

1883
2023
SSM



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

Look with your heart

Dear Sisters and Friends,

The reflection on the Eucharist completes the series of publications that have accompanied us throughout the year of the 140th Anniversary of the SSM Foundation.

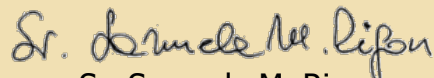
The Eucharist is "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life" (Lumen Gentium 11). Like the disciples who were with Jesus, we too must look with the eyes of faith to recognize the Lord. In fact, they saw the man Jesus with the eyes of the body: to see in Jesus the Son of God, they had to look with their hearts, with the eyes of faith. In the same way, today, only with the eyes of faith can we recognize and encounter the Lord Jesus in the Eucharistic species.

We are called to live our whole life in a Eucharistic way. For me today, this means first of all to be grateful. From a grateful heart comes gratuitousness: the awareness of what we have received makes us capable of giving of ourselves in daily life, without expectation of reward or return, and without counting. "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give (Mt 10:8)". It means choosing and committing to live each day as a gift from God, facing difficulties with trust in Him, building bridges instead of walls, choosing the light of hope in the midst of the dark nights of life and history.



And as I praise God for the gift of Ven. Mother Frances of the Cross to His Church on the 180th anniversary of her birth, I wish to thank all the sisters who offered their valuable contribution by preparing the reflections. I am especially grateful to Sr. Teresina Marra and Sr. Rossana Leone, who prepared the insights for each reflection with SSM documents and memories.

I hope that each area of the Congregation will plan initiatives to celebrate and make known Mother Frances and her way of faith, hope and love on the occasion of the 180th anniversary of her birth.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sr. Samuela M. Rigori". The script is cursive and fluid.

Sr. Samuela M. Rigori
General Superior

Rome, 16 February 2024

REFLECTIONS
FOR THE 140th
ANNIVERSARY
OF FOUNDATION

6

February 16, 2024

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The Eucharistic Life of Mother Frances Streitel and the SSMs

« Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine ... ».
"Adóro te devóte, látens Déitas..."

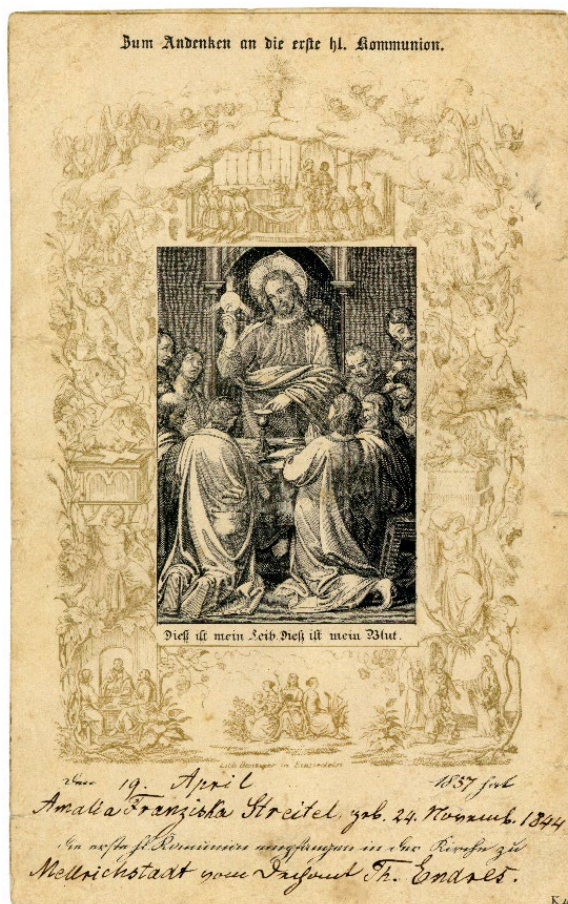
A great mystery, the Eucharist, which is beyond our ability to comprehend. Our senses fail – *visus, tactus, gustus, fallitur* – as St. Thomas Aquinas makes us sing in the Hymn *Adóro te devóte*. Sed audítu solo tuto crédito... all we need is faith! It is a faith that was especially gifted and passed on by Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who carried Emmanuel in her womb. Teacher in contemplation, it is she who guides us to the understanding of the mystery.

In John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, #54, we read: If the Eucharist is a mystery of faith which so greatly transcends our understanding as to call for sheer abandonment to the word of God, then there can be no one like Mary to act as our support and guide in acquiring this disposition. In repeating what Christ did at the Last Supper in obedience to his command: "Do this in memory of me!", we also accept Mary's invitation to obey him without hesitation: "Do whatever he tells you." (Jn 2:5). (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, #54, April 17, 2003)

Mother Frances lived the Eucharistic mystery deeply. She was nourished daily by the certainty that in the Eucharist "Jesus continues ... to love us "to the end," even to offering us his body and his blood" (Benedict XVI, *Esort. ap. postsinodale Sacramentum caritatis* (February 22, 2007) and so she made her life a continual sacrifice of praise, offering herself as a living host to God for the salvation of her brothers and sisters.

Mother Frances always had a deep love and lively respect for the Eucharist. She fervently instilled it in the heart of each sister and placed this mystery of love like a burning fire at the center of community life. Our early Sisters testified that no important decision was made without Mother Frances first spending hours or even nights in



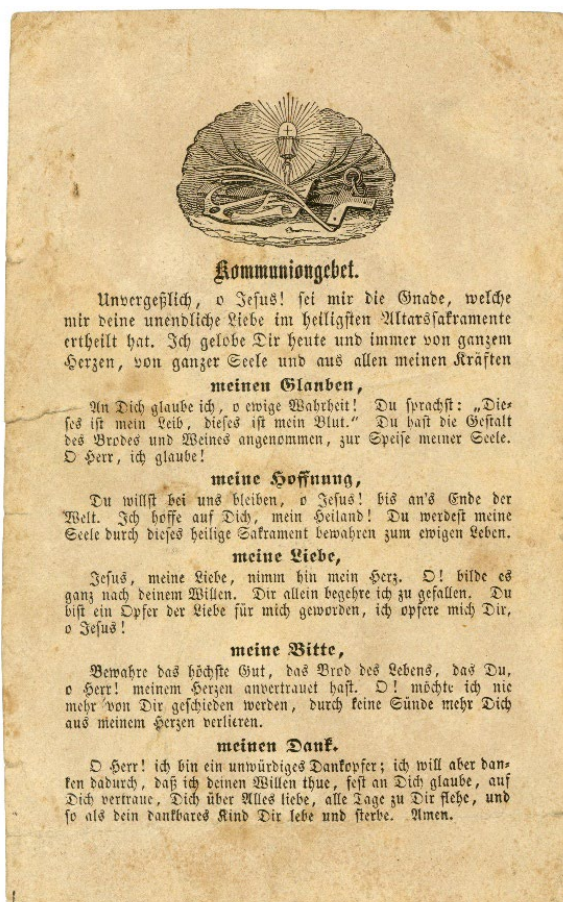


adoration before Jesus in the Eucharist. Not surprisingly, this is precisely what the Theological Consultors noted in the Report on the heroicity of her virtues that led to the Decree of Venerability for the Foundress in 2009.

In this reflection that completes the year-long celebration of the 140th Anniversary of the Foundation of the SSM Congregation, we can savor some lines that Mother Frances wrote to Fr. Jordan in December 1883:

"Now let me make one request in favor of our mutual Love, in favor of our Sacramental God. Reverend Father, would you not like to promise this God in the form of Bread, that as soon as He has taken place in the midst of your spiritual daughters, one of them will stand guard with Him by day and night ... I was given to perceive how to render love and adoration to the Lord in His new vineyard. I am firmly convinced that in this manner the work of the brothers and sisters of our Society will have the special grace to do many and great things for the spread and renewal of the reign of Christ on earth". (Letter to P. Jordan 78 (65),3

"As a direct preparation for Holy Communion one should take at least a half hour. Indirectly, may all our prayers and works be directed toward preparing us to receive the Supreme God ever more fervently and more worthily. The thanksgiving afterwards should likewise occupy at least a half hour". (Norms 1883 # 110, 4)



Souvenir card of Mother Frances' First Communion, signed by the pastor Th. Endres (April 19, 1857).

For personal reflection

For our personal prayer and reflection, let us also be challenged by the words of Pope Francis who urges us in “living an intense relationship with Jesus, an intimacy of dialogue and of life, in such a way as to recognize him as “the Lord”. Worshipping him ... You, I, do we worship the Lord? Do we turn to God only to ask him for things, to thank him, or do we also turn to him to worship him? What does it mean, then, to worship God? It means learning to be with him, it means that we stop trying to dialogue with him, and it means sensing that his presence is the most true, the most good, the most important thing of all. ... Worshipping the Lord means giving him the place that he must have; worshipping the Lord means stating, believing – not only by our words – that he alone truly guides our lives; worshipping the Lord means that we are convinced before him that he is the only God, the God of our lives, the God of our history”. (Pope Francis, Eucharistic Celebration, Homily, Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls (April 14, 2013).

DOCUMENTS AND MEMOIRS OF SSM'S

Mother Frances Streitel “eucharistic bride” in *Articles for the witnesses*

The *articles for the witnesses of the Diocesan Process submitted by the Postulator of the Process P. Mag. Aquilino Reichert concerning the Fame of Sanctity, the Virtues and the Miracles of the Servant of God Mother Frances Streitel* are among the first organized memoirs on her life, focusing especially on her spirituality: a valuable and authoritative document, since the Postulator, during its drafting, had in his hands the testimonies of witnesses “credible persons who have seen, heard, or read thereof”¹.

#5 reads: Mother Frances “received her first communion, together with her peers, on April 19, 1857 [...] A small souvenir card of that memorable day, bearing the signature of the pastor, she cherished all her life as a remembrance of that great hour of grace. From that day her eucharistic love visibly increased more and more”².

Further on, in #35 and #37, she describes the hardships and sorrows “willingly” endured at the Marian Institute in Würzburg where she had been sent to serve as Superior: “*In this Institute all sorts of disorder prevailed. The financial, house, and religious affairs were lacking in order in every respect ...an ocean of sorrows and pain, severity and humiliations came from there, due to the calumnies that were believed*”³.

How did Mother Frances react? The Postulator writes, «Every natural bitterness she determinedly excluded from her heart, prayed fervently, and kept close to Jesus in the Tabernacle”⁴.

¹ *Articles for the witnesses of the Diocesan Process submitted by the Postulator of the Process Fr. P. Mag. Aquilino Reichert concerning the Fame of Sanctity, the Virtues and the Miracles of the Servant of God Mother Frances Streitel*, Rome 1937, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5, #5.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15, #41.

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



**SSM Castel Sant'Elia –
Wooden tabernacle (1905).**

And not only that: “shortening her hours of rest to be able to attend Holy Masses at the Carmelite Church of Würzburg, an hour and a half, then returning to assist at the religious exercises and Mass of the Community”⁵. Thus, presenting the testimonial evidence of her heroic virtues, the Postulator specifically notifies that “her extraordinary love to the Eucharistic Presence in holy Communion and the adoration before the tabernacle, of Him Who strengthens and promotes virginal chastity, kept her virtue spotless”⁶.

It was this same fervor, we further read in the Articles for the witnesses, that accompanied Mother Frances “during the ten years of her generalate” and after her deposition, to the point that “The Sisters had the impression that she prayed constantly”⁷. There she always spent some time before the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament”⁸. In the dark period of her deposition, “She is happy that she may sacrifice herself at the foot of the Altar daily, for the welfare and growth of the Community”⁹.

Sr. Michelina Maltempi’s remarks (witness VI - Ord. Nepi), reflecting on Mother Streitl’s last six years (1905-1911) which she spent in Castel S. Elia, both marvels and moves: “She loved in a special way the poorest and most suffering girls and helped them as best she could with tender love. She never complained of overwork, gladly helping in the afternoons to distribute hot food, to bathe the girls, and comb their hair. She loved prayer so much especially in church. I often saw her before the Blessed Sacrament absorbed in deep recollection especially on Sundays she devoted every month to adoration”¹⁰.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36, #101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67, #182.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37, #101.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32, #88.

¹⁰ CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Franciscae a Cruce. Novissima Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis. Summarium super virtutibus*, vol. I, Rome 2003, p. 90.

The Postulator, after noting that “the sisters never forget the depth of faith revealed” in her, writes at #105: “her Faith manifested itself in the highest degree in her cult of the Holy Eucharist, which she tried to instill in the hearts of her Sisters in every possible way. In the manner with which she uttered the word “Eucharist”, those who heard her could sound the depths of her Faith in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacred Host. Witnesses testify, that on one occasion she knelt eleven hours, in deepest recollection before the Blessed Sacrament. On the Sunday after the First Friday of the month, which is dedicated to the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Community, she would spend the whole day, with the exception of meal times, in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. Reverently kneeling, with her hands folded, and in deepest recollection, she would remain there for hours, as if her body were not subject to fatigue. She continued thus, up to her last illness, to the great surprise of her Sisters, who recognized in this a special grace of God, the gift of an angelic-like rapture before the Blessed Sacrament. Thus she writes in December, 1896: Mary must conduct me into the Mystery of our Altars, and adorn my soul with a bridal, eucharistic love, enabling me to receive the Bread of Angels and the Wine from which virgins sprout forth”¹¹.

Gathering the testimonies of many witnesses, the Postulator hastens to stress again “That in her great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, her love of God is shown in all its refulgence; and that she sought to manifest this love in her humble adoration before the tabernacle. After retiring from office she spent much of her time before the tabernacle, as we have already mentioned above. In the same manner she adored God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. [...] She prayed perseveringly for the privilege of daily Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in one of the chapels of the Congregation, which was later permitted in the Motherhouse of the Congregation in Rome. Her preparation for, and thanksgiving after Holy Communion, were pious and edifying and, if in any way possible, she received during Holy Mass. It was one of her greatest joys to be able to assist frequently at Holy Mass, and this she did as often as the many duties of office permitted”¹².

About her “exceptional graces,” it then reads that “the Servant of God, Frances Streitel, received supernatural gifts from God. One of these was the *gift of Tears*, especially in prayer before the tabernacle. She was often seen shedding tears when listening to discourses on the Eucharist”¹³.

Thus, we are not surprised by the “mysterious splendor” that Mother Frances manifested shortly before her death after receiving Holy Communion: “When, during the afternoon of March 4th, she reopened her eyes, her face had a mysterious splendor, that made an impression on all who saw her. She then received Holy Communion once more. It was the last time. On the 5th of March, which was a day of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the convent, the Superior said to her: Today your Guardian Angel will take your place at

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45, #120.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 70, #188.

Adoration. With tears of joy she answered in the affirmative. She again asked pardon of all the Sisters and asked for prayers”¹⁴

Mother Frances and her “unquenchable thirst for the Eucharist” in *Relatio et Vota* of the Theological Consultors

The echo of the *Articles for the witnesses* is manifestly welcomed by the Theological Consultors. In *Relatio et Vota III, on the Theological Virtues* of the Servant of God, the Consultor writes: “Her Faith was most evidently expressed in prayer, especially in eucharistic adoration even at night. She prayed with her hands folded, kneeling, without leaning, and spent as much time as possible in the chapel. She prayed while traveling, in a carriage or on a steamer. Sisters recall that sometimes she was so absorbed in prayer that it was necessary to touch her to attract her attention. She loved ... the Eucharist in a very special way: she spent many hours, even at night, in adoration of the Eucharist. She devoutly attended the celebration of the Mass, and received the Holy Communion most passionately. Her joy was great when the Church allowed daily Communion”¹⁵.



Back of the medal worn by SSMs from 1886 to 1898, depicting the Last Supper, with the inscription: “Amen dico vobis quia unus vestrum me traditurus est.”

In *Relatio et Vota VIII*, the Consultor then emphasizes that Mother Frances’s expresses in eucharistic adoration her constant and exclusive focus on Jesus: “The Servant of God Mother Amalia Frances Rose Streitel renounced the world and all earthly affections, and loved prayer greatly, which she did day and night; she was always a normal and very devout girl, she prayed continuously even when she worked. Her loving relationship with Jesus was expressed in eucharistic adoration. Her focus was constant and exclusive on Jesus”¹⁶.

The Consultor adds: “Her faith was well founded on a firm basis of prayer, devotion to the Blessed Virgin and especially to the Eucharist. A faith embodied in daily life. ... The Servant of God’s faith tended toward this loving encounter with her Lord Whom she saw as the One and Supreme Good.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73, #193.

¹⁵ CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Franciscae a Cruce. Relatio et Vota Congressus Peculiaris die 15 Maii An. 2009 habiti*, Rome 2009, p. 44. See also *Vow VI*: “The Sisters who witnessed at the Informative Process agree that the Servant of God was assiduous and absorbed in prayer, with a degree of recollection evidently above the ordinary. Some witnesses report that the Servant of God often prayed at length kneeling, without leaning, even at night. Her favorite form of prayer was eucharistic adoration, spending many hours before the Blessed Sacrament; she attended Holy Mass with extraordinary devotion and obtained permission to take Holy Communion every day, to her great joy” (*Ibid.*, p. 107).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

She loved God and instructed everyone to love Him, always prayed and did penance for the conversion of sinners. Her faith was expressed in assiduous prayer before the tabernacle. The Servant of God not only accepted the truths of faith, but most importantly lived out all its implications"¹⁷.

On addressing her charity, the same Consultor notes: "The divine love with which she was inflamed was shown outwardly by a strong piety, utmost fidelity in fulfilling her religious duties, an unquenchable thirst for the Eucharist, immense patience and absolute conformity to God's will in her sufferings"¹⁸.

An "ancient" question for today's SSMs

The authoritative sources we cited confirm that Mother Frances was renowned for her deep faith, which she nourished with unceasing prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist: What does her "unquenchable thirst for the Eucharist" suggest to us today?

Sr. Michelina Maltempi, witnessing at the Informative Process on Mother Frances' eucharistic piety, invites us to respond with our lives, leaving to the SSMs of yesterday, today and tomorrow a memory that also carries with it a pressing question: "I remember it was said among us Sisters: **'Who will take Mother Frances' place in worship when she will no longer be here?'**"¹⁹.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁹ CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Franciscæ a Cruce. Novissima Positio*, op. cit., vol. I, Rome 2003, p. 90.