ground, the Child Jesus prayed to His eternal Father. Through this prayer Our Lord took possession of His throne on the heights of Pichincha and bestowed numerous benefits on Ecuador. Throughout the successive centuries, Ecuador was favored by the many beauties of its nature; by its moral and social life, richly gifted with saints, sages, artists and heroes; and in the reputation it enjoyed among other nations despite its small size. While larger and more powerful countries succumbed to great waves of wickedness, the Child Jesus granted the small nation the preservation of the Catholic religion.

Continuing the prophetic vision, Mother Mariana next saw the Child Jesus arise after He finished His prayer. At this juncture the great Pichincha was bathed in an extraordinary light that carpeted its craggy slopes for the passage of its Lord and Creator.

Soon the Divine Child came upon a smooth, wide wooden cross. On the top the letters INRI were inscribed; from the left arm hung a crown of thorns; and from the right arm a white stole. Once again the archangels appeared. With great reverence, Gabriel brought a white Host; Michael, a white tunic strewn with stars; and Raphael, a rose-covered mantle.

Manifesting great joy, the Child Jesus put on the tunic and mantle and placed the stole, which signifies authority over souls, around His neck. He looked on the Cross with profound love and, unable to hold back great tears which rolled down His cheeks, watched as they were gathered by the three archangels and sprinkled throughout the four corners of the country. Then the Child Jesus placed the crown of thorns on His head and, approaching the Cross, extended His arms and remained crucified, without, however, any nails appearing either on His hands or on His feet which rested on the ground.

He then ordered Saint Gabriel to place the Host behind the nape of His neck. At this point there appeared a cross-shaped halo made of polished gold and set with the finest emeralds. In the center was inscribed the word 'love,' flanked on the right by the word 'Ecuador' and on the left by the word 'Spain.' From the throne of His Cross, He gazed over the whole republic and said: "I could not do more for thee to show thee my love."

A few years after this vision, Mother Mariana had a statue sculpted to reproduce the Divine Child exactly as she had seen Him. With the permission of the ecclesiastical authority, it was introduced to the

eneration of the faithful under the invocation of the Child of the Cross of Pichincha. This devotion has continued to our time and the statue is kept in the church of the Immaculate Conception convent. (This devotion was approved by the Most Reverend Pedro de Oviedo, onetime spiritual director of Mariana of Jesus Torres.)

### **RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FEUDING FAMILIES**

Toward the end of her exemplary life, Mother Mariana was involved in the settlement of a serious feud between members of Quito's colonial society. Because of the gravity of the matter, this case exceeded the many other more quiet interventions of Mariana on behalf of the families who frequented the convent.

Two families had the peaceful city of Quito quite disturbed and concerned over a scandalous contention that had developed between them. The cause of the bitter dispute, trifling as is often the case, was the death of some animals of one family on the property of the other. So severe was this strife that they not only broke off relations and aggressively exchanged insolent threats, but they neither heeded nor respected the authority of Quito's Bishop Pedro de Oviedo. The virtuous bishop had alternated between discretion and moral authority to solve the problem without obtaining even the faintest hope of reconciliation. The two families were so filled with hatred for each other and so set in their fury that only a miracle could be expected to appease them.

When this scandalous offense to Christian charity threatened to endanger the lives of the agitated enemies, the bishop implored Mother Mariana to make use of her wise intervention between the feuding parties and of her powerful intercession with the Lord of Peace on behalf of those who greatly needed it.

Thus the bishop arranged for them to meet with Mother Mariana in the parlor of the convent. The first family went to Mariana and rattled off all the justifications for their unruly behavior as well as the incidents of evil behavior of the other family, and then they gave vent to all the threats and insults against their rivals. When they had no more to say and thought they had convinced Mariana of their supposed logic, they asked the silent religious to express her opinion.

Mother Mariana spoke to them of Christian charity, which they were largely ignoring by their scandalous conduct, and urged them to remodel their behavior after Christ Who is meek and humble of Heart and Who always accepted personal insults. She further reminded them that He had, in fact, come to earth to be mocked, ridiculed and insulted for our sake. She then asked them to join with her in a novena and at its completion to return to the convent to discuss the next step.

In deference to the bishop's request, the second family also visited the holy nun. The conversation followed roughly the same line as the first and they received the same instructions. While both families were in their respective homes that evening, they attempted to recite the Our Father; to their great surprise and terror, they realized that, on coming to the part, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," they were incapable of pronouncing the words. Their tongues refused to cooperate while their consciences accused them of hypocrisy on trying to enunciate what was in contradiction with their present conduct.

The nine days over, the first family hastened back to the parlor. They reasonably discussed the situation with Mother Mariana, listened to her request for a reconciliation, and offered a forgiving hand to the other family. Both families were then summoned to a meeting in the convent where they renewed their days of friendship and understanding and left with the joy that comes with living in the tranquility of God's order.

On returning home, one of the families came upon a tattered and filthy beggar who stopped the father of the family and begged him for some alms. The beggar, after he had received a donation, made an attempt to destroy the father's confidence in the saintly mediator who had intervened in the affair. Not satisfied with this, he then proceeded to invent a monstrous calumny that the other family, in agreement with Mother Mariana, would be armed at the moment of the public reconciliation so as to destroy his entire family. On hearing this accusation, the father became indignant and struck the supposed beggar a heavy blow with his walking stick. The father then stepped away from him, allowing him to fall limply to the ground. Meanwhile, intrigued by such a lively conversation, the wife approached her husband to inquire what had happened and when she looked back at the mysterious creature, she saw him laughing and rejoicing over the trick.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Undaunted, the same beggar visited the head of the second family and tried to convince him also of a betrayal formed by a conspiracy between Mother Mariana and the first family. At first, the father began to fall into the trap and believe some of the story, but, on reminding himself of the reputation of sanctity of the holy nun which had been recognized throughout the city, he became filled with indignation against the deceitful beggar and threw him out of his house.

The next day, both families were at the agreed location. In a cordial and responsive manner, they opened their arms to each other, allowing their hearts to express sincere gratitude toward the holy religious who, with her prayers and those of the convent, had obtained from God this ineffable act of reconciliation. The reconciliation lasted for the rest of the lives of these two happy families who had been so embittered and filled with hatred toward each other.

### CAUSE OF A VIOLENT EARTHQUAKE

After the reconciliation had been accomplished and while everyone still breathed the air of happiness that gladdened the hearts of the reconciled families, Mother Mariana hastened to her Divine Spouse in the tabernacle to express her gratitude for the gifts of peace which He had so generously bestowed. Along with expressions of gratitude and affection, she also beseeched Our Lord to have Satan's power chained so that he could not again put in jeopardy the temporal welfare and eternal destiny of those souls, souls that were redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

The intensity of her prayer and ascetical effort brought about an ecstasy in which her soul became absorbed in God. She saw part of heaven descend to the tabernacle, causing the main altar to become resplendent with glory. She saw how the Blessed Trinity operated in all Its plenitude under the Eucharistic Species: The Father receiving all adoration and majesty; the Son unrelentingly immolating Himself for human salvation; and the Holy Ghost causing sanctity and grace to germinate in the souls of the faithful. The Immaculate Mother of God, channel of all graces and Mediatrix between God and man, was not excluded from this *ad extra* operation of the Three Divine Persons.

During this vision, Mother Mariana heard the voice of Jesus Christ saying to her: “My most dear spouse, in whose heart I live sweetly and peacefully and where I rest from my labors and toils, I can deny you nothing for you are the faithful daughter of my Immaculate Mother with whom you have dealt familiarly during your mortal life. Now that it is coming to its end, may it be done according to your request. You yourself command these furious legions of devils, who have come out to prevent the conversion of souls, to descend to the depth of the infernal abyss.” At that instant the humble nun received the necessary power to cast the evil spirits into hell, commanding them in the name of the Blessed Trinity, of the consecrated Host and of her Blessed and Immaculate Mother.

Supported by divine assistance, she obeyed this mandate of Jesus Christ and ordered the damned legions to retire to the infernal dens. The voice of the frail religious that usually resembled the song of birds was changed into a clamoring cataract of divine justice that put the hordes of pride and evil to shameful flight toward the center of the earth. Falling into the depths, they caused such a violent movement of the earth that the peaceful inhabitants of Quito thought it was an eruption of the Pichincha which in its fury sought to annihilate the city nestled at its feet. The alarmed and baffled bishop ordered the bells to be rung as a warning of earthquake.

## **MARIANA BILOCATES TO SAVE A SOUL FROM DAMNATION**

Toward the end of Mother Mariana’s life, there lived in the convent a native nun from Quito, Manuela, who was known for her virtue and fidelity to religious observance. She had an only brother who at the age of twenty-eight had assumed leadership of the family at their father’s recent death. Although this young man, Robert, a merchant by profession, harbored decent sentiments and devoted himself to his family responsibilities, he cared neither for his original cleanness of conscience nor for a life of sanctification.

It was the practice during those days of violent crime and highway robberies for commercial travelers who were transporting merchandise to travel in caravans for self-protection. Robert, along with some companions, had organized such a caravan, and prior to his departure

he had stopped by the convent to inform his sister and seek Mother Mariana's blessing on the trip which promised such excellent business opportunities.

Mariana, quite concerned over his spiritual condition, took this opportunity to tenderly warn him: "Look, Robert, God Our Lord is about to summon you to judgment very soon, and if you do not put your spiritual life in order, your salvation will be at stake. It would cause your family immense sorrow if you were to be surprised by death in your present state."

"You are right, Mother," answered Robert, "I should reflect on the sins of my past life and amend my life, according to the lessons of Our Lord in the Gospel. If only I had the time and opportunity, I would do it this very moment. But unfortunately I cannot postpone my trip as my companions have made all the preparations to leave. The places through which we are to pass are full of robbers and thieves and unless we travel as a group we will place our lives and property in jeopardy. However, I will promise you, Mother, that I will look into the matter as soon as I return. This trip should not take long and I will bring back a small remembrance for the community. Please do not forget to pray for me and ask my sister Manuela and the other nuns for their prayers."

"I assure you that I will help you in your supreme battle," said Mother Mariana, "During your trip, do not let a single day go by without praying the Holy Rosary on beads I shall give you. Pray with your companions, beseeching God for a good death and the salvation of your soul. Do not fail to examine your conscience, so that you may be able to confess when the opportunity arises."

Throughout the trip everything went well until the day for the homeward journey. When several of the travelers took ill, they had no alternative but to delay the trip until their strength returned. But the impatient Robert did not wish to wait. With the sole company of a page and a few muleteers, he decided to risk the return. He had set a date with death from which none can escape.

He had not gone far on the road when ten ruthless bandits ambushed Robert's small party from the bushes. This band of cutthroats, capable of any crime or atrocity, was led by a man who had killed his own mother and brothers when they tried to prevent him from carrying out his evil intentions. Seeing the danger, Robert dug his spurs into



his mule, which was responsive and trustworthy. The page tried to resist but was immediately shot and killed. The attack now centered exclusively on Robert, who desperately spurred his mule forward as the shots directed at both rider and animal multiplied. Suddenly a most brilliant and blinding light enveloped them. In the midst of this brilliance, Robert could distinguish Mother Mariana, who was now fulfilling her promise of helping him in his supreme battle.

Blinded by the great light, the bandits temporarily halted the attack. Robert took advantage of this momentary lull in the action to reach, with his last strength, a group of travelers coming in the opposite direction. Alarmed by the fury of the assailants, the travelers shouted for help with all their might. The echo of these shouts reached Robert's companions, who hastily rushed to help their friend. The dangerous cutthroats, realizing they had lost their advantage, fled from the field, leaving behind their ruthless captain who had been riddled with bullets.

When Robert reached his unexpected saviors in that last breathless dash, they gently lifted him from his mount and wondered in admiration how he could have remained in the saddle after receiving so many terrible wounds. "Someone," they said to each other, "must have sustained him," because it was impossible for him to have done it by his own strength. They were even more astonished when, on dismounting him, they realized that the mule was completely disemboweled. Nevertheless, it sustained the body of its rider and carried it a great distance at full speed as if it had been perfectly healthy. Once the animal had been relieved of the weight of its owner, it fell dead.

Robert's first concern was to have a priest brought to him so he might have his confession heard. The protection of Mother Mariana was even more discernible when two Franciscan priests were found to be among the group of newcomers. While one sustained the head of the dying man, the other heard his confession.

Without leaving her place in the convent, Mother Mariana was also traveling lonely roads far from Quito, fulfilling her promise that "she would help him in his supreme battle." Indeed, she defended him from the assailants to whom Robert would otherwise have been an easy prey; she maintained and supported him on his mount; gave stamina to the mule so as to save the body of its master; and, finally, obtained from God the spiritual help of the Franciscan priests in order to save the soul of her protégé.



## 9

# The Piety of Mother Mariana of Jesus

### THE PASSION OF HOLY WEEK

For Mother Mariana, there was no week that was not holy, for she lived every week in a most pious way, corresponding strictly and totally to the divine graces received. Nevertheless, while discussing the liturgical period of Holy Week, we must begin by taking to the second power—to use a mathematical expression—the quality and the quantity of her penances and austerities, of her prayer and contemplation, and of her privileged penetration into the intimate sufferings of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. During that special time, she was granted an understanding beyond what is humanly possible concerning the cruelty of Christ's passion and all it meant for the human nature to be hypostatically united to the divine nature and to bear such an accumulation of sorrows: the humiliation, sacrilegious profanations, ingratitude, abandonment, renewed manifestations of the passion of hatred and challenges to divine justice. All this was experienced by the imprisonment of Jesus in a human body—in the ignominious rounds from tribunal to tribunal, the aberrations committed by the soldiers, the horrifying scourging, the diabolically inventive crowning of thorns, the humiliating choice of Barrabas and in the crime of the crucifixion of the God-man.

Mother Mariana wanted to achieve a total union with Christ, both in His physical sufferings and in His moral sufferings. She carefully distributed her time and activities so that she could become one with Him in His terrible ordeal. Every day, in the morning and at night, she took a bloody discipline to herself. She covered her body from

head to foot with instruments of penance. On Holy Thursday, she walked the cloisters of the lower and upper choirs in a constant visit to Calvary. This she did barefooted, carrying a coarse rope around her neck and keeping her eyes on the ground, recalling all the steps taken by Our Lord on His ominous walk from the tribunal of Annas to the tribunal of Caiphas, from Herod's palace to the fortress of Pilate.

During this time she never omitted any of the community observances. On the contrary, she fulfilled them with redoubled fervor and recollection. On arriving at the refectory at mealtime, she did not sit down before having humbly kissed the feet of every religious. At the chanting of *Tenebrae* (Matins and Lauds of the Divine Office for the last three days of Holy Week), it was she who directed the singing with her musical ability and melodious and delicate voice, which transported souls to invisible and eternal regions.

When the ceremony was over, she descended with the rest of the community to the monastic prison singing the *Miserere*. Once inside this gloomy dungeon with nothing but a dim light, everyone prostrated on the ground and listened to the abbess as she read from the Gospel passage concerning the scourging. Following the reading, all presented themselves to be scourged with coarse nettles. From 11 p.m. to midnight, Mother Mariana participated in a Holy Hour in which she read the points for meditation with a special love and devotion, and joined in the singing accompanied by a harp which produced such notes as to cause cascades of emotions to flow.

At 12:30 the community retired to their cells for a short rest. Instead of resting, Mariana, again barefooted and wearing instruments of penance, walked the halls of the convent. This time she prayed the Way of the Cross, bearing on her shoulder a heavy wooden cross, and immersed in the sorrows of her Lord. At the completion of the Way of the Cross, she retired to a secret place where she attached the cross to a wall. Once again she chastised herself with a handful of nettles after which she crucified herself until four in the morning, while, lost in profound meditation, she reviewed the details of the redeeming passion. After her extraordinary penances she visited the Blessed Sacrament and then went to the upper choir to attend the community prayer. Afterward she began her monastic duties without any fatigue or faintness.

On Good Friday she took three bloody disciplines: the first, in the morning; the second, at the hour of the scourging of Our Savior; and the third at 11:30 at night. She concentrated the whole of her attention on the steps taken by Our Lord Jesus Christ on that first Good Friday of the Redemption, from one tribunal to the other, from affront to insult, from one martyrdom to another.

God granted her the grace of feeling in her fragile and virginal body the cruelty of the scourging, the anguishing contortion of the hands and feet at being pierced by nails, the rigidity of the muscles made tense by pain, the burning thirst of His dehydrated tissues, the heaviness of the head unrelieved by any support, and the sensation of life leaving the body after a prolonged agony. Everything was reenacted in this humble religious: the abandonment and desolation on the Cross; the wrenching of the dislocated bones while her hands and feet swelled and turned black and blue at the entrance point of the nails; the adhering of her tongue to the roof of her mouth, which made any talking impossible. Her body and soul were assailed by unspeakable sorrows and pains that culminated at three o'clock in the afternoon in a total fainting spell, an unbloody but death-like tearing of the faculties which, breaking all the ties of the body from the senses, submerged her in the incomprehensible immensity of God, not for beatific enjoyment but for the intense suffering of Christ's passion that lives forever in the eternal pages of the Father's justice.

The fainting spell lasted until five o'clock in the afternoon, when she returned to her senses and attended the chanting of *Tenebrae*. She spent Holy Saturday immersed in the sweet sadness of spiritually following the Queen of Martyrs in her incomparable solitude. From that point on there was nothing extraordinary in her penances, only her usual daily austerities which she always performed with a burning love of God and neighbor.

Taking a brief rest on Saturday night, she arose anxiously and joyfully at three Easter Sunday morning to attend the Resurrection of Our Lord and to contemplate His glorification and triumph over death and sin. Emanating joy through every pore of her body, she awoke her sisters and rang the bell calling all to the choir to sing *Matins* at four. Her face, which on the previous days had been drawn and pale, now took on an air of happiness and became smiling and rosy. Only with difficulty could she contain the joy of her Lord's Resurrection

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

within the boundaries of her loving heart. With Christ resurrected, she also returned to life.

### **HARASSMENT FROM DEMONS**

According to Catholic theology, the existence of the devil is an unquestioned fact which we find on numerous pages in the Gospel. Jesus Christ expelled many of them from the bodies of his contemporaries, and a great number of them, on leaving, acknowledged Him as the Messiah and the Son of God. The angels of evil, who wage a constant battle against virtue and sanctity, could not remain far from Mariana, an authentic personification of good. Many times they dared to approach this holy religious, tormenting her violently and causing all possible evils to her body, since there was nothing they could do to her soul. Sometimes they tripped her, making her roll to the ground or fall from stairs in various places in the convent. While reading in the refectory, the letters would disappear; when serving the table, she would be showered with food from the platters.

Nevertheless, her soul remained unperturbed. A biographer of Mariana of Jesus Torres reveals a depth of understanding that causes the beauty of her soul to shine even more before our eyes. He remarked that many times her beautiful eyes became filled with tears. When they asked the cause of such weeping, she answered ingenuously: "Oh! my little sisters, I weep because the demons are more eager for our perdition than we are for our salvation." Her companions were fortunate that Mother Mariana perceived this continual action of the demons. She heroically tore them away from the infernal claws, defended them from the dangers at the terrible hour of death or assisted in their deliverance from the flames of purgatory.

### **FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI, 1623**

In 1623 during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in a public procession, Mariana was praying before the tabernacle when she received a vision showing a Corpus Christi procession some years in the future. Great crowds lined the streets to witness a magnificent

ceremonial march filled with faith and love toward the Divine Presence. With banners of the country and the Vatican waving proudly from the windows of the houses and the church buildings, the procession wound its way through the streets. Leading were the mayors of Quito, past and present, followed by members of the nobility and upper social circles, then the legislators, bankers, intellectuals, professionals and gentlemen of the great fortunes. Following that contingent were friars and nuns, each wearing their distinctive habits; then the secular and regular clergy, robed in magnificent liturgical vestments; girls in the white dresses of their First Communion and boys in the uniforms of their grammar or high school; and then the great body of the faithful, carrying in their hands the symbolic candle; and lastly, the object of all attention, the throne of light and charity, the majestic monstrance containing the Body and Blood of Our Lord, held aloft by the archbishop, who was accompanied by his ministers.

The eyes of the observers could not see what was visible to the prophetic vision of Mother Mariana: the hairshirts and instruments of penance worn by the nuns and male religious as a loving expression and an expiation for sacrileges of the impious. Nor were they able to see another vision even more disturbing to Mariana: the unchecked fury of the devil who was greatly excited and provoked by the reverence and attention given to the Blessed Sacrament in these holy processions. He was not long in preparing his attack and forming alliances with the bad children of the country. He also cleverly developed a working agreement with those venal apostates who sell their consciences for political power and who force laws on the people that confine Christ and His Mystical Body inside the walls of churches and sacristies and with those who pretend that the Catholic religion is only a sect composed of myths which has no right to involve itself in temporal welfare much less to expand and propagate its ideas. Thus, there would be secular legislation regulating the worship of Him who is the Lord of Nations. The ominous unfolding of future persecution tormented the prophetic eyes of Mother Mariana and is today strangulating the faith of the people who can only expect a meager procession in the evening, devoid of any of the pomp, excellence, or manifestation of triumph which is properly owed to the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Mother Mariana also saw the natural correlation that existed in each soul between the material and spiritual responsibilities, and also between the various groups that operate in the temporal and spiritual spheres, and how they all functioned in God's overall plan.

Finally, she was given an understanding of the great merit received by those who had a fervent devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Conversely, part of the vision showed that many would come to the convent lacking a true vocation and would infect the community with a spirit of indifference, not having a fixed goal or any thought for their supernatural destiny. Worse, this indifference would develop into a lukewarm attitude toward the Blessed Sacrament, the same lukewarmness that so offended Our Lord that He threatened to vomit out of His mouth those who possessed it.

On returning from the ecstasy, Mother Mariana was totally persuaded—and she often repeated this to her nuns—that the foundation of the spiritual life lies cemented in the fusion of three supernatural loves: to the passion of Christ our Redeemer, to the Holy Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Any individual or institution lacking this foundation would never rise nor aspire to eternal life.

### **HOLY THURSDAY, 1624**

While engaged in her Holy Thursday observances, Mariana was graced with a vision that showed a tremendous fire enveloping the main altar in the convent chapel. Terrified by the sight, she hastened to her protectress, Our Lady of Good Success, who deigned to appear immediately to her to appease her fears. She explained that God had ordained that the fire should occur because of the many benefits that would result from the catastrophe, not the least of which would be to increase the fervor of the religious then in residence. The catastrophe would also raise the concern of the outside authorities, both ecclesiastical and lay, for the venerable community, thus causing more cordial relations to develop between them.

Two facts drew the special attention of the seer as the image of the horrible fire unfolded before her: the hatred of the devil against those harmless, cloistered nuns who, from the very heart of the city, attracted the attention of God with their prayers and penances and obtained



mercy for the inhabitants of that city and the whole country; and secondly the authority and masterly dominion with which the Blessed Virgin watched over the fire, allowing only that which would suit the providential purpose, and stopping anything that might affect the safety of the convent, its belongings and the surrounding property.

During the fire's rage, Mother Mariana, who by then would be enjoying the bliss of heaven, saw herself virtually present, inspiring a virtuous soldier of great faith who, braving the flames, ran into the chapel and tried to rescue the tabernacle containing the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. She watched as the heroic soldier, with herself as guide, worked his way through the terrible heat of the fire without being burned or asphyxiated or suffering any wounds.

Once he gained possession of the rich treasure, he rushed to the safety of the closest exit. However, before completely escaping the danger, the young warrior stopped short in a state of confusion. Where should he take the prize? His heavenly guide then led him to the abbess who, in turn, placed the tabernacle in the room of a holy and infirm nun who was enduring much suffering.

## **THE POPULARITY OF THE NAMES MARIANO AND MARIANA**

From 1624 on, Mother Mariana could no longer restrain her yearning for heaven. Each heavenly apparition, each contact with God, which naturally increased her love for Him and His Blessed Mother, gave a new incentive to deepen her humility and to increase her strict observance of the monastic rule, her detachment from all earthly things, and her inexhaustible charity toward the poor. She knew and felt that every human and temporal action had an eternal transcendency, so she spared no effort in the practice of every virtue and in not wasting a single minute of her time that did not produce some good so as to enrich her glory in eternity. These virtues not only perfumed the cloisters of the convent but, finding their way through the walls, spread throughout the city of Quito, inspiring confidence in all who, carrying the cross of their own pains and sorrows, hastened to seek her prayerful intercession, her consolation, advice and efficacious remedies for the evils of both body and soul.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

Mother Mariana exercised a passionate concern for the sorrows of her neighbors outside the cloister, especially for the tears and anguish of mothers who feared the loss of children they were carrying. In order to provide a remedy for their fear, she prepared a drink made from aniseed which was known to possess great medicinal value. When she gave her recipe of aniseed water to the woman in need, she then sought the Doctor par excellence, the loving Prisoner of the tabernacle, and tenderly demanded that He watch over the young vulnerable life. So many children were saved from a premature death that the names Mariano and Mariana, bestowed by grateful mothers on their children, became increasingly popular throughout the territory.

### POETRY OF MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES

Poetry is no stranger to either Sacred Scripture or liturgical music, for all art forms should be used to sing the praises of God. Mother Mariana, who manifested her love for God in so many ways, was also inspired to express this unbounded love in the form of poetry. Following are a few poems that she composed during her imprisonment in 1599. (Given the difficulty of maintaining the perfect rhyme and beautiful flow of language in the original Spanish as well as accuracy in translation, the translator has opted for the latter.)

Beautiful maiden,  
Delight of God,  
Come to my soul,  
With quickened step.

*Hermosa doncella  
delicia de Dios  
camina hacia mi alma  
con paso veloz.*

In my cruel bitterness,  
Amidst sorrow and pain,  
Thou art my comfort,  
Grant me valor.

*En mi cruel amargura  
en pena y dolor  
sois Vos mi consuelo  
y dadme valor.*

Like a wilting leaf,  
From the tree of God,  
I linger so far,  
From the tree Minor.

*Cual hoja marchita  
del árbol de Dios  
me arrastro muy lejos  
del árbol Menor.*

O blessed tree,  
Beloved of God,  
Away from thy shade,  
I am in want of thy love!

*¡Oh! ¡árbol bendito!  
¡querido de Dios  
faltando tu sombra  
me falta el amor!*

Such a frail vessel,  
In a sea of storms,  
Thus fares my soul,  
Without oars and light.

*Cual débil barquilla  
en mar tempestuoso  
fluctúa mi alma  
sin remo y sin luz.*

On a foreign willow,  
Hanging my lyre,  
I am now captive,  
And begin to weep.

*En sauce extranjero  
colgando mi lira  
me miro cautiva  
y empiezo a llorar.*

But far in the distance,  
In centuries beyond,  
I see Francis and his children,  
That to us come.

*Más allá, en lontananza,  
pasados los siglos  
a Francisco y sus hijos  
los veo venir.*

Bringing great joy,  
Peace and good happiness,  
For in so much sadness,  
My home is now found.

*Trayendo la dicha,  
la paz, la ventura,  
que en tanta tristura  
se encuentra mi hogar.*

O day of gladness,  
Of such holy glee!  
Oh! come and do hasten,  
For I am sighing for thee!

*¡Mi día dichoso  
de santa alegría,  
venid presuroso  
que ansío por tí!*

I ask thee, Mother,  
Help in my strife,  
Console me in my sorrow,  
And relieve me in my pain.

*Pidiéndote Madre  
sostén en mi lucha,  
consuelo en mi pena,  
alivio en mi mal.*

Save, then, thy house,  
Which was founded by thee,  
Where hidden reside,  
Both love and peace.

*¡Que salves tu Casa!  
fundada por Tí,  
do ocultos residen  
la paz y el amor.*

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

O Stigmatized Father,  
Francis of Assisi,  
Be thou my advocate,  
In the fatal hour.

*¡Oh! ¡Padre Llagado!  
Francisco de Asís,  
sed Vos mi abogado  
en lance fatal.*

Watch over your daughters,  
Who, weeping and sad,  
Beseech thee lovingly,  
For strength and fervor.

*Cuidad de tus hijas  
que tristes, llorosas  
te piden, amorosas  
valor y fervor.*

A thousand times cursed,  
Be he who loves not Francis,  
General of Christ,  
My father and my beloved!

*¡Maldito mil veces  
quien no ame a Francisco,  
Alférez de Cristo,  
mi Padre y mi amor!*

But I, in this land,  
Of so much pain,  
Where tears are my drink,  
For happiness I hope not.

*Mas yo, en este suelo  
de tanto quebranto,  
do bebo el llanto,  
no espero gozar.*

When the end is come,  
Of these mortal days,  
Then my troubles gone,  
Happiness shall dawn.

*Cuando haya acabado  
mis días mortales  
terminan mis males  
y empiezo a gozar.*

And hence from heaven,  
In holy concern,  
Over the holy observance,  
I shall care.

*Y ya desde el Cielo  
con santo desvelo  
la santa observancia  
de aquí celaré.*

Throughout the centuries,  
Good daughters shall I have,  
Who zealous and loving,  
Will serve their God.

*Y en todos los siglos  
tendré buenas hijas  
que, amantes, prolijas,  
a Dios servirán.*

**Other Poems of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres**

O delight of my love, Jesus of my soul!  
Why leavest me Thou in such bitter pain?  
Like a lonely dove do I weep  
In the midst of a night so laden of grief.

*¡Oh! encanto de mi amor, ¡Jesús del alma!  
¡Por qué me dejas en amarga pena?  
Cual torto lilla solitaria lloro  
en plena noche de dolores llena.*

There in the depths of my vibrant love  
I find no peace nor the least repose.  
Oh! do return and stay with me,  
O heavenly Spouse of my soul!

*Allá en el fondo mi amor activo  
no encuentro calma ni el menor reposo,  
vuélvete, dice, a estar conmigo  
¡oh! ¡de mi alma Celestial Esposo!*

If it is Thy justice that my guilt thus claims,  
I, already humbled, thy pardon implore,  
And, becoming one with the earth's dust, I thee adore,  
O fine Lover of this heart that reveres thee!

*Si de mis culpas tu Justicia clama  
yo, ya humillada, tu perdón imploro;  
y confundida con el polvo yo te adoro  
¡oh! ¡fino amante del corazón que te adoro*

Thou hast placed in my soul this emptiness.  
My life is but a cemetery vast,  
Where Thou my love has buried deeply,  
Thy memory, Thy beauty and Thy goodness past.

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

*Tu puesto en mi alma está vacío;  
mi vida es un vasto cementerio  
do se hallan sepultadas, ¡Amor mío!,  
tu recuerdo, tu hermosure y tu cariño.*

And though by the light of my ardent faith,  
Thy goodness immense I thus ascertain,  
My soul is parched like a withered flower,  
Lacking, as it does, Thy life-giving rain.

*Y, aunque la luz de mi ardiente Fé  
me hace entrever tu bondad immense,  
mi alma se seca cual una flor marchita  
faltando el riego del que le dió vida.*

Just then a beautiful hope is felt,  
like a messenger of that divine love,  
Hastently comes toward me,  
To give me heart in my bitter sorrow.

*En esto viene la esperanza bella  
cual mensajera del amor divino  
y presuroso hacia mí se inclina  
para alentarme en mi amarga pena.*

O Fire of Charity, my hidden God!  
My soul is ablaze in thy ardor divine.  
Neither my sorrows nor Thine apparent forgetfulness,  
Can estrange me from Thou Who art mine.

*¡Oh! ¡fuego de caridad, Dios escondido!  
se abrasa mi alma en tu divino ardor.  
Ni mis dolores, ni tu aparente olvido  
me alejarán de Ti que eres mi amor.*

In a bed of sorrows prostrate I live,  
Waiting for the charity of my daughters.  
O Thou who sharest the same roof,  
Bless all whom thou so much lovest.

*Postrada vivo en doloroso lecho  
esperando la caridad de mis hermanas;  
¡Oh! ¡Tú que vives bajo un mismo techo,  
bendice aquellas a quienes tanto amas!*

And when free from this burdensome body,  
My happy soul to Thee will take flight,  
Open then for me, my beloved  
The doors of Thy mansion of heavenly delight!

*Y cuando libre del pesado cuerpo  
mi alma feliz tienda hacia Tí mi vuelo,  
entonces, ábrene, Amado mío  
de tu mansión las puertas del Cielo.*

So then, Mother of Fair Love!  
O my beautiful and heavenly Mary!  
Thine own self my soul present,  
To my beloved and heavenly Spouse.

*Entonces, ¡Madre del Amor Hermoso!  
¡Oh! ¡mi bella y Celestial María!  
presenta Tú misma el alma mía  
a mi amado y Celestial Esposo.*

To our beneficent motherland,  
To the saving Church,  
Grant to us thy glory access,  
Mary of Good Success.

*De la Patria bienhechore,  
de la Iglesia salvadora,  
dános a tu gloria acceso  
¡María de El Buen Suceso!*

From heaven itself thou comest,  
To this choir of thy love,  
And dost thy garden consecrate  
With such singular favor.

*Del Cielo mismo bajaste  
a este coro de tu amor  
y tu vergel consagraste  
con un singular favor.*

Our own Abbess thou didst,  
Offer thyself to be,  
O Virgin Immaculate!  
When here thou didst appear.

*Que has de ser nuestra Prelada  
Tú misma nos ofreciste,  
¡oh! ¡Virgen Inmaculada!  
Cuando aquí te apareciste.*

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

The keys of this cloister,  
Affectionately thou didst request,  
So as to have thus well secure,  
The home thou didst bequest.

*Las llaves de la clausura  
con cariño nos pediste  
para tener Vos segura  
la morada que nos diste.*

So, since we are thy sheep,  
Of Good Success so loved,  
Receive thus our grievances,  
And grant us a life of love.

*Y, pues somos tus ovejas,  
de El Buen Suceso queridas,  
acoge ya nuestras quejas  
y danos de amor la vida.*

Mariana of Jesus Torres also wrote two books, *The Immaculate Conception* and *The Infallibility of the Pope* which probably contained the true doctrine on these subjects since she was instructed directly by Our Lord Himself and His Blessed Mother in her confidential interviews with Them. It is known that she sent both books to Rome, but they met the same disastrous end as other valuable documents such as the canonical process for the beatification of Mariana of Jesus Paredes y Flores: They were lost at sea.

However, the first drafts of these books were seen by one of her early biographers when they were placed in a closet somewhere in the convent. Unfortunately, this closet with its valuable secrets is presently lost to our knowledge because of the many renovations and additions which the convent buildings have undergone since that time.



## Prophetic Predictions of Mother Mariana

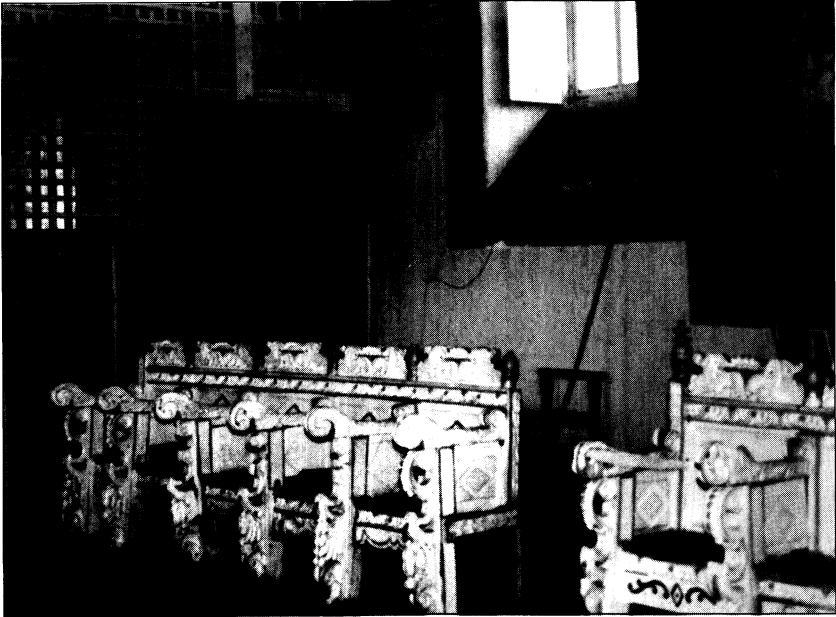
### ANOTHER APPARITION FROM OUR LADY OF GOOD SUCCESS

On February 2, 1634, Mother Mariana had just finished her fervent prayer at three o'clock in the morning in the upper choir when she suddenly noticed that the sanctuary lamp had burned out. Instinctively she prepared to descend to the church in order to relight it, but an unknown force immobilized her muscles so that she could not take a single step. At this moment Our Lady of Good Success appeared carrying the Divine Infant in her left hand and the crosier in her right. Approaching rather complacently, she said: "My beloved daughter, today I bring you the pleasant news of your death which shall occur in ten months and some days. Your eyes will then close to the material light of this world in order to open to the brilliance of eternal light. Prepare your soul so that, purified more and more, it may fully enter into the enjoyment of your Lord.

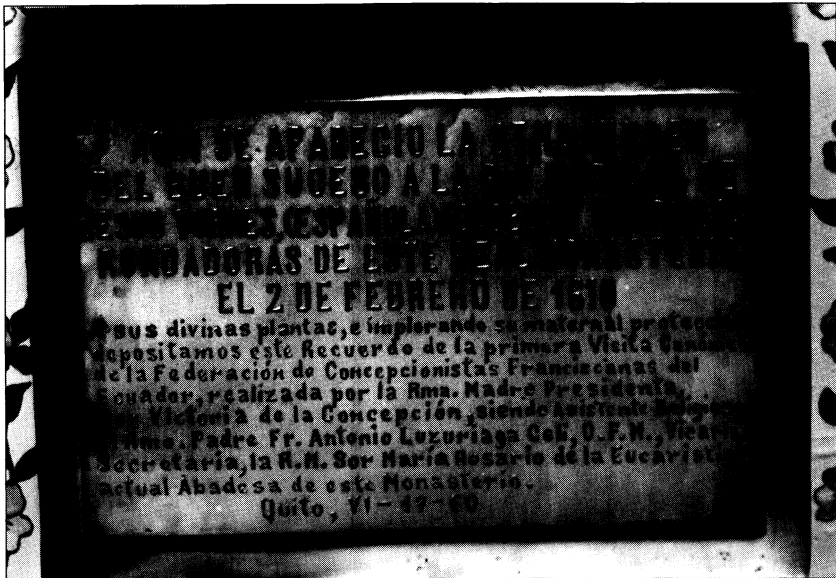
"I wish you to know that my maternal love will always watch over the convents of the entire order of my Immaculate Conception because this order will give me much glory in the holy daughters that it will have.

"The sanctuary lamp that burns before Our Lord in the tabernacle and which you saw go out has many meanings:

a) "The first is that toward the end of the nineteenth century and throughout a great part of the twentieth many heresies will be propagated in these lands, which will then be a free republic. With these heresies in control, the precious light of faith will be extinguished in souls because of an almost total corruption of customs. In those times there will be great calamities, both physical and moral, public and private.



Above. The right row of stalls in the upper choir. In the back, one can see the picture and the plaque (see detail below) indicating the place that Our Lady chose to appear to Mother Mariana.



The few souls who remain faithful to grace will suffer a cruel, unspeakable and prolonged martyrdom. Many of them will descend to their graves due to the violence of suffering and will be counted among the martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the Church and the country.

b) “Secondly, my community, which will be reduced to a small number, will be submerged in a depthless sea of unspeakable troubles. Many true vocations will perish through a lack of good judgment and prudence concerning their formation by the mistresses of novices, who should be prayerful souls well-versed in the ways of spiritual guidance but who will allow many innocent novices, after having been in the secure haven of this blessed convent, to return to the Babylon of the world to become agents of evil for the corruption of souls.

c) “Thirdly the lamp was extinguished because of the poisoned atmosphere of impurity which will reign at that time like a filthy sea. It will flow through the streets, squares and public places with such an astonishing lack of restraint that there will be almost no virgin souls left in the world. It is well-known that the vice of impurity extinguishes the light of faith.

d) “The fourth meaning concerns the power of sects and their ability to penetrate homes and families, thus destroying the beauty of innocence in the hearts of children. In this way, vocations to the priesthood will diminish.

“In the regular clergy, because of the observance of the rule and the practice of the virtues, there will be no lack of holy priests; not so with the secular clergy, who will become attached to wealth and riches rather than their priestly ministry. How the Church will suffer during this dark night! Lacking a prelate and father to guide them with paternal love, gentleness, strength, wisdom and prudence, many priests will lose their spirit, placing their souls in great danger.

“Therefore, clamor insistently without tiring and weep with bitter tears in the privacy of your heart, imploring our Heavenly Father for the love of the Eucharistic Heart of my Most Holy Son to put an end to these ominous times by sending to this Church the prelate who will restore the spirit of her priests.

“We shall endow this dear son of mine with a rare capacity, a humility of heart, a docility to divine inspiration, the strength to defend the rights of the Church, and a tender and compassionate heart, so that, like another Christ, he will assist the great and the small, without

despising the less fortunate who ask him for light and counsel in their doubts and hardships.

“Into his hand the scale of the sanctuary will be placed so that all may be carried out in due measure and that God be glorified. However, the lukewarmness of souls consecrated to God in the priestly and religious states will tip the scales in the opposite direction, thus allowing the cursed Satan to take possession of this land. He will achieve his victories by means of foreign and faithless people so numerous that, like a black cloud, he will darken the pure heavens of the then republic consecrated to the Sacred Heart of my Divine Son.

“With these people every type of vice will enter, calling down, in turn, every kind of chastisement, such as plagues, famines, internal fighting, external disputes with other nations, and apostasy, the cause of perdition of so many souls so dear to Jesus Christ and to me.

“In order to dissipate this black cloud, which impedes the Church from enjoying the clear day of liberty, there will be a formidable and frightful war, in which both native and foreign blood will flow, including that of secular and regular priests and other religious. This night will be most horrible, for, humanly speaking, evil will seem to have triumphed. This will mark the arrival of my hour, when I, in a marvelous way, will dethrone the proud and cursed Satan, trampling him under my heel and chaining him in the infernal abyss, finally freeing the Church and the country from his cruel tyranny.

e) “The fifth motive for the extinguishing of the lamp is the negligence and carelessness of those possessing great wealth who will indifferently stand by and witness the oppression of the Church, the persecution of virtue and the triumph of evil without applying their riches in a holy way for the destruction of evil and the restoration of the Faith.”

After this vision, Mother Mariana began to ponder all the misfortunes announced by the Mother of God for the future centuries: the innumerable souls that would be lost forever; the disconsolate grief of Church and country and, most probably, that of many other countries as well; the catastrophic desolation of the nations chastised by Divine Justice. By the measuring stick of love, she measured the evil practiced by men and the offense suffered by God.

Not able to endure so much misfortune, she collapsed face down on the floor in the choir with her arms stretched out in a cross. At

four o'clock in the morning when Mariana failed to attend the recitation of the Little Office, the community became most anxious and began to search for her. She was found near death without any signs of breathing. The only sign of life was the agitated beating of her heart.

She was taken in that condition to her poor, hard bed. There she remained unconscious without any response to medical treatment or the care of her nuns until two days later. At three in the morning, she gave a long, agonized sigh and crossed her hands over her chest as her beautiful eyes filled with tears. Still she pronounced not a word and gave no sign that she saw or heard anything that occurred around her. The following day, February 5, again at three in the morning, she sat up in bed and exclaimed, "Yes, Stigmatized Seraph and my beloved Father, I thank thee!"

Filled with filial love toward their foundress, the abbess and all the nuns diligently saw to her every need. With her faculties completely returned, Mother Mariana responded to their devotion by gazing at each one with her tender, affectionate eyes, returning their affection. The mother abbess then said to her, "All of your daughters are here concerned about your health. It is five o'clock in the morning." Mother Mariana answered, "How good and charitable you are! I thank you all and pray that the Lord may repay you, but the best demonstration of your piety toward me is to continue to fulfill the acts of the community."

After the nuns had gone to the choir, the sister in charge of the infirmary, a young religious from one of the best families in Quito, approached Mariana. Her name was Zoila Blanca Rose of Mariana of Jesus. Because of her docile, simple and tender character, she was easily loved by anyone who came in contact with her.

Approaching the patient, she said, "Mother, we have wept much over Your Reverence. We thought you were dead. I, in particular was saddened at not having received your last blessing and advice. But now that the Lord, having heard my prayers, grants you life, tell me: What happened? From the choir we brought you out dead, and so you remained for all these days."

Mother Mariana answered her, "Daughter, the designs of God over His creatures are mysterious and profound. They encompass all times. On your part, pray, beseech and weep before the tabernacle so that in our convent there may always reign the love of God, a holy sisterly

charity and a holy and regular observance not only now, but even more so in the future.”

### **THE PRE-ELECTION OF ZOILA BLANCA**

Zoila Blanca's mother, while still carrying her, was warned that her child would die at birth. She then sent some messengers to the convent to beseech prayers from Mother Mariana, whose powerful intercession in such cases was well-known. With her usual smile and tranquility, Mariana prepared her miraculous aniseed water and instructed the messengers to tell the future mother to drink the water and be assured that the delivery would be normal and happy and, furthermore, that she would give birth to a beautiful, healthy and strong girl destined by God to perfume the convent with her virtues.

And so it was. The fears brought about by the medical diagnosis were dissolved, and the mother had a normal delivery, experiencing the joys of a healthy maternity. The grateful mother's first visit after rising from bed was to Mariana with the baby in her arms so that Mariana might see her, bless her and keep her ever in her prayers.

Mother Mariana, ever charming and smiling, said, “You do not have to ask for my prayers, for this girl is more mine than yours. She is a soul chosen by God and will perfume this cloister with the aroma of her virtues. Bring her often, for I wish to see her. She shall dress my body for burial.”

Since that day, both mother and daughter never ceased to visit Mother Mariana. Further commentaries are really not necessary to explain the rapport that developed between these twin souls in the things of God, between the teacher of doctrine and holy action and Rose of Mariana, the ideal disciple ever striving to follow in the footsteps of sanctity of her teacher. When the time comes to relate the end of Mother Mariana's temporal existence, we shall again refer to the edifying memory of the privileged Conceptionist, Rose of Mariana of Jesus.

### **PREDICTION ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF JESUS**

The last ordeal suffered by Mother Mariana which was narrated above kept her in bed for two weeks because, at her advanced age, her

heart could no longer take great emotions. We can well imagine what she underwent at the revelation of the terrible times and spiritual disasters that were so graphically predicted. Such things have an enormous effect on the precious sensitivity of those God-filled souls. Under these circumstances, her wise and prudent spiritual director hastened to the convent to alleviate the weight of her suffering, for he knew she was accustomed to unburden her conscience completely to him.

“Father,” she told him, “the last day that I spent without my senses, I saw my stigmatized father, Saint Francis, opening his arms to me and saying, ‘Rejoice, rejoice, faithful and most beloved daughter! Only a few months remain of your painful exile and then you will arrive at the long-desired port.’ ”

“Another voice followed, ‘In your last moments, we will be at your side—I, Beatrice, the foundress of your order, as well as your daughters and all the brothers in the Seraphic family. Also present will be the holy Ignatius of Loyola, whom you love so dearly because of the ardent love he had for Jesus Christ, conquering many souls for Him at the cost of great sacrifices. He is a servant most beloved by God, as is his Society, its whole spiritual life animated by the military character that he left as his legacy. The Society will always have great men of learning, great saints, and invincible martyrs. As a special gift, it will possess the discretion and discernment of souls. Its spiritual masters will direct souls most favored by God, who, rejected by other priests, would have been otherwise lost.’ ”

### **THE APPROACHING FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, 1634**

The end of the life of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres quickly approached. Her nuns, already informed of the day and hour of her farewell to the world and entrance into heaven, now, in affectionate anguish, counted the days that were left before they lost their earthly mother. They never tired of repairing to either of their choirs to beseech Our Lord to spare them the departure of such a holy religious who was their model of virtue and a burning furnace of love for God and His Blessed Mother. In order to influence God to look with favor on their petitions, each religious offered her own life in exchange for

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

that of Mother Mariana. They surrounded her with tenderness during leisure hours to ask her counsel and seek her blessing.

By an apparent supernatural infusion, all sentiments and aspirations became one despite the diversity of personalities and temperaments. There seemed to be just one heart which was fully opened to sisterly love and the generosity of sanctity. In such conditions, the word of their foundress sounded as if God's own voice was contained in her kind and sweet voice. Taking advantage of this state of spirit, Mariana asked her daughters, in view of the approaching Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the last that she would celebrate on earth, to make this celebration something never before equaled by lending it extraordinary characteristics of a most lively faith, most confident hope, and most ardent love. To encourage them in this resolution, she said to them:

“See my daughters how my exile has been prolonged. All my founding sisters already enjoy the sight of God. In a month and a half, I shall also be leaving you materially as they left us. I must spend what time is left in preparation, so that, like the prudent virgins, I might meet my heavenly Spouse with my lamp full and burning. Thenceforth, I shall pray for you from heaven, and though we shall be physically separated I shall watch over the regular observance, your progress in perfection and your devotion to Our Lady of Good Success, the true abbess who governs you.”

The sisters listened to these encouraging words, which prepared them for the upcoming trial without, nevertheless, diminishing their profound grief. They had long experienced that brilliant light that had illuminated the convent and carried it to such spiritual heights of sanctity, so that, because of the angelic life of each of the nuns, it truly reflected heaven on earth.

### THE LAST APPARITION

On Our Lady's great Feast of the Immaculate Conception—richly celebrated even before the promulgation of the dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854—all the sisters, filled with an intense interior devotion, received Holy Communion after praying the novena. The rest of the day they divided between a joyful fulfillment of their monastic tasks and in



celebration with their holy foundress in heavenly conversations overflowing with mysticism until the time came for the nuns to retire to their hard beds.

Mother Mariana rested until 11:30 at night, then arose from her bed and went to the upper choir. In a profound plea, she recommended each of her spiritual daughters to the Queen of Heaven, imploring for them safety from diabolical snares and loss of religious spirit and a successful passage to eternity. As the divine love increased, she lost the use of her bodily senses and found herself in the presence of the Queen of Heaven. Our Lady, graciously maternal as usual, held her Divine Infant with her left arm and the abbess' crosier in her right hand and was surrounded by a full court of angels, including the three archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, each of whom carried several emblems.

Saint Michael held innumerable white tunics strewn with stars and embellished with adornments of burnished gold. Each tunic had a necklace of very beautiful pearls with a pendant cross of gold, studded with all kinds of precious stones. In the middle of the cross shone the names of Jesus and Mary, inlaid with a resplendent star. Saint Gabriel carried a chalice bearing the blood of the Redeemer, a ciborium filled with hosts and a luminous bouquet of beautiful, fragrant white lilies. Saint Raphael held a most splendid transparent flask which contained a delightfully fragrant balsam whose aroma spread through the air, causing a sensation of peace, joy and tranquility in the soul. The same archangel also carried numerous violet-colored stones, resplendent with light, as well as a magnificent feather pen of burnished gold and engraved with the name of Mary.

The three archangels knelt at the feet of their Queen and Lady, and, at a sign from Michael, the nine angelic choirs filled the room with chants of an exquisite harmony. The Blessed Virgin spoke: "My most beloved daughter and chosen spouse of the spotless Lamb, leave this earth, sad exile of the just, and come to the long-awaited fatherland. The harsh winter of your mortal existence has passed, and your eternal springtime is beginning, where the good works practiced during this mortal life are flowers of rare beauty, exquisite perfume and great worth, because they are won at the cost of the abundant and painful Redemption.

"Oh, if mortals knew how to appreciate the time given to them and

would take advantage of each moment, how different the world would be and how many souls would avoid perdition! This carelessness is the fundamental cause of their disgrace. Weep, my daughter, for your careless brothers, the sinners, demanding your God and Redeemer to send to their souls special and efficacious graces, capable and powerful enough to save them from the dark abyss of sin in which they lie.”

The Blessed Virgin then explained to her daughter what the vision symbolized. The white tunics carried by Saint Michael are destined for her fervent daughters who, throughout time, will live in this convent; to some for having preserved their baptismal innocence and to others for having purified themselves by austere penances. The stars signify the continual exercise of all the virtues which will radiate light in the firmament of the Holy Catholic Church; the adornments of burnished gold stand for the generous acts of sublime charity inspired by divine love; the necklace signifies the bond of the three vows by which they are consecrated to God; and the golden cross is and shall always be the symbol of physical and moral suffering endured with Christian resignation in accordance with the will of God. These tunics and their furnishings are not only destined for cloistered nuns, but also for secular and regular priests, as well as for laymen, both men and women, who, “loving my Most Holy Son and me with a simple and upright heart, will also love this convent of our predilection, working to preserve it and striving to propagate devotion to me under the consoling invocation of Good Success, which will be the support and safeguard of the Faith during the almost total corruption of the twentieth century.

“The chalice bearing the blood of the Redeemer which Saint Gabriel carries symbolizes the infinite and inexplicable richness of the merits of the passion, death and resurrection of my Son which is conferred with such generosity and abundance on the faithful through the channels of the sacraments, particularly, penance.”

Here the Blessed Virgin made it a point to explain to Mother Mariana how this sacrament would be despised by those living in the twentieth century. People then would live quite comfortably in union with sin, intentionally ignoring it, or not even considering its existence from a theological point of view, since for them nothing would be a sin anymore. But if those of the world would turn their backs on the sacrament of penance, more painful still would be the fact that priests would do the same. While some would regard it with indifference, others

would not even so much as administer it or, if so, would confer the sacrament in such a way as to discourage the faithful from its pious reception.

Our Lady also mentioned a certain category of souls, who filled with a spirit of God, would suffer intensely, whose frail lives would constitute an uninterrupted Calvary of secret martyrdom. They wear the double crown of virgin and martyr and, travelling by supernatural pathways, generally become the target of scorn, derision and calumnies from all types of people. To these souls so beloved by the Heavenly Father is entrusted a difficult mission, and thus do they also receive most special and sufficient graces.

Divine Providence sent Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, into the world at the end of the eighteenth century to provide a magnificent example of a zealous and apostolic priest. Saint John, patron of parish priests, achieved sanctity by giving the sacrament of penance top priority in the exercise of his pastoral ministry. The few pious priests throughout the twentieth century would be able to look to him in admiration and try to imitate him.

Along with the chalice, the archangel Gabriel carried a ciborium filled with hosts signifying that the sacrament of penance is made complete by the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. After God has forgiven man of his sins and miseries, He then provides him with strength and protection for future battles. The vessel was filled as a reminder of the reverence with which the sacrament should be treated.

Unfortunately, the Holy Eucharist, the greatest miracle of God's love toward man, would be treated with the same ingratitude as the sacrament of penance. Exposed as Our Lord is under the appearance of bread, He becomes vulnerable to the sacrilegious profanation of His ungrateful sons. "To make reparations for these crimes against the majesty of God is the destiny of souls who lead a contemplative life, in God's design one of the purposes for the founding of this order."

The luminous bouquet of beautiful, fragrant white lilies signifies the innumerable holy religious who shall inhabit these cloisters. Each of them, in her own cloister, will have a distinct mission. The Most High has charged them with obtaining with their prayers and sacrifices the worthy reception of the sacraments by the faithful, especially penance, Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders.

Continuing the explanation of the meaning of the symbols of this

vision, the Blessed Virgin went on to explain that the transparent flask carried by the archangel Raphael, containing a balsam with a most sweet odor, perfumes the countries that possess monasteries and convents. The virtue and good example prevalent there purifies the devilish and hostile atmosphere that emanates from the stagnant and putrid waters of vice and degradation. “No one on the face of the earth realizes,” said the Blessed Virgin, “that the prayers and sacrifices of monasteries and convents are presented by me to the throne of God for the salvation of souls, the conversion of great sinners, the mitigating of great chastisements, the production and fertility of the fields, the cessation of plagues and wars, and the good harmony between nations. All these proceed from the prayers that reach heaven from monasteries and convents.

“The innumerable violet-colored stoles held by the archangel, which give off a magnificent brilliance, signify the practical action and zeal of good priests who in total self-denial forget themselves so that Our Lord Jesus Christ and I, their tender mother, may be known and loved. They labor untiringly in the Lord’s vineyard to make it grow and prosper, and to save the souls redeemed by the Blood of the Redeemer.

“The resplendent feather pen of burnished gold and engraved with my name is the glorious reward destined for priests, both regular and secular, who write about my glories and sorrows. It is also for those who, by means of their writing, propagate the devotion of Our Lady of Good Success of this most dear convent of mine, as well as your life, which is inseparable from this tender and consoling invocation. In the twentieth century, it will work prodigies in both the spiritual and temporal spheres. It is the will of God to reserve this invocation and your life for that century in which the corruption of customs will be almost general and the precious light of the Faith will be almost extinguished.”

Thus, we humbly close this highly condensed chapter of the life of Mother Mariana by recalling the words of Saint Peter in his second epistle (1:20-21), “Understanding this first, that no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation. For prophecy came not by the will of man at any time: but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost.”

# 11

## An Entire Life of Sanctity

### LAST MONTHS ON EARTH

All the physical signs indicated that Mother Mariana's earthly existence was coming to an end. Despite this and the great love her sisters bore for her, they required her to continue as mistress of novices.

Like moths mesmerized by the brilliance of light, the creatures of the world fly around the flame of adulation, not realizing that its attraction may be their very destruction. They are only interested in the dignity and grandeur of those who exercise top authority, taking no notice of positions which, while apparently secondary, are truly the ones that preserve the inner dynamics of institutional life. These unnoticed workers form the vital nuclei of the small or great enterprises created for the perfection of mankind.

To use a different metaphor, all attention in a military camp is turned to the monumental instruments of destruction: tanks, cannons, missiles, airplanes, and so on. No one so much as glances at the simple tents where the general's staff meets to study the strategy of war and to draft the battle plans that will lead them to victory. The novitiates are precisely those tents where the warlike spirit of those called to wage battle against the surrounding legions of evil are formed and forged. Unfortunate indeed are those novices and seminarians who do not find in these quarters the virtuous teachers and models to form them into spiritual warriors.

Obviously, those who assume this most important responsibility must, themselves, have passed through a rigorous novitiate, and they in turn must train others to fill that position when the time comes.

Furthermore, spiritual development does not stop at the end of the novices' probationary period, but continues for life.

Although their great vocation had already been framed out by God, the courageous founders of religious orders were not born confirmed in grace but had to struggle against all sorts of trials, some of them monumental. To bequeath to the world a masterpiece, above all a masterpiece of God, decades of preparation are needed. Beatrice da Silva prepared herself for forty years to found the Order of the Conceptionists. It is true that Mother Mariana was only ten years old when she participated as cofoundress in the establishment of the royal convent in Quito, but several years of suffering and arduous training awaited her as we have already recounted. Her ability to inculcate her spirit of prayer and penance, as well as her profound love of God and His Blessed Mother, was the result of spiritual preparation.

The maxim "to educate, one first needs to learn" certainly applied to Mother Mariana. She first learned the art of sanctity from her aunt, Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada, and her Spanish sisters. This learning unflinchingly begins with humility and the rejection of the dust and dirt of vanities, appearances and falsities.

She learned to be humble and to trample on human worth, considering herself below all her sisters in religion. That is why she loved those lowly tasks and chores that are generally despised by mortals: kitchen duty, house cleaning, caring for the sick and elderly, and all those household duties that do not have any glamour in themselves and call for little talent and no command over others.

From the step of humility, she ascended to one of understanding others. From there she climbed to a level where she had compassion for all who suffered, for all who were in need, and for all who were pained in body or soul. At this point her soul had reached the heights of charity. In every action and deed, she fulfilled the will of God, which is the true essence of sanctity, and she sought God in the four ways that lead us to Him: reading, reflection, meditation and contemplation.

Thus, emptying herself of self and being filled with God instead, she felt, in all her simplicity, so close to God from her early years and God was so comfortable in her innocent company that the soul of Mariana reciprocated as closely as humanly possible the likeness of the infinite love.

## LAST CHRISTMAS

Every minute brought Mariana of Jesus Torres closer to her true goal. Naturally, the closer she approached the end, the more inflamed she became in her love for God. Her heart, although physically worn, was still capable of spiritual excitement. Overflowing with charity, affection and goodness, her prayer was more active, her advice more frequent, her vigilance stricter and her observance more exemplary.

A metamorphosis had occurred: the human creature had become an angelic creature. Her nuns did not take their eyes off her; they counted the minutes that they still had to enjoy her presence and, to the extent that these passed, a sadness settled in their souls. This sadness eventually reached such a point that it caused some of the nuns to weep.

Mother Mariana, full of gratitude for such a proof of love on her daughters' part, attempted to calm them: "My most beloved daughters, do not be afraid; although the dry oak of my body will be leaving you, the flame of my spirit will always remain in your company. Let us take advantage of these days of my fleeting presence to become one in the love of God and in the generous sacrifice of our lives which we owe to Him, and let us prepare our hearts to receive the Infant Jesus."

Her words and example turned Christmas of 1634 into an unforgettable feast. The nativity scene was resplendent with beauty. She took up her harp once again and in a melodious voice sang the leading part in the canticles, perhaps like the swan that sweetens its voice on sensing that death is near, or better still, preparing to join the choir of angels with the harmonious notes of her melody.

## THE NUN WHO DIED THREE TIMES

Despite the simplicity of her life on earth, her entire existence was spent in a frame of supernatural brightness. On considering her final illness, we find it impossible not to cry in endless admiration, "*Hic est digitus Dei*," Here is the finger of God! Not because we see her lying on her humble, austere bed concealing her pains behind a smile and giving an example of a joyful submission to the will of God, but

because we are utterly astounded at the unprecedented case of a nun who died three times.

The unchanging cycle of life—to be born, grow, reproduce and die—goes on so repeatedly before our eyes and experience that it does not surprise us; it is so natural and expected. But when we are told with historical and documented evidence that this blessed religious actually and truly died in 1582, resurrected, and continued to live until a second death on September 17, 1588, then once more resurrected, only to die permanently on January 16, 1635, we are left wide-eyed with sheer amazement and admiration for that which is extraordinary and divine.

All Mother Mariana's biographers agree that in 1582, while she was in front of the tabernacle pouring forth the grief of her heart, which had been offended and calumniated by one of the religious, she heard a strange noise in the church and noticed that it was enveloped in darkness. Concerned that she was to blame, Mariana proceeded to humble herself before God. Then she saw Our Lord emerge from the tabernacle in His actual size as He was on Mount Calvary. Over His head hung three swords.

Our Lady of Good Success explained to her that these swords represented the three sins of heresy, blasphemy and impurity that would prevail in the twentieth century world. At the same time, she asked Mariana if she would be willing to sacrifice herself for the people of that century. When she answered in the affirmative, the three swords moved away from Christ and plunged into the seer's heart and produced such an excruciating pain that she fell dead to the ground.

Her nuns carried her to her bed and summoned the doctor, Mr. Sancho. After examining her and failing to revive her, he declared that Mariana was truly dead. Since she was so well-known for her sanctity, the doctor suggested that a picture of her should be painted. After giving his sympathies to the nuns present, he left to spread the sad news.

When the people of the town had been informed, they gathered at the town gate asking to kiss the hands of the saintly religious. The Franciscan fathers hastened to the convent with the most eminent theologians and Friar Diego, a lay brother who was considered to be a contemplative saint. No sooner had he entered the deceased's cell and began to pray, than he entered into a state of ecstasy. Friar Diego



saw that Mariana had offered the sacrifice of herself for all those who were guilty of the three spiritual offenses. He saw that she had been judged and found faultless, was justified before the Lord with those words of the Gospel: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, because from your early years you heard my voice and giving up your homeland, came to foreign lands to sacrifice yourself!"

Brother Diego was also shown that the prayers of so many good souls would obtain the return of Mariana to life. Before this occurred, her Divine Spouse presented two crowns to her: the first, of ineffable glory and the other, of lilies intertwined with thorns. He asked her to choose, either to remain in heaven in the enjoyment of its perfect bliss, or to return to earth and there continue to suffer the miseries of this corruptible and sinful world, full of sorrows and calamities, just as she had been warned it would be on the day of her religious profession.

Knowing that she had been destined to form and educate the new religious and to be the supporting column of the community, Mother Mariana chose the painful way, the crown of lilies and thorns. Heeding the call of the Franciscan director, the angelic and heroic religious opened her eyes anew to the life of this world.

At the nuns' summons, the doctor hastened to the convent. The mother abbess told him, "Mother Mariana is alive!" And he answered, "She is dead!" When he looked at her, he stepped back believing himself the victim of a hallucination, and when he saw that her smiling face had regained its full beauty, he exclaimed, "For this I have no prescription!"

## THE SECOND DEATH

Another extraordinary fact occurred that was confirmed under oath by the doctor, the Friars Minor, and the nuns of the convent. On September 17, 1588, Mariana was saying her customary prayers at midnight in her room, prostrate on the floor, when suddenly she uttered a cry of pain while her whole body shook violently. On hearing the cry, the mother abbess hastened to her and, placing her arm around her, carried her to bed. When the trembling of the body did not cease,

the other sisters became alarmed and rushed to her side. Mother Frances of the Angels, the convent nurse, examined her hands and saw that on her palms were marks similar to holes in which something had been driven; the same appeared on the soles of her feet in the place where Christ had been pierced in His Passion. Over her heart was a purple spot and a red scar like a cut of a sword or lance and her heartbeat was so loud that it could be heard at a distance.

All this seemed to indicate that Our Lord had given her interiorly the imprint of His wounds. During this time her body was stiff and immovable; only her eyes and mouth could move. She spent the whole night in this state of veritable martyrdom. The next day Dr. Sancho was summoned. On examining her, he said that because of the penitential life that she led, the marrow of her bones had dried and only her heart was still living.

The good nuns wanted to exchange the raw hide strewn with bloody tacks on which Mariana was accustomed to sleep for a comfortable mattress. But the doctor would not allow it, saying for a person accustomed to a hard bed, a softer one would do more harm than good.

Her sickness lasted five months. Although her face lost its rosy color and became ashen, she would blush when obliged to submit to washing and treatments. Her body became one single wound. Not able to swallow any nourishment, she lived on liquids alone.

As if this were not enough, her Divine Spouse withdrew His heavenly light and consolation and allowed her spirit to be plunged into a veritable hell of forsakenness and solitude. The devil appeared to her in the form of a serpent dancing around her cell and constantly repeating that everything in her life had been illusions, deceits and lies, and that her body was now his. Despite so much sorrow in soul and body, she never abandoned her prayers at midnight and three in the morning.

Her soul was consumed with the desire to receive Holy Communion. However, when Father Jurado approached her while he was saying Mass in her cell, she presented a problem by keeping her lips tightly closed. Only after the priest commanded her to open them in the name of holy obedience did they finally part. After she received Communion, the devil danced with evil glee saying: "Now I have another sacrilege for hell."

For a few months in the summer of 1588, the use of her hands returned, allowing her free movement to attend to her own needs. But

then toward September her condition worsened again, and on the second Wednesday her agony began. To afford her some comfort, the friars celebrated Mass in her cell and then administered the sacrament of Extreme Unction. This she received with immense joy, realizing that the end of earthly life and the beginning of eternal happiness was near.

However, she did not die in the morning nor in the afternoon. The Franciscans were obliged to return to their monastery but ordered her in the name of holy obedience not to die until they returned. They found her still alive on Thursday and Friday. At twelve on Friday death became imminent; her face became disfigured, taking on the paleness and coldness of death. The nuns did not cease praying. At 3:30 in the afternoon, Mariana raised her eyes to heaven, then looked down to her crucifix, bathed it with tears, pressed it against her heart and, heaving a last sigh, died.

The sorrow of the convent cannot be described. Both the friars and the sisters, unable to hide their tears, wept unceasingly. Doctor Sancho came and confirmed her death. The nuns prepared the precious body for burial by covering it with flowers. Placing her on a bier, they carried her to the lower choir where the people, who had already been informed of the sad event, were crowding into the church asking to view the body and to pray to her as their protecting angel.

On Saturday night the mother abbess discontinued the vigil and instructed the nuns to retire since she was determined that the daily obligations should be renewed. The burial was set for Monday. When on the following day, Sunday, the nuns entered the upper choir to recite the Little Office, they were shocked out of their wits. There was Mariana, whom they thought dead, praying with her usual fervor. The fright that they felt must have been enormous when they saw that the deceased, whom they had left on a bier waiting for burial, was now approaching them with the obvious intention of embracing them in a gesture of gratitude and sisterly love.

At the sight of such a spectacle, the nuns took to their heels, running from what they thought was a ghost. The more Mother Mariana tried to assure them that there was no need to flee, for she was truly alive, the faster they ran. The abbess, who in her turn did not allow herself to be embraced either, overcame her natural fear and ordered Mariana in the name of holy obedience to tell her what had happened.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

To which Mother Mariana answered, "Look at me, Mother. It is truly I, alive, healthy and strong."

The sisters then turned to God and began to pray the Little Office. On finishing, they descended to the lower choir to make certain of what they were hearing but not believing. There they found the bier empty with only the shroud and candles remaining. This sight finally convinced them that their sister Mariana had resurrected. On being advised, the Franciscans hastened to the convent and rendered a joyful thanksgiving for such a marvel.

After the astonishment had subsided, the interrogation by Father Jurado and the abbess began. Mariana replied that on dying Our Lord had placed her soul in another state of purification. She stood by her corpse while suffering a mystical purgatory that lasted until three o'clock Sunday morning, the same hour that Christ had resurrected. He then placed her soul back in her body, giving it the same vigor and strength as before. She sat up by herself, climbed off the bier and put out a candle that had fallen on the ground and threatened to start a fire. The rest of the story they witnessed themselves.

Our Lord had granted her life after a whole year of sickness, rewarding her with a complete recovery. Mariana understood that God had restored her to life so that she could experience in her own person how sweet and meritorious it is to suffer and endure pain in imitation of Christ, patient and sorrowful, becoming one with Him in the holocaust for the love of souls.

### **THE THIRD AND DEFINITIVE DEATH**

Beginning with the new year of 1635 Mother Mariana's condition worsened. Her physical strength was much depleted, and her heart beat so fast that it seemed about to leave her chest. At 6:30 one afternoon, she suffered a deep fainting spell which alarmed her nuns. As the natural remedies gave no result, the city doctor was called. After applying all the medical means at his disposal, he decided to make use of a hot iron cautery which was the last recourse used to bring a patient back to consciousness. He then warned the religious community of the gravity of the situation and of the nearing fatal end.

We can easily imagine the bitter sorrow felt by every religious and all persons who had direct contact with the community. The abbess spared no effort and applied all diligence so that nothing might be lacking in the care of the holy patient, whom she venerated as her foundress and God's greatest gift to the community. The nuns took turns in caring for their mother and in vain strived to hold back the tears which gave vent to their uncontainable grief.

Awakening and finding so much sorrow all around her, Mother Mariana, forgetting her own predicament, beseeched them not to be so anguished, to calm down, and to resign themselves to the Divine Will. She then consoled them with these words, "I shall not leave you orphans, but shall be watching over you from heaven. There we shall all meet again to continue loving God and singing His praises forever."

In the last fifteen days of her life, she continued to fulfill her austere daily schedule, attending all the acts of the community without excusing herself from any, even though on the seventh she suffered a further relapse in her already waning health. For three days starting on the eighth she felt slightly better and with heroic effort rose from her bed to be with her beloved community. On the eleventh she collapsed again. Completely devoid of strength, Mother Mariana asked to be taken to the infirmary, whence she never left.

Her whole body trembled violently; the fatigue was extreme and the beating of her heart was so strong that it could be heard from afar. Continuous and abundant vomiting of blood prevented her from talking. Nevertheless, her countenance remained as sweet and calm as in her most healthy days, and she extended her usual affection and gratitude for every service done for her.

On January 14, the anniversary of the founding of the convent, her faithful nurse, Zoila Rose of Mariana of Jesus, asked her whether she would like to celebrate such a memorable date with the reception of the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction. "The time has not yet come," answered the patient. "I shall most joyfully receive it on the sixteenth, the last day of my life." The young religious then said, "Mother, I beg you to take me with you and not leave me behind. You know that I possess neither the physical nor the moral strength to endure such a hard trial." To which Mother Mariana answered, "Ask this grace of the Lord and, if it be His will, prepare yourself that we may go."

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

On hearing these words, she had difficulty in concealing her joy despite the sad and grief-laden atmosphere of the convent. The abbess was much surprised at this sudden change in the attitude of the young nurse whom she knew to be innocent and simple as a child. The superior thought that perhaps Mother Mariana had given her some hope in order to console her. Nevertheless, she intended to remind Zoila of the impropriety of exhibiting joy at such a time. An opportunity arose when she saw the nun prostrate in front of the tabernacle in the lower choir.

Seeing that she was weeping, the abbess tried to console her but was most surprised when Zoila said, "Mother, I weep for joy because Mother Mariana told me that she is going to take me with her. I have now come to ask our Jesus to fulfill the words of His spouse because I could not live without her whom I love so much. Help me to ask and to obtain this request. I shall be ever grateful to you from heaven."

On January 16 the holy patient asked for the last sacraments. The mother abbess had the bishop informed of the state of health of the last surviving foundress. His Excellency received the news with great consternation not only because of the monumental loss but also because he was unable to administer the Holy Viaticum as he himself was sick and running a fever. So he ordered Father Anguita to administer the last sacraments in his name.

Meanwhile, a long line of religious who desired Mother Mariana's advice and spiritual direction for the last time flowed through her chamber. Despite her exhausted heart and the depth of her suffering, she received each one privately and gave the most consoling and edifying words as the last spark of that fire of divine and human love that burned in her heart. So that her nuns might feel comfortable and totally confident in revealing their secrets to her, she asked her faithful nurse to leave the cell and added, "My little Rose, you need not be sad for you are going with me."

Father Anguita hastened to the convent as soon as he was called, taking with him as a companion, the Father Guardian of the convent who was their overall director. He confessed the illustrious patient and then, taking the Host from the tabernacle, organized the triumphant procession through the cloisters adorned with wreaths and draperies and carpeted with flowers. A choir of twelve nuns, including Sister Zoila, who had a beautiful voice, intoned the *Pange Lingua*

most sweetly, sounding like a host of angelic spirits. The Divine Majesty and choir were followed by the rest of the community carrying large, lighted candles. From their midst could be heard sobs and sighs caused by the anticipation of the permanent absence of their mother and mistress.

When the procession carrying Our Lord reached the door of the infirmary, the holy patient received Him on her knees and was veiled as the rule prescribes. Unable to hold back the torrents of love that flooded her soul, she broke forth in a concert of melodies, chanting that same Eucharistic hymn which she had composed and sung with such sweet, modulated notes so many times before and now poured forth like a cascade of joy:

O Fire of Charity, my hidden God!  
My soul is ablaze in Thy divine ardor.  
Neither my sorrows nor Thine apparent forgetfulness  
Shall keep me from Thee, Who art my love.

At the moment Mariana received the Viaticum, Our Lord began His last conversation on earth with the faithful virgin. Within a few hours that conversation would continue forever in heaven once the soul, separated from the human clay, became immersed in the immensity of divine nature.

If humility is the foundation of sanctity, it is also the crown of virtue. This holy woman throughout her entire life exhibited a sincere and profound humility. Wearing a black, rough, knotted rope around her neck as an emblem of penance at the hour of her final parting, she said to her nuns, “I beg you that in your charity and goodness, you may forgive me all the bad examples that I may perhaps have shown you in my long life.”

Father Anguita answered her, “Mother, your daughters and sisters forgive you, love you and beseech you not to forget them in heaven.”

Mother Mariana responded, “I give thanks to God for all His benefices and because I die in the bosom of the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I ask you, Father Guardian, and my community that as a last favor I may be granted to die on the ground in imitation of my father Saint Francis.”

At this, mother abess and her nuns immediately brought her down from her humble bed and placed her on the hard ground. There on her knees, she received the Holy Eucharist with manifestations of intense love and veneration. Following this Father Guardian administered the sacrament of Extreme Unction; after anointing each of the bodily senses, Mother Mariana made an act of contrition which edified all with her piety. After this sacramental act was completed, Father Guardian asked the illustrious patient by virtue of holy obedience to tell them at which hour she was to die, for they would never forgive themselves if she were to die without their assistance.

“My Father and most dear sisters,” answered Mother Mariana, “I give thanks to God once again for allowing me to receive the holy sacraments and I pray that all my daughters here present and those to come have the same advantage. Unfortunately throughout the centuries, some will die without the sacraments due to the negligence of many abbesses, for whom, on this account, Divine Justice has reserved a special punishment. To answer the question you ask, at exactly three o’clock this afternoon, my soul will leave its mortal bindings and fly to heaven. Please, in accordance with Divine Will, do not deny me your assistance in a Christian departure. At one thirty, I shall read the will which I make as foundress of this Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception.” It was then a quarter to twelve and the Franciscan fathers left the convent, promising to return after lunch.

Meanwhile, the holy patient concerned with the exact fulfillment of the rules and schedule of the convent asked the abess to have the nuns take their usual meal in the refectory. Obeying this wish, the abess and the sisters left the cell and went to the refectory. The mother abess took advantage of the time between the sad lunch and her return to the infirmary to talk privately with the young religious Zoila Rose of Mariana, admonishing her on the impropriety of appearing so happy in those extremely sorrowful moments.

The young nun, kneeling at the feet of her superior and with her usual sweetness and humility, said, “I must let your reverence know that I am going with her this very day. Here are the keys to the small box where I kept the things of my personal use; everything else is in the cell and the work room. I have nothing, nor any attachment to the things of this earth. I only ask your reverence and my community to forgive my bad examples and my small service. Grant me the old-



est habit for my burial, a small hole in the convent for my tomb and your blessing to die and go to heaven with my mother foundress.”

Surprised and incredulous at the words of the youngest of the community, the abbess who thought it wise not to oppose her at this moment said, “I receive the keys and give you permission to die and go to enjoy God whenever and in whatever way His Majesty may wish, and I give you my abbess’ blessing.”

On hastening back to the infirmary, Mother Mariana asked them the time. On learning that it was past one o’clock, she asked that the mother secretary ring the bell summoning the whole community. When all had entered including the Franciscan friars, Mother Mariana, with a voice vibrant with emotion but firm in the strength of faith and sincerity, echoed the words of Our Lord in His farewell, “It is necessary that I go, but I will not leave you orphans. I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God and the Divine Consoler will descend to console you.”

These words were followed by precious counsels that the regular observance of the rule might never slacken nor sisterly charity diminish, and that the love of God and His Blessed Mother might always increase as well as that of the sweet invocation of Our Lady of Good Success.

With a clear voice, unbroken by emotion, she proceeded to read the will, which, as foundress of the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception, she was bound by custom to do, binding all her successors to transmit it from generation to generation.

When she had finished, Father Anguita approached and, taking the missionary’s crucifix from around his neck, had her kiss it and then placed it in her hands. Mariana pressed it against her heart. The Franciscans and the community then piously proceeded to commend her soul to God. When this liturgical prayer was finished, two big tears rolled down her cheeks; she heaved a deep sigh, and without effort calmly gave her soul to the Lord.

At the same moment, the city clock struck three on that afternoon of January 16, 1635. Several coincidences accompanied her death. Our Lord Jesus Christ died at the same hour. We can believe that God in this coincidence of time indicated that the union of her life with His in the unifying force of the redeeming vocation stamped the life of those chosen, in due proportion, with the supreme ideal of the salvation of souls.

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

At three o'clock in the afternoon, on the height of Mount Calvary, Our Lord Jesus Christ expired, thus bringing His redeeming work to an end. At three o'clock on the heights of the Andes in the city of Quito, Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres expired, thus completing the foundation of the Royal Convent where thousands of souls were to be saved, and other thousands from that city and region were also to obtain their salvation for centuries to come, thanks to the prayers, penances and sacrifices of those nuns. Keeping the right proportions between what is divine and what is human, we may say that on both heights occurred a death of blood and love.

Seventy-two years had elapsed from her birth in Viscaya in 1563 to her death in 1635, the age that tradition attributes to the existence of the Blessed Virgin Mary on earth. Another coincidence? Or the fusion of two lives which were identified in the same fire and love of God?

The angelic choirs in heaven prepared their golden harps to sing the grandiose Alleluia for the reception and glorious enthronement of the soul of Mariana of Jesus, while on earth another choir fixed their eyes admiringly on the exemplary closing of a life consecrated to God. The Conceptionist nuns and the Franciscan friars sang the Magnificat in gratitude and thanksgiving for the marvels performed by God in those spotless days filled with the most spectacular graces of Mother Mariana's sanctity.

The funeral scene was impressive: a long room devoid of architectural beauty, barely furnished and lacking any adornment. On the floor, four worn mats served as seats for the nuns; and directly on the bare ground, without mattresses or even mats, lay the virginal body of the saint, like Christ on the cross. Nevertheless, this poverty-stricken spectacle had more spiritual value than the greatest treasures on earth.

For the human observer, this was but a group of nuns despoiled of all vanities and worldly glitter and a few mendicant, discalced friars, humble missionaries to the villages and Indian tribes. But in the eyes of God, the heart of these nuns shone like white embers of purity and the souls of these friars with sparks of glory. While Father Anguita stormed heaven with the responsory prayers, Father Mendoza remained on his knees with folded hands, a gaze fixed on heaven in deep contemplation. No sooner had Mother Mariana closed her eyes,

than he opened his to say to his brothers, “My little sister has already entered heaven and has told me that next year, on the day of the Purification, I shall follow her to heaven. Alleluia, alleluia.”



## The Testament of Mother Mariana

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON,  
AND OF THE HOLY GHOST. AMEN.**

“I, Mariana of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa, Fernández, Taboada y Reig, as a faithful and obedient daughter of the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, believing and confessing all the dogmas, mysteries and truths that She believes and confesses, and rejecting what She rejects; in the most holy and most sweet name of Our Lord Jesus Christ; in the name of the ever Virgin Mary, pure and free from original sin from the moment of her Immaculate Conception in the fortunate womb of my glorious Saint Anne; in the name of her glorious death and Assumption, body and soul, into heaven, which will one blessed day be declared a dogma of the Faith in the Catholic Church at a time when the whole world will be enveloped in the dark shadows of general corruption, and this mystery will then shine like a bright star in the heavens of the Church to enlighten many strayed intelligences; in the name of the glorious patriarch, my Lord Saint Joseph, foster father of the Divine Word and most chaste spouse of the stainless Virgin, Queen of Heaven and Earth, sure refuge of poor sinners; in the name of the human seraphim Saint Francis of Assisi, my Seraphic Father, whose most blessed body received the insignia of the five wounds in his hands, feet and side, thus becoming a living image of Christ, Our Lord and Redeemer; in the name of all the saints of the Seraphic family and of the blessed, who in glory and triumph reign with Christ in the blessed and heavenly homeland, I make my testament, as foundress of this Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

Most Holy, Our Lady, in Quito, thus ordaining and manifesting my last will and testament, and with it, that of all the founding mothers, and especially that of Maria of Jesus Taboada, blood relation of the King, who was the first foundress and abbess of this royal convent, all of whom on closing their eyes to natural light, commanded that, when I was about to die, that I leave a testament written and signed in my own hand for all our most dear daughters and sisters of this convent, both present and future, unto the end of time, so that it may be followed with religious conscientiousness, bearing in mind that it will be for the restoration of the religious spirit and the preservation of this place, so privileged and loved by Our Divine Savior and His Blessed Mother. This testament is as follows:

#### **FIRST CLAUSE**

“This large place with all its premises is bequeathed and remains the perpetual property of those souls called by divine vocation to be professed nuns, living and dying in this convent. I emphasize it for all those nuns faithful to the grace of the vocation and Seraphic spirit and not for those who are unfaithful and unworthy.

“When the time comes when those living here will be obliged to dispose of a great part of these premises, they should do so, preserving at all costs, without omitting any sacrifices, the house where the choirs are located because there Our Lord has performed great marvels. Furthermore, this should be done while considering the common good, free from personal convenience, to obtain a price sufficient to buy lands for the support of a hundred persons, to provide for their clothing needs and for the restoration of the roofs, walls and rooms as the need arises, as well as to assist the truly poor who come to us begging alms, but not to those who are idle and full of vice and, pretending to be poor, spend large sums of money on vanities, trifles and all sorts of vices.

“The mother abbesses should especially favor with their alms the families of the nuns who find themselves in true poverty as well as those who were benefactors of our convent and afterwards were tried by God Our Lord with want and poverty, for these benefactors will never be lacking to this dear convent.

## SECOND CLAUSE

“The holy life in common in this beloved convent is bequeathed to you to have and to guard. Keep with care and extreme vigilance, my daughters, this precious treasure of great value which we, your mothers, have acquired at the cost of so many sacrifices, toils and sufferings for you. Oh, if you knew how much we suffered to make this foundation and to establish the common life in a secure, stable and permanent way! Now you suffer nothing, you do not realize it. You are our most dear daughters for whom your mothers have suffered bitter hardships, shed abundant tears and toiled day and night to make you happy. Do not squander this treasure of great value.

“Bear in mind that if private life finds its way into a convent, laxity also enters and with it the death of the religious spirit. When everyone is striving to watch out for themselves and their servants, they will not have sufficient time to fulfill their monastic duties and to dedicate themselves to mental prayer, which is the life and nourishment of every religious soul, and above all, of the contemplative daughters of the Immaculate Virgin, daughters of the holy Mother Beatrice da Silva, who with the powerful weapons of mental and vocal prayer founded our order, also daughters of our enraptured Father, the Seraphim of Assisi, who do not recognize as their sons and daughters those souls, who while living in the cloisters, lead a dissipated life as if they lived in the world. If prayer and community life are lacking, everything is lacking and they will be like soldiers without weapons at a time when the battle is hottest. Because this present life is indeed a battle, it is not enough to live in the cloisters to assure one’s salvation.

“It is necessary, it is absolutely indispensable to labor in the field of the spirit, to keep the holy vows and the austerities of monastic life and to weed out daily the chaff that grows in our soul without our recognition or desire. However, these we can clearly see by means of prayer.

“Beloved daughters and sisters, I bequeath to you self-denial and holy penance. Oh! Do love penance! It is an antidote against evil passions and even healthy for the body. A daily discipline, except for Sundays, should always be taken by a fervent religious of the Immaculate Conception by the soul who, detached from everything and especially herself, lives in exile on the arid desert of this mortal life and walks briskly in the direction of heaven. This applies to my daughters who

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

are sick but not gravely ill, for the sick religious are still religious and bound to fulfill their duty strictly in the measure that their strength allows.”

Here she advises how to suffer in time of sickness for the love of Jesus Crucified, how to avoid the pains of purgatory where we satisfy our guilt without gaining any merit, and how to receive a favorable sentence at the Supreme Tribunal. Although she opposes the use of hairshirts and instruments of penance for those who are sick because it prevents the circulation of the blood and causes other inconveniences, she adds, “but the discipline you may use to both physical and moral advantage.”

She advises those who are sick to listen to the doctor and the nurses and not to be demanding nor to show bad humor, but on the contrary, to show patience and an irreproachable and edifying conduct. She asks them to apply the merit of their suffering for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls without complaining about the lack of some alleviating medicine, but rather thanking God for having something to offer for His love. She exhorts them to sanctify sickness and be sanctified through it by offering both small and great pains so, that on being united to the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother, they may earn you the final grace of salvation.

Mother Mariana ends the clause by saying, “Keep these truths, my dear daughters, that your mother foundress leaves you in her testament from her deathbed even as she draws her last breath, for they are not just theoretical but practical because of the long and uninterrupted experience that she has had personally as well as in the community.

“I know all of you, both the sick and the healthy; I know every last daughter that will be professed and live in this dear convent of mine. I love you more than my own self; I consider you the most delicate fibers of my heart; I bless you and desire that you be saints so that you may sanctify this place that I leave you as your inheritance and your residence while in exile from your heavenly homeland on this arid desert of mortal life. With your heroic sacrifice, sustain this dear convent which we your mother foundresses leave to you. From heaven we will watch over you, take care of you, bless you, accompany you in your sickness and be with you at your bed of suffering. At the end of your lives, we shall present you to the Divine Tribunal as our daughters and sisters so as to take you where you will remain for all eternity as members of the



Seraphic family, under the blue mantle of the Queen conceived without original sin, and of our mother, foundress of the order, Beatrice da Silva, favorite daughter of the Most Pure Conception of Our Blessed Mother and the Seraphim of Assisi.

### THIRD CLAUSE

“While the Divine Master hung from that shameful gibbet of the Cross with His life slowly ebbing away amidst almost infinite pain and torment, He spoke the fourth word or testament which He bequeathed to mankind by giving us His own Mother for our mother. He thus addressed the Virgin, saying, ‘Woman, behold thy son,’ the beloved disciple. And turning to him said, ‘Behold thy Mother.’ Appropriating that fourth word of my dying Spouse, I, your dying mother, addressing you from my bed of agony my last words, tell you, my present-day daughters and those throughout time until the end of the world: Behold your Heavenly Mother, Mary Most Holy of Good Success. She will always give you good success.

“As you know, she has always graced me with her motherly care and tenderness. She herself commanded me to have a statue made. It was made by a man of God, Francisco del Castillo, who already enjoys God in heaven. On the day that he planned to give it its final touches, God, out of the special love that he has for this His beloved convent, so disposed that the beautiful statue, which you have in the upper choir presiding in the abbess’s chair, should not only be finished by angels, but—marvel of marvels—would be done by them.

“When Francisco went to continue his work, he saw the outer layer of his carving lying on the floor. Filled with a special admiration, he gave his assurance in a sworn, written statement that the statue’s features were not the way he had left them the previous afternoon. He added that he dared not touch the holy statue, not even to kiss it, because he considered himself unworthy of this work of the angels, and which was not his own.

“After this there were many prodigies in connection with the holy statue about which you can read in my biography, which I leave to you in my testament. Love the statue with enthusiasm because she, desiring to be the perpetual superior of this convent, orders that she be

placed in the aforementioned location with the keys of the cloister in her blessed hands in order to keep her dwelling safe from the avarice of men instigated by the devil throughout time and from the satanic envy which will apply all its efforts and diabolical power to destroy the work of God. Achieving no results in open action, evil will attempt to influence many good Christians, priests and even bishops to abandon this place for another. But this is not the will of God Our Lord, Who, according to His high designs, founded this convent here in the heart of the city and wishes it to remain here afloat against the furious, mounting waves of a stormy sea, much like seagulls on the physical sea. Be then, my dear daughters of all time, spiritual seagulls and preserve this convent with your monastic virtues.

“Have a great love for the Blessed Virgin; imitate her virtues, above all her profound humility, her ardent love for God and poor sinners, her simplicity and childlike innocence. Let there be no deceits and hypocrisies in your souls. Preserve and propagate her devotion under the invocation of Our Lady of Good Success, for with it you will obtain from Jesus and Mary everything you ask. However, I wish you to know, dear daughters, that a time will come when the devotion to Our Lady of Good Success will be neglected and hardly mentioned. Then I shall prostrate in heaven before the throne of Mary and obtain from her maternal heart that she again deign to look down upon this my beloved convent. She will favor one of my future daughters with many manifestations. I myself shall prepare her soul and vocation from her earliest years to receive such graces. After becoming an abbess, she will strengthen the lapsed devotion which will never again be lost.

“Know, also, daughters and sisters of all times, that the holy statue is consecrated with holy oil and is guarded by the three archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, so that the treacherous serpent will not do it any harm. Seeing himself oppressed by this devotion and losing many souls because of it, he will always attempt to destroy it, but to no avail. God watches over His works. You should also devotedly care for your true treasure and make her known and loved by as many souls as possible, assuring them that with this devotion they will always obtain good successes both in time and eternity.

“Have recourse to her in all your spiritual and temporal needs. When your souls suffer temptations and are immersed in grief, and if the star of your vocation is hidden by divine permission from the sight of your

soul, turn to her with confidence and say, 'Star of the stormy sea of my mortal life, may your light shine upon me so that I do not stray from the path that leads me to heaven.'

"Ask and urge that the consciences of all the sisters throughout time may be directed and their vocations formed by the assistance of our Friars Minor. Only they can form the true daughters of the Immaculate Conception in the Seraphic spirit until that blessed day arrives when they return to their original foundation, which will occur in the twentieth century. I also bequeath to you a love for the stigmatized Seraphim, Saint Francis of Assisi, my father and yours, who, descending from heaven, girded the statue of Our Lady of Good Success with his own cord and then delivered his three orders to her."

#### FOURTH CLAUSE

In this clause Mother Mariana asks and urges her nuns always to "love the holy observance, internal and external recollection, and holy silence, which constitute the most beautiful and rich adornment of the convents." She went on to ask them to "love the sick with extraordinary tenderness! Ignore their peevishness. Never dare to aggravate or increase their trials by causing them irritation." Consider "that these souls, so beloved of the Lord, possess an accumulation of virtues superior to yours" and that they will receive "most numerous treasures of the Cross in their sufferings, so that in a day not too distant, they will receive in heaven the crowns and palms of martyrs" and joys "in proportion to their sufferings borne for the love of Jesus Christ."

Mother Mariana asks them not to forget poor sinners because the Sovereign Judge will reproach them for their neglect in a matter so closely related to their vocation. She emphasizes the importance of this by saying, "Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother have revealed this to me in frequent and repeated apparitions."

One of Mariana's most important warnings is to practice mutual charity. "Guard yourselves with extreme care never to say crushing, injurious or disparaging words. Ignore the weaknesses of men which are proper to earthly life . . . bear with the dispositions and temperaments of your sisters. In the monasteries and convents, assemble persons of different countries, languages and states of life, as well as with

a diversity of spiritual graces and physical and moral gifts.” She explains that once the bonds of fraternity are broken distrust enters, then rancor, often followed by the loss of vocation. When charity is lost and grows cold, it is replaced by envy and other capital sins.

This procedure attracts divine punishment and is the cause of the suppression of convents “as will happen in the nineteenth century to one of our convents in the North. I have wept and still weep over this suppression, for I wish that the convents of the Franciscan Immaculate Conception be multiplied. In the same century, an attempt will also be made to close our convent at Riobamba, which will make the fatal error of wanting to affiliate itself with a family foreign to ours.

“I assure you, dear daughters of the Immaculate Virgin and of holy Beatrice da Silva, scattered over the face of the earth, that whosoever has the pretension of dispensing with Francis and Beatrice does not belong to the true Conceptionist Order and will not be recognized by them as their daughters. In the twentieth century, Beatrice will be raised to the altars after the Conceptionist convents have been purified. Many saints who will be characterized by their love for the Franciscan Order will appear for the glory of this country and Mother Beatrice.

“When the convent of Riobamba is at the point of closing, I shall prostrate before the Divine Tribunal to prevent such a disaster, because I love it dearly. In the course of time, they will come to know my life and will love me in the simplicity of their hearts. They will love our treasure, the Immaculate Virgin under the consoling invocation of Good Success, to whom they will dedicate an altar for public devotion.

“In this city I shall begin to work miracles for the cause of my beatification. Know, beloved daughters, that Our Lord wishes to glorify your mother by raising her to the honor of the altars. When this happens, all my convents will be what they should be and what God desires of them.

“There will be religious in this beloved convent who will suffer greatly and are beloved by both God Our Lord and Our Lady of Good Success, as well as by my seraphic Francis and my holy Mother Beatrice, for whom love and devotion will be inculcated in small sprouts that shall come after the furious tempest which I have mentioned. Our beloved convent will also be attacked by the furious envy of the cursed and treacherous serpent.

“In all times there will be good sisters possessing the Seraphic spirit who will try to regenerate that spirit of the first foundation. But, their efforts will fail at this point, because the works of God are never done without much suffering. This suffering will lead to the return of the Friars Minor and also the recitation of the Little Office in the morning. However, if this is suppressed, there will be neither health of body nor soul, nor firmness of spirit in the young women to come.”

Mother Mariana continued to give norms to her nuns in dealing with religious and secular priests. Since the former have also been living in a religious community, they will be inclined to understand problems in greater depth and possess the experience to deal charitably and prudently with them. On the other hand, if the priests are in the secular state they assume that the nuns have already reached perfection and, in an effort to remedy situations, make difficult and imprudent demands that annoy the conscience and make what should be a most amiable life of religion weighty and hard. To add special emphasis, the great nun observes, “I speak to you out of my own experience; . . . Your mother has gone through everything, as you can see in my life that I have written at the order of my directors and which has been approved by the present bishop.”

Mariana also stresses mutual charity and asks the mistresses of novices to love all their spiritual daughters equally and not to show any preference, especially toward those angelic souls with sweet temperaments and an innocence that naturally attracts affection. A particular novice may have been famed as a saint in the world, but in a monastic situation sanctity is achieved only through the practice of humility. Preferential treatment often impedes true spiritual growth.

## **FIFTH AND FINAL CLAUSE**

The last clause is addressed to the abbesses to whom she bequeathed her maternal heart for all their daughters. Mariana instructs them to see in each one of these, who left parents, family and possessions, at times great and valuable, to enter the convent, a privileged soul most beloved by God. They should be provided with all that is necessary, both materially and spiritually, so that, without concern or

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

hindrance, they may dedicate themselves entirely to the life of the community. They should not lack anything in respect to food, clothing and other necessities and should become proficient in the skills of painting, sewing, embroidering, working with silk, linen, and wool; for a contemplative should not be idle nor ignorant. Each nun is to learn many skills so as to prevent egotism.

She urges that there always be nuns dedicated to all that pertains to worshipping in chant and music. At all costs, avoid outside choir masters for, not knowing the divine intimacies, they will not carry out their functions with fervor and care. For this purpose she bequeaths books of religious music which were sent from Spain by members of the royal family who were related to the foundresses.

Under no pretext should personal maids for the nuns be allowed, for they become a source of resentment, gossip and the destruction of sisterly charity. They also provoke breaches in silence and absence at prayers and cause the nuns to lose sight of God's presence and the dictates of the spiritual life. All servants should be for the entire community. She recommended that her nuns be charitable and patient in dealing with them, especially in forming them to be good Christians and to save their souls.

Mother Mariana advises the abbesses to make certain that their nuns do not retire for a night's rest without first reconciling themselves with any nun who may have been hurt or offended by them during the day. She further recommends the abbesses to study each one's temperament so as to better direct them and not to oppress them with an imprudent or poorly interpreted observance.

### **OBLIGATORY PRACTICES**

"I leave you the following practices which you should carefully guard. Do not neglect them, much less eliminate them, because upon them we founded this dear convent, and they are the secret support of our religious spirit.

- *The Little Office of the Morning*. "At its completion, the novices should ring the bell that lifts the papal silence imposed by the vice-superior the preceding night. This bell also serves to summon the community to mental prayer.

- *The Reading of the Gospel of Saint John.* “This should be done before the recitation of Prime according to the judgment of the foundresses because it repels diabolical schemes and impurity from the cloister and the surrounding neighborhood, weakens the power of the treacherous serpent and his followers who never sleep, and attracts many graces for superiors and subjects, facilitating the latter’s humble subjection. At the words ‘*Et verbum caro factum est*’ the community should kiss the ground.

- *The Ceremony of Prostration of the Novices.* “Upon beginning the first Magnificat of Vespers, the novices should prostrate. This practice was established in the community upon the order of the Blessed Virgin when we, your foundresses, were imprisoned. She assured us, in her maternal goodness, that she would grant the mistresses and her novices many internal efficacious graces which would strengthen them in their vocations and give the former a clear knowledge of true and false vocations. This practice also shows gratitude to the Blessed Virgin for the special love that she has for this convent, sanctifying it with her presence and leaving the blessed statue that was finished by the angels as a sure pledge of her love.

- *Hymn of the Holy Ghost Before the Praying of Matins.* “This acts to request and obtain for the community the special light of the Divine Spirit so that the abbesses might always govern the convent according to the wishes of God. It is also for the Pope and the other prelates of the Catholic Church.”

- On the days preceding the reception of Communion as prescribed by the rule, the community will not receive visits. Rather at night, at an hour selected by the mother abbess, when the temperature is sufficiently warm so as not to expose the nuns to illness upon uncovering their backs, they will piously scourge themselves, except on December 8 and 25, and on Easter Sunday.

- “Lastly, our most valuable treasure, the holy statue of Our Lady of Good Success, which was finished by angels, remains the property of the convent under the solicitous care of the abbesses and the community. See that in all times she be made known and loved by the faithful. The holy statue has a crown, scepter and crosier of gold and precious stones, a gift of the pious Marquise, who is already in the joyful possession of God in heaven as a reward for her virtues and great devotion to Our Lady of Good Success. In addition to the

pectoral cross donated by Bishop Rivera, Our Lady has two other precious crosses of gold: one adorned with emeralds which was donated by the cathedral chapter; the second was made in Spain with precious stones donated by benefactors who had received favors. The names of these benefactors and friends will remain engraved on it for all time. Mr. Cosme de Caso and his wife Jeromina de Paredes also donated some precious stones for the second cross.

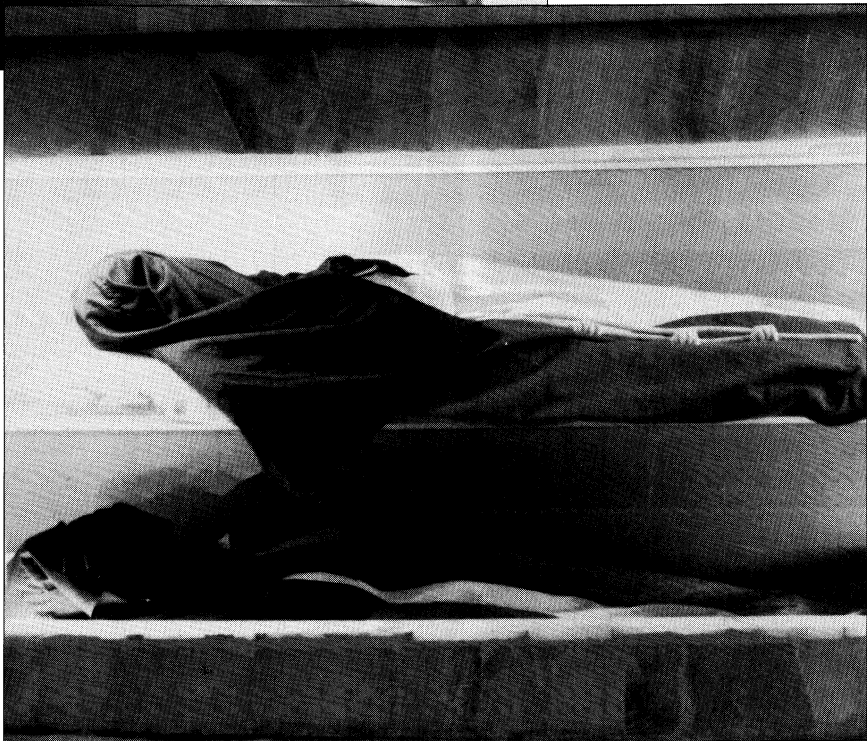
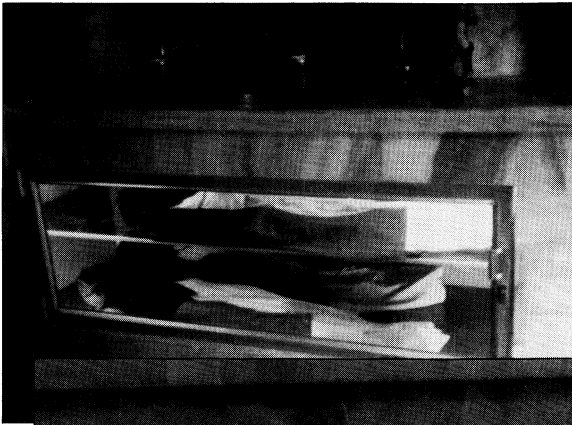
“The Marquise donated a beautiful star with diamonds and a ruby upon which is written the names of those dear to her. She also offered the adornments for the crosier with the exception of two emeralds that were given by Maria de Paredes y Acevedo for various graces received by her family and herself. Our Lady also holds the silver keys which were placed in her most holy hands by Bishop Rivera, who, with great emotion, asked that she open the gates of heaven for him.

“Our holy and miraculous statue has two infants, both made by Mr. Francisco del Castillo, masterpieces in which one sees supernatural intervention. Both infants have, as you can see, the royal crowns of an emperor with many jewels of great value given by the Marquise. There is also a small statue of Our Mother of Good Success that I had Francisco make. He sculptured it with much goodwill and dedication and gave it to me as a gift. The statue was blessed by one of the Franciscan provincials and dressed by the Marquise, who also donated a magnificent royal crown made of gold and precious stones along with a pectoral cross, crosier and a set of small keys. It was placed in a niche with an eagle with grapes in its beak, symbolizing the Marquise’s desire to soar to heaven and carry grapes of love to the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin. This, then, represents her, because she will always have an intimate place in the heart of the Queen of Heaven.”

Mother Mariana then listed many other exquisite works of religious art that she was bequeathing to the community, and then uttered her final words, “Now receive the last blessing which, with the greatest love and affection, your mother gives, taking all of you in her heart to heaven, so as to watch over you and the convent. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. May Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Francis engrave in your hearts both the testament and the advice that I leave you. Farewell, daughters of my soul.”

From the moment of the blessing, the whole community had been kneeling. Having pronounced these words, she breathed with difficulty;





**The incorrupt bodies of the foundresses of the monastery are kept under the altar of one of the convent's chapels. The incorrupt body of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres (1563-1635) is among them.**

SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

her cheeks were hot and flushed and her face radiated beauty. Then, addressing the priests, she said in a low tone of voice because her strength was ebbing, “My fathers and sisters, the time has come for me to depart; recommend my soul to God with the appropriate prayers. I thank you for everything. Always, I beseech you, have this convent and your sisters in your care. I die, as I was born, joyously and peacefully in the arms of my mother, the seraphic order.”

Two large tears flowed from her blue eyes. She heaved a deep sigh and, without any violence, but rather with a tenderness and a charm of an angelic smile, died.

## 13

### Post Mortem

#### A LOOK INTO THE DEATH OF SAINTS

In attendance with the Franciscan priests at Mother Mariana's death was a religious of great sanctity and virtue, the lay brother Peter of the Conception. Deeply marked with the three characteristics of the sons of the *Poverello*, love, poverty and prayer, this friar was a noted master in the secrets of the contemplative and ascetic life and one of the most precious jewels that ever shone with grandiose splendors of soul throughout the centuries in the long, exemplary history of the Franciscan monastery in Quito. As soon as he entered the cell of Mother Mariana—which at that moment was like an antechamber of heaven—he knelt down on the floor in a corner so as to be able to approach God and look at Him with the clear-sightedness of those who are clean of heart according to the promise of Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:8).

With the eyes of the body closed but those of the soul opened, he thus followed not the earthly scene but the eternal one. He silently contemplated the mysterious progress of Mother Mariana in her joyful advancement through the ethereal regions of the empyrean heaven. The mortal rupture of the fragile base of temporal life occurred and introduced the soul to the immense realm of divine existence that is true life, that promised heaven finally reached.

Incapable of repressing the magnificence of the spectacle and overflowing with joy, his silent lips opened and he began to say, "O spotless lamb who walks among the lilies! O holy virginity, how beloved thou art of God! Already the soul of my little sister rises with palm

and scepter in hand and a precious crown on her head, dazzling the human sight with her blue and white garment. She has no purgatory, because she has already suffered it in mortal life. Her purgatory consisted only in seeing it in passing, and this caused her much grief. She enters heaven. There she is already a queen on her throne. Oh! When will I go to keep her company! O Friar Sinner, do penance so that you may enter into this beautiful heaven, reward and delight of holy souls. Mother Marianita, do not forget us who sadly remain in this exile of life, still capable of offending God and losing Him forever.”

Those present were both astounded and frightened as they gazed at the corpse which, because of the rosy complexion and the charm of her smile, gave every appearance of still being alive. The obvious expression of the ecstasy of love on her face complemented the descriptive words of the holy brother. When the brother finished speaking and the impact of this strong emotion had passed, the abbess and Zoila, with trembling hands caused by reverential love, piously dressed the corpse of the holy foundress, not realizing that in those precious moments they were agents of a miracle because prophecy is a miracle.

We must remember that Zoila of Mariana of Jesus, who was now fulfilling the office of nurse, was in danger of losing her life when she was a small being in the womb of her mother. Mother Mariana, in an effort to calm the expectant woman, sent her some aniseed water and asked the messengers to reassure her by saying that a beautiful and healthy girl would be born to her and, with the passing of time, would become “a religious in this convent and, as such, would dress the corpse of her foundress.”

The prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. The small rosebud had opened its petals without difficulty. She was born and grew healthy and content. A few days after her birth, she was sweetly nestled in the maternal arms of Mother Mariana, who, caressing and blessing her, placed her next to her heart, rocking her to sleep in those domains of sanctity.

And so sanctity entered the childhood existence of Zoila, until at the age of ten, no longer feeling comfortable in the sweet ambience of her home, she begged, wept, and insisted to be received into the convent. To the freshness of her life was added heavenly bliss when she was clothed in the white and blue habit of the Conceptionists. She reached the heights of joy on taking the vows of poverty, chastity,

obedience, and cloistered life: a poverty of both effects and affections, an obedience both prompt and joyful, a chastity of body and soul without profane breaches or residues that violate the integrity of the offering, a cloistered life in which she rejected the illusions of the world to live a beautiful and supernatural reality.

In the plenitude of life, glowing with youth and beauty, surrounded by sisterly love and humbly enthroned in the heights of monastic virtue, the young nurse prepared with the innocence of a child and the faith of an adult to undertake with her mother and mistress the swift flight to heaven that already smiled so closely upon her. After dressing and adorning her foundress with flowers and helping the sisters in the sacristy with the painful tasks of arranging the lower choir in preparation for the ceremonies, Zoila took her turn at carrying the bier in the mournful cortege from the infirmary to the lower choir with the mortal remains of that nun whom everyone acclaimed a saint. After these tasks were completed, she continually invoked Mother Mariana and asked her to fulfill the promise of taking herself with her.

Around six o'clock in the afternoon after the funeral procession had ended and the holy corpse had been placed on an altar of roses and lilies, Zoila asked the mother abbess to allow her to watch by the body of her holy mother and to be exempt from any other duty. "My little daughter," answered the superior, "remain at her feet and make sure the candles do not fail. The community will be in and out, but if you begin to feel ill and need rest, hasten to your cell." The abbess gave the young nun her blessing and left the choir.

Kneeling down, Zoila placed her hands and leaned her head on Mother Mariana's feet and there remained motionless. The nuns and the service personnel came and went, prayed and wept, and all understood how much the nurse must be suffering, knowing how close she was to the heart of the mother foundress.

At one o'clock in the morning, the mother abbess brought some aniseed water for Zoila, who had not eaten anything all day. She called her tenderly once, then several times. When the abbess did not receive an answer from one who was the model of gentleness and obedience, she became surprised and thought that the nurse had fainted. She called the other religious; and, placing their arms around her, they laid her on the ground. On touching her they found that she was cold and rigid, her face flushed, her eyes perfectly closed, and her mouth full

of coagulated blood. More blood was found on the feet of the mother foundress.

Taking her to the dormitory, they put her to bed and covered her with hot water bottles, but neither this nor any other remedy had any effect. When the day dawned, they summoned the doctor who hastened to the convent thinking that perhaps the holy foundress had resurrected. "This joy is not granted us," replied the nuns, "and not only that, but also with her went Sister Zoila Rose."

The doctor respectfully went about his work; he examined her slowly and carefully, applied several remedies, and finally introduced a lancet in the left side of her chest and confirmed that blood no longer flowed through her veins. Turning to the nuns he said, "Mothers, it has been seven hours since Sister Zoila had ceased to exist. Mother Marianita has taken her youngest to the heavenly gardens."

"Sir," said the nuns, "She may have suffered a strong attack. We will watch over her for a couple of days to see if she comes to herself."

"That would be in vain," said the doctor. "It is no attack. She died instantly when the main artery of her heart was wrenched."

The sisters had the Bishop and the Franciscan priests informed. Soon Bishop Oviedo, Father Guardian and Father Anguita arrived. Speaking in the parlor with the mother abbess and informed of all that had happened, Bishop Oviedo ordered the corpse of Sister Zoila to be placed beside Mother Mariana and exposed in a wake of three days so that proper respects might be paid to them.

He asked the priests to handle the details of the Masses and burial and promised that he himself would officiate at the funeral Mass and recite the funeral prayer in order to demonstrate the great esteem and profound reverence in which he held the extraordinary virtues of Mother Mariana.

Once the nuns were fully convinced of the death of the angelic nurse, they began the painful task of dressing the corpse. But they soon realized that it would be impossible to adorn her with the flowers that both the rule and traditional custom had prescribed. The adornment of the chapel for Mariana had taken all the existing flowers of the convent as well as the abundant gifts from outside benefactors.

They improvised a bier and, amid sobs and ritual canticles, carried her in procession to the lower choir. As they reached the ground floor and passed by an adjoining patio, they uttered a cry of astonishment

on seeing that it was completely covered with white roses, double the normal size and most fragrant. The sight was all the more spectacular since the patio was made all of stone and completely devoid of any gardens.

The mother abbess was the first to gather some roses, followed by the rest of the nuns present until the body of Zoila Rose was covered with those roses laden with perfume and the essence of miracles. Then the procession continued to the lower choir.

It was five o'clock in the morning. Complete silence reigned in the small space of the choir, while in the depth of the souls of each cloistered nun the responsory canticle of angels, a mixture of mystery and joy, could be heard as a new angel was received into heaven.

## **THE WAKE IN THE LOWER CHOIR**

The news of the death of the Founding Mother and of her inseparable nurse travelled through the city of Quito, then small in size but great in its love for its Conceptionist nuns. Its inhabitants, leaving their homes at early morning, surrounded the convent, beseeching the nuns with their tears and lamentations to allow them to see for the last time their dear mother, who had been not only a model of virtues, but also the discreet counselor, the peacemaker of families, the charitable consoler in afflictions, the efficient assistant in moral and economic needs, the powerful intercessor before the throne of God and the titular angel of the city in all aspects.

Sorrow overwhelmed the hearts of the afflicted townspeople, and their hands knocked beseechingly on the doors of the church and the parlor. The Franciscan Fathers, who were officiating the funeral at the request of the bishop, found it incredibly difficult to make their way through the crowd to the cloister, which they, with their own bodies and the help of several lay brothers, had to defend from the popular avalanche that only respected the presence and requests of the holy brother Friar Peter the Sinner.

Inside the cloister, the Franciscan Fathers prepared everything necessary to celebrate Holy Mass, at which they officiated for three consecutive days at diverse times in the morning. On the third day, the Most Reverend Pedro de Oviedo, tenth bishop of Quito, was present

with his official canonical retinue to celebrate a pontifical funeral Mass.

The funeral sermon given by His Excellency was most moving and poignant. Each phrase recalled the virtues, qualities, merits and accumulated good works of the Founding Mother, causing tears and uncontainably suppressed sobs. And, like the miracle-working stick of Moses that struck the rock of Horeb, his words struck the most hardened hearts and caused the flow of streamlets of gratitude and loving recollections converted into the tears of orphans.

When the liturgical ceremony was over, the Franciscan Fathers took the bodies to the convent cemetery, singing with words broken by weeping the words of David: "De profundis clamavi a te Domine!" ["Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord!"]. Indeed, never before had prayer sprung up so strongly in the people's heart, amid restrained tears, and they chanted their sorrow with the ululating steps of death.

Upon descending to the sepulcher, it was noted that the bodies of the holy nuns showed no signs of deterioration or of putrefaction, even though the room of the wake had been hot and stuffy with candles and flowers and despite the complete lack of any elements of preservation. Their members were flexible, their flesh of natural color, their cheeks rosy-colored as if blushing with virginal abashment before the immense and varied public present. They merely had the appearance of sleeping angels, their wings folded up and submerged in the permanent contemplation of eternal happiness.

The other nuns, anticipating future times when human justice, after being deterred for centuries, would turn its gaze toward these models of sanctity to implore their intercession, strived to make it very easy to recognize the body of the holy foundress for the assured veneration that would be given her on the part of future generations of religious and lay devotees, thereby joining in the hope that the Church would elevate her to the honor of the altars.

In the silk lining of her blue habit, they put two small purses: one of them contained four disciplines of blood and two pairs of complete hairshirts; the other purse contained a spool of thread, three thin needles, three skeins of Castilian thread, a small pair of scissors and a small Christ made of yellow metal. All of this was wrapped in a handkerchief that had belonged to Mother Mariana. They also wrapped in a piece of linen parts of a metal hairshirt, well-cleaned



but deteriorated by the permanent use of Mother Mariana until the day she fell ill and could no longer rise again.

## A BLIND GIRL IS HEALED

Within minutes, the church was filled with the faithful who orchestrated the festival of grief, their sentiments equally divided by an infinite joy upon counting on the intercession of a saint and by an infinite sadness in being separated from her, this mixture of emotions expressed by mourning, lamentations, and amorous reproaches of farewell as well as recommendations for her to take to heaven.

Among these mixed circumstantial pleadings, the voices of a tragic duo stood out. The high voice of a blind girl, accompanied by the deeper voice of her mother, a mestizo woman named Petra Martinez, did not cease to cry out their anguish that was filled with both tenderness and reproach: "Mother Mariana, Founding Mother, have pity on us! What will become of this girl after I die?" said the mother. "Who will care for me as thy grace has done?" added the girl. "Fulfill thy promise of giving sight to my daughter," insisted the mother. "Let me see you for the first and last time! How beautiful you must be!" the girl cried out.

This alternating of voices that accentuated the surrounding grief was unceasing and reciprocated by the sorrow of those who cried out and those who heard.

The withered and bony arms of the mother and daughter worked to reach beyond the grille to the bier and draw near to Mother Mariana. There was a moment when the grieving woman, leaving her daughter beside the grating, suddenly left the church, returning with a thin piece of reed in her hand. With it she drew near the grille, intending to pull out a flower that formed part of the crown that encircled the forehead of the Founding Mother and that had inadvertently fallen over the left eye of the deceased, which had inspired this idea in the mestizo.

As to be expected, neither the nuns nor the lay brothers looked well upon these unusual maneuvers that had been inspired by the faithful mother's faith and confidence in the intercession of Mother Mariana, whose merit before God she believed would force from God the miracle

of the girl's cure. Finally, moved by the woman's insistence, they willingly gave her what she so desired. Once in possession of the flower, Petra Martinez took her daughter in her arms, laid her in her lap with her face up, and immediately began to apply the flower first to the right eye, and then to the left eye, of the blind five-year-old girl. This she did unceasingly, beseeching Mother Mariana for the miracle.

The girl, weary from crying and perhaps hungry, soon fell asleep. The mother, who no longer cried out so as not to awaken her daughter, leaned against the grille and also fell sleep. The nuns and the faithful, moved and touched by this scene of sorrow, respected the sleep of the mother and daughter. They remained in this suave repose until five in the afternoon, when the mother awoke and began anew to clamor and cry, imploring the so-desired miracle from Mother Mariana. These cries woke the girl. Slowly she raised herself to a sitting position on her mother's lap. Suddenly she leaped toward the grille, exclaiming: "Mother Mariana, how beautiful thy grace was! But do not sleep any longer! Awake and arise! Another beautiful mother is also sleeping by your side. What beautiful nuns!"

Upon hearing these words, her mother was dumbfounded with astonishment. Her first reaction was to look into her daughter's eyes, and she saw that they were shining with joy and light.

"A miracle, a miracle," the mother cried out, bathing the jubilant little face of her daughter with her tears. Mother Mariana had miraculously fulfilled her promise!

## **PRESENCE OF THE "LILY OF QUITO"**

Among the thousands of people who assisted the funeral of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres was a young lady of extraordinary beauty, austere veiled with careful modesty and an imposing reserve; by her presence, she bore witness to her affection and veneration for such a renowned religious. She was no one less than the virgin Lily of Quito, Saint Mariana of Jesus Paredes y Flores,\* a descendant of

\* This saint of Quito, known for her extreme and austere penances, was canonized in 1950. She never joined a convent, but chose Saint Ignatius as her patron and considered herself "a daughter of the Society of Jesus." She is called the "Lily of Quito."

an illustrious family, but, above all human and earthly conceptions, a woman of singular virtues, only seventeen years old, yet already highly reputed for her respectability and sanctity of life.

Her eyes filled with tears, her heart moved by the popular grief and candid pain of the people, her lips sweetly opened to exclaim, "A saint has died!"

If we dedicate a bit of attention to this young personage, glory of the Church and of Ecuador, heroine of sacrifice and foundation stone of the Ecuadorean nation, we also note that her name, Mariana, which became popular in the upper and medium classes of the city by the great affection of the people for the holy foundress of the Conceptionist nuns, was, for her, also a watchword of love, a constant stimulus to imitate the Conceptionist's outstanding virtues. Consequently, we see how this great Ecuadorean, neither a religious nor even cloistered, nevertheless followed the outline of sanctity given by her spiritual mistress and received the direction of conscience from Father Francis Anguita, O.F.M., the same privileged priest who for so many years led the soul of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres to heaven.

Four years after the death of this first disciple, Mariana Paredes y Flores also took the Franciscan habit of the third order and was professed in it, oriented and led by the hand of Father Anguita. From the moment of her profession, she renounced the grandeur of her noble titles, desiring henceforth only to perpetuate the luminosity and graciousness of Mariana of Jesus.

Her life of perpetual exemplarity is haloed by the prophetic brilliance of Mother Mariana Francisca, when, announcing the glories that would crown the illustrious Society of Jesus, enumerated that first among these would be the spiritual direction that, through the ages, it would generously give to divinely predestined souls, leading them to the heights of sanctity. And this was the case with Mariana of Jesus Paredes y Flores, who was wisely led by the spirit and vision of the sons of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.



## The Biographers of Mother Mariana

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Mother Mariana's last testament which she personally read on her deathbed, stated that she left her life story, written under obedience to her spiritual directors and bishops.

This written account received the approbation of the Most Reverend Pedro de Oviedo, tenth bishop of Quito, who governed the diocese from January 17, 1630 to 1646. This illustrious prelate had the sorrowful task of presiding over her funeral services, where her spiritual family took their leave of the mortal remains of the saintly religious on January 16, 1635. He also delivered the official funeral sermon for that privileged soul, for whom he had the extraordinary opportunity to direct, know and venerate. It was also Bishop Pedro de Oviedo who authorized and promoted devotion to the Child Jesus of Pichincha.

### THE "CUADERNÓN"

With the memory of the exemplary and saintly lives of the founding mothers of the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception still fresh in their minds, the Franciscan Fathers undertook the responsibility of writing their biographies so that their names would be remembered and passed on to future generations.

The honor of writing the life of Mother Maria of Jesus Taboada, foundress and first abbess, fell to the virtuous Fr. Michael Romero, O.F.M., who knew this angelic soul as her confessor and spiritual director.

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

The learned Father Provincial, Friar Jeronimo Tamayo, O.F.M., wrote about Mothers Magdalen of Saint John, Mary of the Incarnation and Catherine of the Conception.

Fr. Louis Catena, provincial in 1625, performed the same service for Lucy of the Cross and Anne of the Conception, and Fr. Martin de Ochoa completed the list by detailing the lives of Frances of the Angels, Mariana of Jesus Torres and Zoila Blanca Rose of Mariana of Jesus.

All these biographies were preserved together in a large volume, known as "*el Cuadernón.*" At the present time, its whereabouts is unknown, because it was hidden in some small secret closet in the convent for safekeeping.

## DIEGO RODRÍGUEZ DOCAMPO

In 1650, fifteen years after the death of Mother Mariana of Jesus, Diego Rodríguez Docampo, sanctioned by an official document of His Majesty and under the mandate of the Royal Court of Quito, publicized the story of the life of this holy religious by relating her virtues, her examples, and the marvels that His Divine Majesty and the Mother of God worked through her. He recounted the magnificent opportunity she had in receiving the Child Jesus in her arms, the gift of prophecy that God granted her and the marvelous things that embellished her life and her death. (cf. Marcos Jimenez de la Espada, *Relaciones Geográficas de Indias*, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Madrid, 1965, vol. 3, p. 51).

## FRIAR ALÁCANO, O.F.M.

Through 1760-70 after new facts and more abundant documentation surfaced, Fr. Bartholomew Ochoa de Alácano y Gamboa, O.F.M., published a series of articles which formed a large book about Mother Mariana which received widespread circulation and enthusiastic response in the Franciscan monasteries of Spain, Portugal and, most certainly, South America. This biographical work, excellently written, chronological, detailed, piously interpreted, had been enriched with firsthand material, such as the funeral sermon given by Bishop

Pedro de Oviedo and the convent chronicle that contained a description of the lives of the founding mothers, the abbesses and those religious distinguished for their virtue.

These documents, also used later for a biography written by Fr. Manuel de Souza Pereira in 1790, were kept in a depository in the lower choir. Now, with the passing of time, amidst the constant activity of construction, additions, remodeling and other such work, the knowledge of the location of the concealment was lost and this valuable archival treasure was perhaps buried forever.

Friar Alácano, a native of Spain, and a man of great prudence, lived and died in the Franciscan provincial house, the Monastery of Saint Paul of Quito, serving in various offices including several terms as provincial.

### **FRIAR MANUEL SOUZA PEREIRA, O.F.M.**

In 1790, at the request of the Conceptionist religious of Quito, a book was written with devotion in the style of Franciscan ascetism titled *The Admirable Life of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres, a Spaniard and One of the Foundresses of the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception of the City of Saint Francis of Quito*.

The pious and brilliant author, Fr. Manuel Souza Pereira, deserves our gratitude for having given us a wealth of details and a profound spiritual penetration into the psychic process of this sublime religious who impressed her spirit of sanctity on the monastic institution she founded. This zealous priest spent his life working for the benefit of the Church and Ecuador through the mediation of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres, the very object of his biography. Since mysterious circumstances and the special guidance of Mother Mariana mark the vocational choice in his life, it is worthwhile for us to know some of the incidents in his history.

He was Portuguese, born in Sotomayor in the diocese of Braga in December 1751 of an illustrious family that enjoyed a high social and economic position. An orphan from early childhood, he was raised under the roof of his uncle, General Pereira, his mother's brother. When the time came for him to choose a career, he chose the military. His uncle's influence was able to open doors for him, and he

dedicated himself completely to his career. The counsels and example of his uncle provided high-minded guidance for his life.

His Christian education, frequent reception of the sacraments and the spiritual direction of a Franciscan priest fortified his heart against any decadence in his morals, which were attacked daily by the sinful and dissolute companions in the barracks. The struggle was hard and fierce. The concerned young soldier sought to preserve his peace of conscience, but his false friends were more concerned about conquering him for vice. A day came when he believed he had lost the battle.

Before delivering the ammunition of his resistance to the devil, he wanted to give a final proof of friendship to his confessor and take his leave of him—to return no more. On this very day, after turning his back on God, he and his friends would hurl themselves into the arms of perdition. Fortunately, he followed the inspiration of God which led him to the cell of his confessor. The old priest sensed the torment that was destroying the heart of his friend and penitent, and tried to calm him and give him courage. In his hands he held a small book that he had been reading avidly in the solitude of his cell. It was the life of a Spanish nun and foundress in Quito from the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres. He asked the young officer if, before taking his leave, he would permit him to read one or two pages from the life of this angelic heroine so that he would understand the way to confront the spirit of evil and how to wage battle and conquer like a true warrior. He gave his permission quite readily.

Hours passed without notice. The soul of the officer had been given a spiritual cleansing. His attention had been captivated by the simple pages of that angelic biography.

As the bell sounded that called the religious to community prayer, Manuel Souza begged his confessor to lend him the book so that he could read it from beginning to end. If the priest would consent, he would take it to the barracks, and, regardless of the consequences, he would dare to ask his commanders if the little book could be read aloud there.

God did the rest; his reading moved the hearts of the officers and men. They drew comparisons between the carefree and sinful life of the barracks and the tested, crucified and pure life of that little nun in the blue and white habit, timidly hidden in the distant brambles



of the Pichincha. Unable to bear the weight of their remorse, all, to the very last one, asked if they could be given a series of spiritual exercises that would be the beginning of their conversion. This was done. By the fervent intercession of Mother Mariana, all the soldiers, officers and commanders confessed, received communion and undertook a total renovation of their lives and habits.

The young officer, Manuel Souza, did not stop there. He began to see in his dreams the glorified figure of Mother Mariana, who twice told him to abandon the human military and enlist himself in the Franciscan army in order to serve the true Lord.

Still, he did not feel strongly disposed to any change of military uniform. Then he had another dream where the blessed religious showed him the place that was being prepared for his soul in hell. In the center of the earth, he saw a deep, dark pit filled with moaning, suffering and eternal fire, inhabited by evil spirits who anxiously awaited his fall and eternal ruination. This vision had a powerful impact on his soul during which he abandoned any further resistance and decided to relinquish all earthly attachments in order to dedicate his life to the conquest of the King of Heaven. Now nothing could stop him, neither the supplications of his relatives, nor the counsels of his companions and friends, nor the anxiety of an uncertain future.

Having disposed of his earthly goods, giving two-thirds to his adoptive brothers and one-third to the poor, without thinking twice, he knocked on the doors of a Franciscan monastery asking for asylum and protection. Received joyfully by the Father Guardian, he prepared to leave for Spain to undergo the arduous priestly formation.

While Manuel Souza was in Spain, He received a mysterious visit from the Conceptionist nun who showed him in his dreams that his destiny was Quito. There he would be ordained a priest and render his spiritual services to the community founded by her.

After his ordination in 1777, he went on to occupy the highest dignities in the leadership of his monastery where he was renowned for the austerity of his life. His dedication to learning and virtue set such a good example that it emanated from his whole being.

However the great moment of his life came when the bishop of Quito asked Friar Manuel Souza to accompany him on his canonical visit to the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception. While inside he was able to trace the steps of that extraordinary nun who had

## SISTER MARIANA OF JESUS TORRES: A SPANISH MYSTIC IN QUITO

oriented his youthful steps toward the fulfillment of the will of God.

When he crossed the threshold of the convent his heart filled with emotion. His eyes sought the footsteps of the holy foundress passing the grilles in the upper and lower choirs, on the abbess's chair so worthily occupied by Mother Mariana, in the rough benches of the refectory, in the terrifying prison, in the wretched cell, on the stone stairs where the devil pushed her in order to mistreat her wasted body mortified by depravations, penances, hairshirts and disciplines. In an effort to penetrate the light of these mysteries, his eyes sought out and reflected on the sites of her daily prayer, elevated by the ecstasy of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin and her Divine Child which bore the mark of the grandeur of God and His Infinity.

His hands reverently touched the incorrupt remains of the angelic religious, the object of the predilection of God and His Blessed Mother. On fire with heavenly emotion, the Franciscan vowed never to rest until he finished the story of the admirable life of Mother Mariana.

## FRIAR FRANCIS DE ANGUITA, O.F.M.

Of all the biographers of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres known for their virtue and gifts of intelligence and culture and, therefore, deserving absolute credibility, perhaps no one could be such a qualified witness to speak and write about this holy religious than the Franciscan, Friar Francis Anguita.

Confessor and spiritual director of Mother Mariana, he was able to know and admire firsthand this gold mine of heavenly riches bestowed by God upon the recently founded convent. A soul parallel to the eminent Conceptionist, he knew how to direct her, understand her, and raise her to the elevated heights of religious ascetism.

To the great misfortune of Ecuadorean and Church history the writings of Father Francis Anguita, which for our times would have an incalculable spiritual value, were placed in the secret closet where the monastic chronicles of the Immaculate Conception also lay hidden. So these revealing documents remain tucked away in some mysterious location instead of shining a light on the glorious past and in harmonious combination presenting sublime examples to the future Church.

## Solemn Pledge

### LAST CHAPTER

Mother Mariana lived the seventy-two years of her life in the isolation of prayer, penance and the fervent love for God and His Blessed Mother. She offered to God the first fruits of her life by giving Him the freshness of her soul, her unsullied beauty, her enormous thirst for sanctity, the copious overflow of her charity and the soaring flights of purity and holocaust. She desired to live imprisoned in the dark shadows of her cloister which prefigured the sepulchral silences that surrounded her during the long years of her interment.

For three hundred years only the dust disturbed the silence of her tomb; a silence uninterrupted by revelries of worldly city-dwellers that could not penetrate the walls of her convent; a silence unbroken by the tranquil voices of her sisters in their daily prayers. Always the model of humility while she lived, she now reposed in the humility of the dust and the forgetfulness of those here below who never raised the burial cloth to contemplate the incredible beauty of this virgin soul.

In 1906, a miracle occurred before the eyes of the abbess, Mother Dolorosa del Coregio, that would wash the consciences of her daughters and purify the masters of theology of their false doctrines; that would pave the way for justice in paying a debt to the foundress of the convent and most important to bring to life the devotion to Our Lady of Good Success for the devotion to the Mother of God is the only lifeboat for us in this universal shipwreck in which the twentieth century is drowning.

In an effort to facilitate the remodeling of the convent, the centuries-old sarcophagus was opened. To their utter amazement, they discovered the whole and incorrupt body of Mother Mariana of Jesus. Even her white habit and black headdress had escaped the ravages of vermin and insects. Her face had a natural color, her mouth half-opened so that one could see the freshness of her tongue. Her eyes closed and adorned with eyelashes, the ears flexible, her fair hair soft and flowing. An exquisite aroma of lilies emanated from her whole body. Various instruments of penance and other personal objects of Mother Mariana had been placed in the pockets of the green silk lining of her habit by the Mother Abbess Mariana of Saint Dominic and her advisory council, with the approval of the Franciscan Fathers, so that they might serve as valuable relics of their faithful sister, whose glory will be justly exalted and known in the twentieth century.

Blessed be Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres! Your warnings of justice have struck our very bones. We acknowledge that we are in kinship with you for having sown in these Andean mountain ranges the white and blue lilies of the Immaculate Conception; for having won for us the gift of Christian Faith and Marian love; and for having sprinkled in our lives the iridescent gold of hope engendered by sweet devotion to the Mother of Good Success, the certain anchor of salvation. And by the example of your life, resplendent with virtues; by the fulfillment of your prophecies and the divine message that your hands placed in our consciences; by all the marvels of sanctity, love and graces worked by God to form you, educate you, and perfect you; and by your sacrificial and permanent self-surrender for our conversion and salvation; for these and for all that we owe you, we offer to you our undying gratitude. And, as pledge of this, we also offer:

- To be faithful to the devotion and propagation of the cult of Our Lady of Good Success.

- To form a salient with our hearts, our minds and all our human and superhuman efforts in order to defend the interests, ideals and purposes inherent to the existence of your foundation of the Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception.

- To join prayers and efforts of every kind to achieve from the ecclesiastic authorities the acknowledgement of the sanctity of your life and of your work so that you might be crowned with the honor of the altars for the glory of God, the Church and Ecuador.

## **Acknowledgement**

The Church gives a brief definition of a miracle as “an extraordinary occurrence outside of the regular course of nature and specially produced by the power of God.” After having written this modest book in order to reveal the preferential love of God for the Ecuadorean nation from its historical beginnings which was manifested by the extraordinary soul of Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa, I was convinced that this work of mine would never open its eyes to the light of day, since I lacked the economic possibilities to have it printed and circulated.

Nonetheless, a miracle has happened: A generous hand knocked at the door who was interested in seeing the original draft of Mother Mariana’s miraculous life and brought it to the attention of the distinguished Foundation for a Christian Civilization, which, sparing no sacrifices and with exceptional generosity, drew it from its obscure anonymity and will present it to the immensely noble and benevolent people of the United States of America.

Mariana Francisca of Jesus has worked the first miracle in fulfilling the prophecy that her life would be known, published and loved in the twentieth century, when her Divine Spouse would raise her to the honor of the altars.

May God superabundantly bless this Christian Foundation that thus spreads the marvels of God so that they might be known and appreciated by men throughout creation!

MSGR. LUIS E. CADENA Y ALMEIDA  
Postulator for the Cause of Beatification of the Servant of God  
Mother Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa  
Quito, March 1, 1987



**The author, Msgr. Luis E. Cadena y Almeida, in the courtyard of the palace of the archbishop of Quito.**

## Brief Curriculum Vitae of the Author

**Academic preparation:** Doctor in Philosophy, History and Letters.

**Priestly activity:** In three areas, pastoral, teaching and social service:

a) In the first area, he exercised his ministry in six parishes successively;

b) In the second, he founded and directed six Educational Institutions for pre-primary, primary and secondary formation;

c) In the third, he served as the head of the Catholic Labor Movement and founded the Association of Catholic Employers. He was also Provincial Director of the Ecuadorean Red Cross of Cotopaxi; Director-Founder of the Catholic Seminary “La Voz de Latacunga”; an active member of the House of Ecuadorean Culture, Nucleus of Cotopaxi; an active member of the Bolivarian Society of Ecuador and of various literary and charitable entities; Executive President of the FEDEC of Cotopaxi, of the “Estupiñán” Institute, and of the Association for Catholic Education; rector of the schools he founded: “Católico” of Latacunga, “Miguel de Cervantes” in Quito, and Sección Secundaria, with the later addition of the Pensionado Elemental P.P. Borja No. 1; professor at several renowned schools for both men and women.

**Publications:** “La Cultura Maya,” doctoral thesis; speeches, conferences and newspaper articles; Private Book of Poems; *Sister Mariana of Jesus Torres: A Spanish Mystic in Quito*; *Origin of the Cult and Devotion to the Blessed Virgin of Good Success*; *Prophetic Message of the Servant of God Mother Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa* (unpublished).

**Awards:** “Knight of the Order of Simon Bolivar,” conferred by the Venezuelan government; First Class “Education Award,” conferred by the Ecuadorean government; awards from the Catholic Labor Movement of Quito, the citizenry of Latacunga, the “Catholic School District” of Latacunga; the Gold Button from Pensionado P.P. Borja No. 1.

All these were given by their owner to the Sacred Statue of the Blessed Virgin of Good Success in a religious ceremony on October 6, 1985.

**Appointments:** Monsignor and Chaplain of Honor of His Holiness John Paul II; Postulator for the Cause of Beatification of the Servant of God Mariana Francisca of Jesus Torres y Berriochoa.

