

1883
2023
SSM

REFLECTIONS
FOR THE 140th
ANNIVERSARY
OF FOUNDATION



SISTERS OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER
THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF ST. FRANCES OF ASSISI

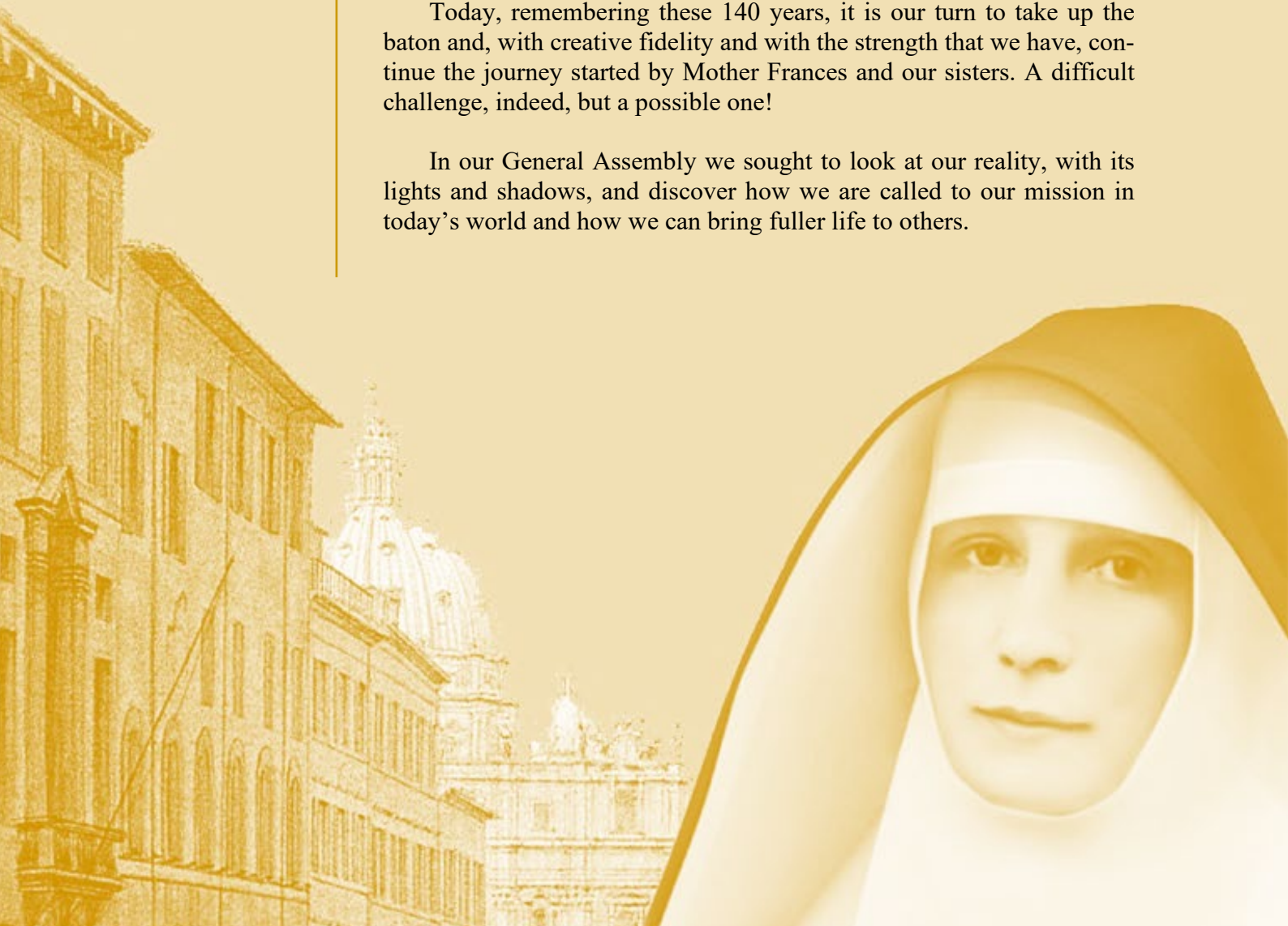
A possible challenge: creative fidelity to the SSM charism

140 years ago we responded to God's call, first through the charismatic intuition of Mother Frances and then, over time, through the mission of the more than 2,000 SSM Sisters who, likewise, welcomed the challenge to live «contemplation closely united with activity»ⁱ to remedy «the spiritual and social misery of mankind»ⁱⁱ.

Mother Frances' desire was «to be inflame for the extension of His kingdom on earth»ⁱⁱⁱ and for her and her sisters «to become an image of the Crucified, to be formed anew into Him»^{iv}, to actively love the poor and the sick. Our Foundress was a very brave woman! Listening to the voice of God and attentive to the needs of her neighbor, she was able to venture along new paths, to undertake long and uncomfortable journeys, to welcome material hardships, and to overcome misunderstandings of all kinds. I have always been impressed by her courage!

Today, remembering these 140 years, it is our turn to take up the baton and, with creative fidelity and with the strength that we have, continue the journey started by Mother Frances and our sisters. A difficult challenge, indeed, but a possible one!

In our General Assembly we sought to look at our reality, with its lights and shadows, and discover how we are called to our mission in today's world and how we can bring fuller life to others.

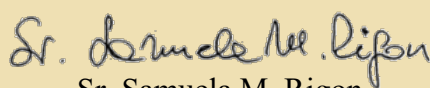


In the spirit of a synodal Church and in the perspective of one SSM Body, each of us is called to bring our personal and unprecedented contribution, but we will only be able to do so by letting ourselves be shaped by the values that Mother Frances herself lived: the total gift of ourselves at all times of our lives and great spirit of sacrifice, and «preserve in ourselves trust in God and sincere self-surrender to Mary as our only Mother»^v, «the admirable Mother of Sorrow»^{vi}.

A question often accompanies me that I want to share with you: if Mother Frances were to knock at the door of our communities today, if she were to pay us a visit today, would she be able to recognize that we are her daughters by the way we live among ourselves, by the style of our daily life, by the way we pray and work?

One of the initiatives to celebrate the 140th anniversary of our Foundation involves the publication of a series of reflections offered by some SSM Sisters on topics related to the spirituality of Mother Frances Streitel and our Charism. The reflections, to be published bi-monthly on the 16th day of the month, commemorating the day of the Founding. Our first publication is April 16, the anniversary of the Franciscan Order. Each reflection will be accompanied by an in-depth summary explanation taken from the General Archives.

Thank you to the Sisters who initiated this project and made themselves available to be involved. May it be an opportunity for all of us to get to know Mother Frances more deeply.



Sr. Samuela M. Rigon
General Superior

Rome, 16 April 2023

Selected themes

Love for the Virgin Mary, Sorrowful Mother
Eucharistic Life
Love for Christ's humanity
Simplicity and penance
Poverty and solidarity
Contemplation and active life

ⁱ Letter to Fr. Jordan 28 (17).

ⁱⁱ Letter to Fr. Jordan 39 (86).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Letter to Fr. Jordan 88 (98).

^{iv} Letter to Fr. Jordan 81 (68).

^v Cfr. Letters to her parents 19 (18).

^{vi} Letter to Fr. Joseph Joch 13 (13).

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Virgin Mary, Sorrowful Mother

Sr. Sherri Marie Kuhn

Amalia Streitel was influenced from the time of her birth by her parents and the town's devotion to the Sorrowful Mother. Throughout the church and the town were shrines and depictions of the Virgin, particularly the Sorrowful Mother. As Amalia grew in her faith, the Eucharist, the Cross, and Mary, played important roles in her spiritual development and her listening to the call of God in her life.

The Blessed Mother had the capacity to listen deeply to God; when Gabriel called her to be the Virgin Mother, at the presentation through Simeon's words, at the finding of Jesus in the Temple, and when she was given to John and us as our Mother. Her listening was not just listening with the ears; but listening with the heart followed by the actions of accepting the Will of God in her life. Mother Frances, through her prayer life, grew in the spiritual virtue of Listening/Discerning. She listened to God's vocational call in spite of her parents' wish for her to marry, to the call to enter a Franciscan Institute and then to leave. Not an easy decision! A decision not looked favorably on by society at that time; yet one she united with the Passion of Christ and the Sorrowful Mother. She then heard God calling her to a deeper life of prayer and solitude in the Carmelite Order where she once again united her interior struggles with the Crucified Christ and the Sorrowful Mother. Through a vision of two mountains, she heard the voice of God calling her to unite contemplative prayer (Carmel) with the ministerial life (Alverno) and once again she left a religious community to begin her journey of founding the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

In many of her letters she begins, «May the admirable Mother of Sorrows bring you my lines...» (Letter 13 to Reverend Fr. Joch) showing how she entrusted her words, and expressions of her life to the Sorrowful Mother to intercede to God for her. Mother Frances united her whole life with the Passion of Christ through the Sorrowful Mother. When she was deposed from office she humbly and without complaint became obedient until death. From then until her death, she combined the contemplative and active life with Mary, the Sorrowful Mother, in union with Jesus under the Cross.



On March 6, 1911, the death anniversary of Mother Frances, the Constitutions of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother were appropriated. Our Constitutions begin «...standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.» Jn 19:25-27. This is the legacy Mother Frances left to the women who would follow her charism throughout the world.

On March 27, 2010, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints published a Decree on the 12 Heroic Virtues lived by Venerable Mother Frances Streitl. These 12 virtues are rooted in the Gospel and within the Franciscan and Carmelite traditions. They are virtues which Ven. Mother Frances strove to live daily with Mary, the Sorrowful Mother and Christ Crucified. They are the virtues she has modeled for us as our foundress and we are called to model for the people of God today and for the future.

Let us each take some time to reflect once more on Ven. Mother Frances' life and ask ourselves "How am I developing my capacity to hear the call of God personally and communally and act accordingly; even giving up my desires for the good of the whole Congregation?"



Mellrichstadt - Großenberg-Kapelle



ASSMR

INSIGHTS

DOCUMENTS AND MEMOIRS OF SSM'S

Mother Frances Streitel and Our Lady of Sorrows in *Relatio et Vota* of Theological Consultors¹

In *Vote I of the Theological Consultors* we read: «With joy and a spirit of service, Sister Amalia brought God's merciful love to every person in need, both human and divine, placing Mary of Sorrows, model and icon as Mother of Humanity at the foot of the Cross, at the center of her intense missionary activity».²

The same reiterates later: «She had a special devotion to Jesus Crucified and to the Sorrowful Mother, for which she took the name of Sister Maria Frances of the Cross».³

Later, in *Vow IV*, it is highlighted how Mother Frances, already at the Convent of Maria Stern in Augsburg, was praised for her integrity of life and for her devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows: «All [the sisters] praise her integral religious life, her generosity and her devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows, to St. Joseph, her spirit of sacrifice and love for the poor».⁴

A devotion that, along the way, matures and becomes fidelity to the intention of following God's will, contemplating the Mystery of Christ on the Cross next to Our Lady of Sorrows: «The Servant of God follows in her search for the will of God and this search will lead her to the last stage of her earthly life, as foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. However, it will also be a difficult stage. In it, however, the Servant of God did not fail in her firm intention to always follow the will of God under that particular aspect that she had always privileged: the contemplation of the Mystery of Christ on the Cross next to Our Lady of Sorrows».⁵

This analysis leads the same Consultor to affirm that «among the other moral virtues» that «are part of the totality of her consecration to God from an early age, her union with the Mystery of the Sorrowful Mother stands out beside the Cross of her Son Jesus».⁶

The opinion of the Consultors is unanimous. In *Vow V* we read: «Sister Frances nourished a deep devotion to Our Lady, whom she venerated in a special way under the title of Our Lady of Sorrows. She wanted all the sisters, changing their names, to have Mary's name first».⁷

¹ Special Congress of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to discuss the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Mary Frances of the Cross, 15 May 2009.

² CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Franciscæ a Cruce. Relatio et Vota Congressus Peculiaris die 15 Maii An. 2009 habiti*, Rome 2009, p. 6.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

«You have not only
a glorious history
to remember
and to recount,
but also a great history
still to be accomplished!»

And again: «The enthusiasm with which the Servant of God identified herself with the sorrows of Mary was extraordinary: showing her great love to Our Lady she wanted the title of the new Congregation as Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, to whom she addressed every day with the prayer of the Holy Rosary».⁸ To conclude then: «The Servant of God was strong in suffering, she suffered everything for love of God, taking as a model Mary Most Holy of Sorrows».⁹

In *Vow VIII*, the Consultor finally specifies how Mother Frances' missionary zeal and her compassion for every person in difficulty springs from having taken Our Lady of Sorrows as a model, for herself and for the Congregation she founded: «On October 4, 1885, Mother Streitel founded the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, joining them to the Franciscan Third Order, with the desire to unite the active apostolate to the spirit of contemplatives, to bring God's love to every person in difficulty, taking as a model Our Lady of Sorrows, who became the mother of the humanity at the Cross of Jesus».¹⁰

The SSM's and Our Lady of Sorrows in the Constitutions of 1911

I think it is also beneficial to offer to the common reflection some excerpts from the first SSM Constitutions¹¹ to grasp how our charism and our identity have been faithfully accepted and guarded, according to the intentions of Mother Frances, who gave her life for «the increase of the work of the Sorrowful Mother», reaffirming decisively that «we work for our congregation only if we are faithful with Mary in the cross and in suffering».¹²

At No. 152 we read: «They call themselves Sisters, because they are all children of the same Sorrowful Mother».¹³

At No. 157 we read: «Closely attached to the Sorrowful Mother, they will always be satisfied to take the last place in the Church of Christ, to be the least and to be considered as such. The Heart of Jesus, their Divine Spouse, will look with satisfaction upon such humility and preserve them for all times as true Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother».

At No. 121 we read: «If Divine Providence sends crosses and visitations to the Congregation, the Sisters must remember that they are called Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother and that through sufferings they will become more like their heavenly Mother».

At No. 336 regarding *the Mistress of Novices* it is said: «Her sole care should be to form Christ in her own heart and in the hearts of the novices, that Mary the Sorrowful Mother may recognize them all as her true daughters».

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

¹¹ The extracts here mentioned refer to the *Constitutiones Sororum a Matre Dolorosa* approved in 1911. The original text, in Latin, was immediately translated into German (Typescript almost entirely lost. Only the table of contents, Msgr. George Jacquemin's statement on the accuracy of the translation from Latin and the authentication of the Sacred Congregation for Religious with imprimatur remain). A handwritten Italian translation is also preserved in the General Archives, the drafting of which probably dates back to 1911, as the title page of the notebook suggests. The first printed texts in German and Italian date back to 1926, and it would be necessary to wait until 1930 for the first printing in English.

¹² Letter to Fr. Joseph Joch 13 (13).

¹³ All the articles cited here have been extracted from the first printed translation into English (1930).

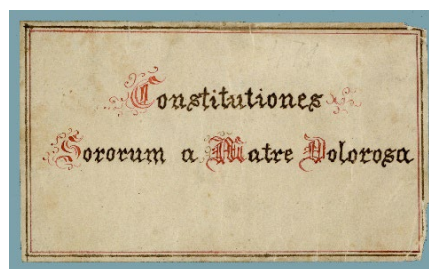
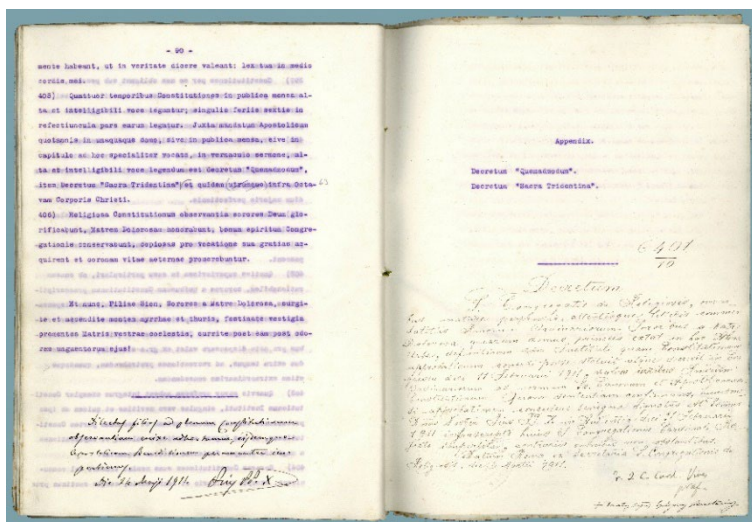
At No. 292 regarding *the canonical visitation*: «When the Mother has been informed about everything, she will take refuge to Almighty God and confide her anxieties and cares to the Sorrowful Mother. She will then assemble all the Sisters, give them necessary and appropriate instructions and admonitions, or communicate to them the regulations she has made. In conclusion, she will admonish them to begin with her in fresh zeal to strive after perfection, to walk as true Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother and renew in themselves the grace of their holy profession».

At No. 206, with regard to *the apostolate with children*: «Only when the children are able to make their own living, shall they be discharged. The surest and best means for the protection of their innocence and for their perseverance is to instill in them a deep love for the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a tender affection for, and a childlike confidence in the Immaculate Virgin and Sorrowful Mother¹⁴, a special veneration for their Guardian Angel, St. Aloysius, and the other patrons of youth».

At No. 235, with regard to *assistance to the sick*: «The nursing of the sick as such does not dispense the Sisters from their spiritual exercises. These they must perform as far as it is possible. Furthermore, they will often think of the bitter passion and death of our Lord, meditate on the suffering of the Sorrowful Mother under the Cross, and call to mind the death of Holy Father Joseph».

Again, at No. 246: «Whenever the Sisters set out to nurse the sick, they shall picture to themselves Mary, the Immaculate Virgin and Sorrowful Mother going with them, how she is always at their side, how she watches and prays with them. Only in this way, will the Sisters be able to be of real use to the sick, and to sanctify themselves so that one day they may hear the words of Christ, their Divine Bridegroom: “I was sick and you have visited me. Come ye blessed of my Father and possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”».

Finally, at No. 406: «By a religious observance of the Constitutions, the Sisters glorify God, honor the Sorrowful Mother, preserve the true religious spirit, obtain abundant graces of their vocation, and merit the crown of eternal life». And now, Daughters of Sion, Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, arise, ascend the mount of myrrh and incense, tread in the footsteps of your heavenly Mother, and follow the sweet odor of her ointments!».



Left: Constitutions of 1911 and Decree of approval.
Top: detail of the cover.

¹⁴ It should be noted that in the printed text of the Constitutions in Italian (1926), as well as in the German and English translations, it is no longer “Blessed Virgin Mary, our beloved mother” as in the 1911 Latin original, but “Immaculate Virgin Mary of Sorrows.” Not only that: the variant already appears in the first handwritten translation into Italian, where we read, “Immaculate Virgin Mother Sorrowful Mary.” It is relevant to consider how even in this article of the Constitutions, in translating the text, the title “Our Lady of Sorrows” was emphasized, albeit acting with a certain “freedom” from the original.