

TERESA BALL – EDITED VERSION OF SR. MARY DESOUZA IBVM

The Irish Branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary was begun two hundred years ago in 1821 by Mother Teresa Ball. What was this woman like as a person?... , she who brought to Ireland the Institute which spread to nearly all the continents of the world, even in her lifetime.

She was born Frances, the sixth and youngest child of John Ball and Mabel Clare Bennett at Eccles Street, Dublin, Ireland on 6th January 1794. John was married before and had a son from his first marriage. When his wife died he married Mabel Bennett in 1776 and had five children – Cecilia, Anna Maria, Isabella, Nicholas and Frances. As a child, Frances or Fanny as she was called, showed a warm, affectionate nature and had a merry, lively disposition. She was the darling of her elderly father who was not at all eager to let her go away to school in York, England at the age of nine in 1803. Before leaving, the words of her sister, Anna Maria made a great impression on Frances, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things shall be added unto you”. Sadly, she would never see her father again, for he died one year later in 1804.

In the early days her school reports tell of childish pranks and years later she showed a soft corner for children who got themselves into trouble because of their mischief! When she did settle down to her studies, she showed a very clear mind, quick understanding and an excellent memory. Mrs. Ball decided to bring her two youngest children back from York in 1808, Fanny was 14 years old.

The Archbishop of Dublin, Father Daniel Murray would finally show her where her vocation lay. He recognized in Fanny a person with great potential who would do great things for God. On the 3rd March, 1810 Fanny, who was sixteen was invited to a ball. Suddenly during the ball she heard the words, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things shall be added unto you”. Fanny wanted to return home immediately but her mother stopped her. Fanny spoke to Archbishop Murray about what she felt she was being called to but he asked her to wait and pray since he felt that she was too young. Fanny’s mother and the rest of the family did not want her to enter religious life. Later, however, her mother relented and Fanny quickly confided in Archbishop Murray. He was anxious to have a foundation of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland and for this he pleaded with the Superior of the Bar Convent, York to admit Fanny as a postulant to be trained as the future foundress of the community in Ireland. Fanny arrived in York on 11th June 1814. Mary Aikenhead who was to be the foundress of the Sisters of

Charity in Dublin and Fanny were to be trained in the convent at York. Fanny wanted to take the name of Mary Magdalen but Dr. Murray asked her to take the name of Teresa and have St. Teresa of Avila as her patron saint. Her motto was 'The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever'.

Her first two companions died within a few years of joining her, of consumption. This was a difficult time for Teresa who went through anxiety and depression how the Irish project would begin. Quite early in life she developed the habit of keeping strict control over her feelings so that she seldom revealed them when she was moved or hurt. She is described as having a striking personality, imposing, even awe-inspiring. Indeed she needed a strong personality to undertake and carry out the task placed on her shoulders by her friend and guide, Archbishop Murray whose trust and support were there for her.

In 1821 Archbishop Murray considered the time right for Teresa to begin her work in Ireland. Teresa would have preferred to open a house away from her homeland. She was anxious and unsettled. Archbishop Murray wrote to her to encourage her and asked her to trust in Divine Providence. Teresa copied in her own handwriting 300 pages of the Constitutions of the Institute which were closely modelled on the Jesuit Constitutions and faithful to Mary Ward's vision. In May 1821 Dr. Murray bought Rathfarnham House and Teresa and her companions left the Bar Convent, York on 10th August 1821. Repairs had to be done at Rathfarnham so they stayed with the Sisters of Charity at Stanhope Street till they got legal claim of their house, which took nine months. They opened a temporary school. They moved into Rathfarnham House on the 4th November 1822 where work was still going on. The renovation took a year with fifty men working in the house. Teresa named the house Loreto after the shrine of Loreto where it was that the house of Nazareth had been moved by angels to protect it from destruction. She wanted the same spirit of Nazareth to pervade her sisters – the spirit of humility, obedience, peace, joy and love. By 1825 there were nine members in the community. Between 1828 and 1833 sixteen girls entered from Rathfarnham School. Gradually communities and schools sprung up all over Ireland. Teresa herself used to go to get the various places ready for the community and to help in settling the house. The copies of the Constitutions which Teresa had copied in York were given to each superior.

In 1841 Rev. Dr. Carew, an Irish born bishop of Calcutta saw the need of Catholic schools in India and so he sent a deputation to Mother Teresa to send her sisters to Bengal. Mother Teresa had never thought of sending her nuns out of Ireland. The voyage would take four months. She refused at first but

on August 23rd 1841 seven sisters joined by six postulants left for India, the first overseas mission. Then from Mauritius (1845), Canada (1847), England (1851), Spain (1851) came invitations to work for the people there to which Mother Teresa responded with her farsighted vision and missionary zeal. Meanwhile in Ireland too, houses and schools were being opened in quick succession. Teresa saw the need of setting about drawing up the Constitutions and revising it. This was completed by Mother Teresa's successor, Mother Scholastica Somers in December 1861. The organization of Loreto was completed in 1913 by the division of the Institute into Provinces for the countries in which the sisters worked, each Province with its Mother Provincial under the Mother General in Rathfarnham.

Teresa was modest, gentle, dignified, elegant and refined and so many considered her reserved and stand-offish, but to those who confided in her she was a true friend and guide. Just as throughout her life, she had to the end, a deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Blessed Lady. Her thoughts were always for the welfare of the whole Institute, especially its unity and her last words to her friend and confessor, Fr. Tom Burke were, 'Father, promise that they shall all be one'. From 1855 on, Mother Teresa's health began to fail. She was bright, cheerful and alert and interested in everyone of her large family and each of their concerns. She was diagnosed with an internal malignant tumour in December 1860 and later with acute rheumatism. No matter how great her sufferings, she never uttered a word of complaint or self-pity. She asked to see each member of the community to say goodbye and give them a little memento. Her condition grew worse towards the end of Holy Week and from then on, until her death she could not retain food. To the amazement and grief of the Rathfarnham community she asked to be taken to Dalkey, a convent she had founded by the seaside. The doctors agreed saying that the change of air would do her good so on May 11th the carriage taking her, left Rathfarnham for Dalkey. On 19th May Mother Scholastica began to say Vespers and when she reached the Magnificat Mother Teresa opened her eyes, smiled and then died. On May 20th, 1861 Mother Teresa's remains were brought back to Rathfarnham where she was buried. Mother Teresa Ball's one wish that recurred in her letters, 'Pray that all may be united under one head' seems to be coming to its fulfilment with the CJs and the IBVMs immanent union. May her spirit live on in us.

CHRONOLOGY

6 th January 1794	Birth of Frances Ball
7 th January 1794	Baptism at St. Michael's Church
14 th July 1803	Was sent to school in the Bar Convent, York
April 1804	Death of her father, John Ball
16 th June 1805	First Holy Communion
1808	Frances returns home from the Bar Convent, York
3 rd March 1810	At the ball she hears the words 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things Shall be added unto you'
11 th June 1814	Entrance as a postulant in the Bar Convent, York
8 th September 1814	Reception as a novice – takes the name of Teresa
9 th September 1816	Takes Religious vows
1819	Two candidates enter – Anne Therry and Eleanor Arthur
8 th May 1820	Her two companions receive the dress of the Institute
10 th August 1821	Frances Teresa Ball, Anne Therry and Eleanor Arthur sail from Liverpool for Ireland
12 th August 1821	They reach Dublin, Ireland
15 th October 1821	Her two companions make their profession of vows
5 th May 1822	School opened in Harold's Cross
4 th November 1822	Moved into Rathfarnham House
May 1823	Poor school opened
February 1831	Death of Mother Teresa Ball's mother, Mabel Clare Ball
1833	Foundation in Navan – St. Anne's
1836	North Denmark Street, North Great George's Street
23 rd August 1841	Seven sisters and six postulants leave for India

30 th December 1841	Arrival of 'The Scotia' in Calcutta
1842	53. St. Stephen's Green
7 th August 1843	Foundation in Dalkey
1843	Gorey, County Wexford
1844	Mauritius
1845	Gibraltar – South Spain
8 th September 1846	Church in Rathfarnham Abbey consecrated
1847	Toronto, Canada
10 th August 1850	Bray, County Wicklow
October 1851	Manchester, England
1851	Cadiz, Spain – closed in 1856 – sisters returned in 1887
26 th February 1852	Death of Archbishop Daniel Murray
28 th August 1854	Letterkenny, County Donegal
1854	Omagh
1859	Boris-in-Ossory – later transferred to Kilkenny
October 1860	Beginning of final illness of Mother Teresa
November 1860	Killarney, last foundation made by Mother Teresa
11 th May 1861	Mother Teresa was moved to Dalkey at her request
19 th May 1861	Death of Mother Teresa
19 th July 1875	Foundation in Australia
5 th April 1877	South Africa followed by East Africa