

## MOTHER MARIE DOLORES OF THE PASSION

Foundress of the Carmelite Monastery of Mary, Mother of Grace  
Lafayette, Louisiana

August 4, 1896 was a hot, humid day in southern Louisiana; the sort of day when all activities take a leisurely pace. But there was an unusual stir of excitement in the household of Judge and Mrs. L. P. Caillouet on Canal Street in the small town of Thibodaux. Soon the vigorous cries of a newborn infant resounded throughout the house as their eighth child announced her entry into this world. She became Heloise Marie, child of God, through Baptism that same day.

This blue-eyed, fair-haired child was surrounded from the very beginning by the character-forming atmosphere of a loving but disciplined family life where she learned, by example as well as by teaching, the solid virtues of true Christian life. For the Caillouets their home was a haven of peace, enlivened by frequent and happy family gatherings. Heloise was a prime contributor to the merriment on these occasions. She loved to organize backyard watermelon parties and picnics or to pile the nieces and nephews in the old model T Ford and take them for a spin along the dusty roads of the area - often teasing them and provoking peals of laughter by suddenly pushing on the brakes and coming to a short stop. On the day of her funeral some of them were recalling their "good times" with Tante Lise.

The Caillouet daughters (there were three older sisters) were educated according to the norms prevailing at that time. They attended the local Academy taught by the Mount Carmel Sisters, studying French, music, fine needlework and oil painting as well as the usual academic subjects. Heloise was blessed with a mother who taught her daughters in a practical way the ordinary household tasks of cooking and preserving, sewing and mending, gardening, care of poultry and dairy products. All these tasks bore the character of a gracious frugality.

Along with her older sisters Heloise took her turn at these duties but managed to escape the cooking which was "just too prosaic for me!" Later on in Carmel she astonished her family by announcing proudly -- "and I've learned to bake bread!"

Spiritual formation was strengthened by daily family prayers and Scripture reading. Thus Heloise grew into a pious, well-balanced young woman. She developed a tender love for Our Blessed Mother, being active in the parish Sodality of Our Lady and the Altar Society.

In her late teens she read the Autobiography of Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and at once felt a strong inclination to follow her way of life in Carmel. Two of her brothers - Lucien, two years older and Abel, four years younger - were studying for the priesthood and Heloise felt urged to devote her life to prayer and sacrifice for them and all priests. This intention remained uppermost in her heart all her life. Even in her last years when she was no longer able to speak, her eyes would always respond meaningfully when this incentive was mentioned to her.

But Heloise dearly loved her homelife and it was not so easy to wrench herself from it. Not until she was 23 did she finally surrender to the insistent voice of her Beloved.

September 8, 1919, after an excursion around the city with her parents, she knelt at the enclosure door of the New Orleans Carmel with a box of French chocolates tucked under her arm - a parting gift of her father! She often laughingly remarked: "I thought I was providing for my first lean days!"

The postulant, Sister Marie, made the transition from a homelife that had monastic overtones to that of Carmel very smoothly. Her discerning mother had prepared her well: "Now, just because you could do many things well here at home, do not take it for granted you can do the same in Carmel. They will have their own particular customs and manner of doing everything. Listen carefully to instructions and do exactly as you are told." The remembrance of this sage advice often served the young, energetic postulant well on occasions when her naturally impulsive nature would have rushed ahead to "get it done quickly" or to retort: "Oh, I already know how to do that." "I really never had any difficulty with obedience," she said in later years, "for I was accustomed to complying with my parents' wishes and directions."

The foundation of solid virtue and simple faith combined with practical abilities won the confidence of her superiors and qualified her for assuming certain responsibilities when on May 8, 1920 Sister Marie added Dolores of the Passion to her name and began the life of a novice. An illness requiring surgery delayed her Profession of temporary Vows until November 21, 1921.

Straightforward simplicity and constant fidelity best describe Sister Marie Dolores' Carmelite life. All complexities were simply foreign to her. Once she surprised a priest by declaring: "St. John of the Cross is crystal clear to me." She had reduced his doctrine to Nada - Toda. She was wont to say: "I love Jesus and He loves me; we live together in peace and joy. He knows 'when I sit and when I stand.'" (Psalm 139) "Bless the Lord, O my soul; let everything in me bless His holy Name." (Psalm 103) Such dispositions established in her a spirit of trust and resignation which supported her during the approaching trials and sustained her until TIME led her to final triumph.

When Sister Marie Dolores made final Vows three years later, it was decided the Veiling would be postponed until her brother, Abel, studying in Rome, would return home a priest. The ceremony took place August 27, 1925 with the young Father Caillouet officiating. An older brother, Father Lucien, who had studied at Louvain, was present and among several others were two of their classmates, Fathers Schexnayder and Greco. When the Lafayette Community celebrated the making of Solemn Vows in 1958 these same four were present - three of them Bishops and Monsignor Lucien the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

The Veiling Day was an event of Glorious Joy for Sister Marie Dolores, her Community and her family.

Shortly afterward she was elected Subprioress and began the training of the Community in Gregorian Chant. Mother was largely responsible for the footnote in Chapter V, Number 49 in the 1926 edition of our Constitutions which permits the use of the Chant.

In 1930 Mother Marie Dolores was appointed Novice Mistress and rendered this service to the Community until she came to Lafayette in 1936. She gave special emphasis to forming Marian souls, reflecting in her instructions her own total dependence on Carmel's Queen-Beauty.

It was at this time that Mother undertook the exacting work of translating the new Ceremonial for the Nuns from the French. She had a great propensity for work and an endurance that kept her at the task long after the retiring bell had rung.

When Bishop Jeanmard of Lafayette invited the New Orleans Community to bring Carmel to his new diocese, Mother Marie Dolores was chosen to lead the group of five Sisters who, hopefully, would form the nucleus of the foundation.

The Monastery of Mary, Mother of Grace was opened May 16, 1936. Clergy and people seemed enthusiastic and offered support and services to the new Carmel. Surely this

was another Day of Glorious Joy for Mother when she saw her two brothers assisting Bishop Jeanmard at the altar in the new Carmel. Other members of her family were present, including her aging mother, and many friends - among them a number who had been associated with her father.

Only a few months had passed when the dark clouds of trial began to lower ... and Mother's soul was shaken as the storms broke, threatening to destroy the very foundations of the Foundation. The oppressive elements included successive and simultaneous illnesses of the three Choir Sisters - and finally the Out Sister also - apparently insurmountable financial difficulties and, the heaviest of all, misunderstandings which created a delicate situation and increasing tensions ...

Mother was caught by surprise and inexperience ... and as she wrestled daily with untoward events and the prevailing winds of adversity she gained new strengths which finally gave birth to a new compassion and sensitivity. No doubt this period of Mother's life was one of the most fruitful. Some years later she wrote: "Writing at this date, more than six years after the dawn of 1937, I cannot but praise and adore the infinite wisdom of God in withholding from us knowledge of the future. Little did we dream when we greeted the New Year that ominous clouds were already gathering, that a storm of trials and sufferings was soon to burst and with varying intensity was to hang over the Carmel throughout the year ..."

The clouds did not dissipate themselves at the end of 1937 but continued, in perhaps a lesser degree, to weigh upon Mother for several more years. She had the sorrow of seeing aspirant after aspirant "go away sadly ..." With continuing suffering came increasing strength. Mother carried on unrelentingly but progress came slowly.

In 1949 Mother gave over the duties of administration to Sister Theresa Margaret, remaining her advisor and staunch support.

When in 1953 the necessity of a new location became plainly evident, Mother Marie Dolores worked long and hard on plans, generously using her experience gained in 1936 to further the project of the new Monastery. Again, her practical abilities were truly profitable for the Community. She directed the landscaping of the new site and expended herself indefatigably in starting a large vegetable garden and orchard, insisting that only the natural, organic method be followed.

Despite the fact that habits of doing things had been formed over several decades, when changes in liturgy and aspects of Community life resulted from Vatican Council II, Mother showed only support and enthusiasm, never displaying the least reluctance in following the directives of the Church in authentic Renewal.

After having served for several terms as First Councillor or Subprioress, Mother again assumed the leadership of our Carmel in 1967. During this term she began to suffer from arthritis and found some of the prioress' duties difficult. She definitely wished to retire from office when the 1970 elections were held.

Mother's third Day of Glorious Joy was that of her Golden Jubilee in 1971. Her two brothers and two nephews were main Concelebrants of the Mass which also included four Bishops and about forty priests. Again her whole family, now close to 100 in number, came to share this joy. Mother renewed her Vows during the Mass using a formula she had composed with utmost care making, once more, a total immolation of herself for priests, for the Church.

At the close of the two-day public celebration (we had reserved the first day for clergy and family, the second for friends) one of the participants remarked thought-

fully: "This celebration was a great sacrament which brought an outpouring of blessings and joy in abundance to the Church of Lafayette - and extending far beyond ..."

We believe it truly extended to the uttermost bounds of the earth! A Blessing from Pope Paul VI personally signed by himself and from Maximus V, Patriarch of Antioch, joined East and West making them ONE in the heart of Mother Dolores. Numerous greetings and Masses came from missionaries on five Continents. A Day of Glorious Joy, indeed, for her apostolic soul!

A poem written for her Jubilee contained a note of prophecy:

"At a point beyond the joyed refrain  
Of singing sisterhood, her heart sits still  
And knows its God, but knows as well His pain ..."

Yes, Mother soon became, for the most part, 'beyond the joyed refrain ...'. The form of 'knowing His pain' was the illness which soon became apparent and was to purify her for the final Day of Glorious Joy on earth. It was a process of nine years - to the day. God asked Mother first for her mobility, then her speech, and finally her memory. But

"With purple passion-flowered force of will,  
Alive and sensitive to what might kill  
Whatever else would cause her will to wane ..."

she unhesitatingly, unflinchingly, unreservedly gave ALL - finishing the work He gave her to do October 23, 1980.

Now, 'the strife is o'er' and she awaits one more Day of Glorious Joy when her Beloved will come upon the clouds in great Power and Majesty. Then the seed sown in weakness will rise to meet Him, glorious and immortal, and be caught up to reign with Him forever in the Kingdom of His Father.

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Note: Since Mother Marie Dolores' final weeks, her death and her funeral were described when we shared our Community's annals with you, we did not repeat these events in this account.