

Blessed Maria Eugenia de Smet

1825-1871

PURGATORY

Maria Eugenia Josephine Smet was born in 1825 at Lille in France. She studied with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and at the age of 17 she desired to enter into their convent. But she remained with her family, devoting herself to ministry in the parish. She became a supporter of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In November of 1853 she professed the private vow of chastity and decided to promote an association of faithful dedicated to praying for the souls of Purgatory. She obtained many memberships, but the difficulties encountered convinced her to found a religious Congregation, with that same purpose. To begin her work she asked the advice of many people, among them were Pius IX and Saint John Marie Vianney. In the beginning of 1856 a priest entrusted to her five religious women who shared the vow to intercede for the souls of Purgatory. Thus she founded the Sisters Helpers of the Holy Souls. She desired to devote herself also to people still alive who needed assistance and said: "We must become for others the Providence of God."

Her vision for the liberation of souls in purification became always more clear: "Let us redouble our prayers to liberate the poor souls! I would like to empty Purgatory!" And again: "There are in the Church some Congregations aiming to relieve the most varied needs of the people, shouldn't there be also a congregation which is primarily devoted to helping the

deceased? Eighty thousand people die each day and who offers himself for these poor souls?"

On November 1, 1853 during the Eucharistic benediction Maria Eugenia prayed to Jesus to enlighten her on the choices she should make: "If it is You, my Lord and my God, Who inspires me with these concerns for the souls make sure that at the exit of the church a friend would speak to me about Purgatory!" Then as she was going down the steps at the exit of the church a woman she knew said to her: "During the benediction I had the idea to commit myself to offer, together with you, this month of November for the poor souls!" Still not satisfied of this proof, she asked advice to Saint John Marie Vianney, who several times had told her that her project: "Was a labor of love originating from the heart of Jesus and that her work has been desired by God for some time." One day the Holy parish priest of Ars wrote to her: "It is God who has inspired you to work by practicing the works of mercy for the liberation of the poor souls of Purgatory, in this way you fulfill completely the spirit of Jesus Christ by helping at the same time his suffering people on earth and relieving the pains of the ones who are in Purgatory."

Maria Eugenia offered all her prayers and her sufferings for the souls of Purgatory, faithful to the motto entrusted to all her fellow sisters: "Pray, suffer, work for the souls of Purgatory."

