

Mothers Of History

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Saint Anne, the Mother of Our Lady.

A proverb, we are told, is the crystallisation of the experience and consent of ages. It is from a proverb that we could, perhaps, best derive the greatness of Saint Anne, the mother of Our Lady.

One proverb has it that the greatness of a mother is her children. Our Lady is the greatest Mother of history, but She is also the daughter of Saint Anne, the only daughter, in fact the only child.

Saint Anne's claim to greatness is not a multiple claim; She has only one claim; but that one is all sufficient, all explanatory. She is the mother of Mary, who is the Mother of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Singularly blessed by God was she who is the Mother of 'Our tainted nature's solitary boast.' Expression of the place Saint Anne holds in the affection of her devout clients is nowhere better illustrated than by the fact that she is called 'Good Saint Anne.' What a wealth of meaning is implied in that simple little adjective 'good'. It expresses in a word all we would like to say in praise of Mary's mother.

It must surprise us somewhat that Holy Scripture, while it speaks much of other great women, as Judith or Esther, makes no mention of Saint Anne, who was mother of the Blessed Virgin, and of whom these other women were only types. We cannot penetrate the hidden designs of God, but from this silence of Sacred Scripture, we dare infer that Saint Anne led a retired life.

We depend upon what has been handed down to us by tradition for our knowledge of Saint Anne.

Saint Anne's husband was Saint Joachim. An ancient tradition tells us that Joachim and Anne had long been childless. To be childless was considered a wife's greatest disgrace among the Israelites. For many years, the hand of the Lord weighed heavily upon Saint Anne. She was tried in the furnace of humiliation before her race.

When God intends to elevate a person to great dignity and sanctity, He invariably humbles that person in various ways. Anne, the wife, was humbled for years, nor was the reproach removed until, in God's good time, she became Anne, the mother of Mary. In patience and resignation Saint Anne, the childless wife, endured all the contempt heaped upon her and ceased not, in humble unshaken confidence, to pray to Almighty God, for Saint Anne well knew that 'no word shall be impossible with God.'

Such virtue must needs call down the favour of the Almighty. Purified in adversity, found worthy in humiliations, and confirmed in sanctity, as she was, the Lord could now give to her the child of grace, that should tend to bring joy to the whole world.

Saint Anne was great before God, not only on account of her humility, but also on account of her magnanimity – her greatness of soul; her big generous desires to please God; for she had vowed to

offer her holy child, the blessed fruit of her fervent prayers, to the Lord. What renunciation! What a sacrifice! But Saint Anne knew that a mother's love is not a rival of Divine Love; only the foolish make it so, and begrudge their son or daughter to the service of God.

Far from being a rival of Divine Love, a mother's love is a reflection of it. God is Love, and to give us some idea of Divine Love, God gives us mothers. A mother's love is a tiny spark in the heart of a woman from the mighty furnace, which is Divine Love. Saint Anne loved her daughter dearly; but she remembered with gratitude that a child is God's gift, and so love of God triumphed over mother love.

Just where Saint Anne lived when Our Lady was born is uncertain. The strongest opinion seems to be that of Saint John Damascene, who spent a great deal of his life quite close to the Holy City, and is thus an excellent witness to the Christian traditions of Jerusalem. He tells us that the Holy Virgin first saw the light of day in her father's house of which we read in the Gospel, where Our Lord cured the paralytic.

It was the custom among the Jews to name their children, in the midst of the assembled family, the ninth day after birth. Saint Joachim's own name means Expectation; Anne signifies Grace. Gracious assuredly in the eyes of God was she who now named her child Miriam, a name of Egyptian origin; in Greek or Latin, Maria, which signifies both Sovereign Lady, or Princess, and Sea of Sorrow.

But we who wish to show Saint Anne's greatness always remember that her child was saluted by the Angel: 'Hail, full of Grace' – the destined Mother of God.

Saint Anne's feast is kept on July 26th. The Church has chosen a passage from Saint John Damascene's writings to be read at Matins (the Office of Readings, in the morning) on the feast. It sums up for us the greatness of Saint Anne. 'Now even as Anna of the Old Testament, when she was stricken with barrenness, gave birth to Samuel as the fruit of prayer and promise; in like manner the second Anna received from God, the Mother of God promised to her entreaties so that in fruitfulness she had not to yield to any of the illustrious matrons who had gone before her. Thus Grace (for this is the meaning of the word Anna) is mother of the Lady (the signification of the name of Mary), who in truth was made the Lady over all created things when she became the Mother of the Creator.'

Saint Monica.

Most of us think of Saint Monica in association with her son, the great Saint Augustine.

This is understandable for two reasons. We are familiar with the famous painting of the parting of Monica and Augustine at Ostia. Familiar, too, are the now famous words of an unknown bishop to Saint Monica: 'The child of such tears will never perish.' We are introduced, as it were, to Saint Monica sorrowing.

Sorrow played a big part in the life of Saint Monica; the sorrow of a loving wife for a harsh spouse and a devoted mother to a wayward son. Life was not kind to Saint Monica. Her husband, Patritius, was a pagan. Though naturally generous and kind hearted, Patritius was a harsh and unfaithful husband. His mother and servants took their cue from him in their treatment of his young wife. Monica bore her difficulties with patient cheerfulness and her conduct profoundly influenced Patritius, finally bringing him to the gift of faith after twenty years of married life.

Wife beating was common among the pagans and Monica's neighbours marvelled that not once did Patritius strike his wife.

Saint Augustine himself tells us of his mother in his writings: 'She served her husband as her Lord and strove to gain him to You, O God, by speaking of You to him by her virtues, by which You did render her beautiful and reverently lovely and admirable to her husband. . . . She never resisted him by word or deed in his fits of anger, waiting till the storm was over for a proper occasion. And when many wives came to her all disfigured to complain of their husbands' conduct, she jocosely told them to blame their own tongues.'

Saint Monica had three children, two boys and a girl – Augustine, Navigius and Perpetua. Augustine, the eldest, was born at Tagaste on November 13th, 354.

In spite of every difficulty, Monica brought up her children in faith and piety. We are indebted to Saint Augustine's own writings for the information: 'While yet a child I had heard from her of the eternal life promised to us through the humiliations of the Lord, our God, Who came down to cure our pride. My father could never so far overcome in me the influence of my mother as to prevent me from believing in Christ for she laboured that You, my God, should be my Father rather than he, and in this You did assist her.'

In another place Saint Augustine tells us: 'By Your great mercy, O Lord, my tender heart imbibed with my mother's milk, the sweet name of Christ, Your Son, my Saviour; and ever after nothing, be it ever so learned, ever so polished, ever so true, could, if devoid of this name entirely carry me away.' ENTIRELY carry me away! But partly, almost completely, carried away Augustine was. The explanation lies in Monica's one fault – she deferred her child's baptism and paid the price of thirty-three years' anguish.

Brilliant, proud, high-spirited, Augustine passed from hero to zero. Influenced by bad company he became ashamed to be less wicked than others. 'I became ashamed of not having done shameful things.' Monica's cup of bitterness seemed to be overflowing. Her brilliant son grown to man's estate, seemed to have carefully rejected all her early teaching. In the midst of it all, came a ray of hope, the famous assurance: 'The child of such tears will never perish.'

Alone with her grief, but incessant in prayer, Monica witnessed, through many years, the acute mental and moral struggles of Augustine. His great intellect had to be convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church. He was left to struggle alone.

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, the only man who could have assisted him left him entirely to himself in this matter, relying on the prayers of Saint Monica. 'Often when we met,' writes Saint Augustine, 'he used to break forth in praise of my holy mother, congratulating me on having such a mother, not knowing what a son she had in me who doubted all things.' Saint Ambrose knew, in spite of Augustine's conviction to the contrary. But Ambrose was wise in the way of souls and his wisdom counselled silence.

Step by step, Augustine fought his way to the final conclusion that the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic Church had an undoubted claim on his assent and obedience.

Came the famous 'take up and read' incident and the conversion of Augustine was complete. Having sought the well of happiness and found only the puddle holes of sinful pleasure, Augustine finally succumbed to the influence of his holy mother and turned to God. 'Our hearts were made for You, O Lord, and cannot rest until they rest in You.'

The loving son of thirty-three brings the good news to the prematurely aged mother. He desires Baptism. With his scholarly friend, Alipius, he goes to Monica. In his own words: 'Thence we go in to my mother; we tell her all. She leaps for joy and blesses You who are able to grant more than we can ask or imagine. For we saw that You had granted her for me, far more than she had ever dared to ask for in all her prayers and tears. You had turned her mourning into joy much more perfectly than she had ever hoped.'

Saint Margaret of Scotland.

Saint Margaret was born in Hungary in the year 1048. She was of royal stock, whose history is intimately bound up with the history of England.

On the death of King Edmund Ironsides, Canute of Denmark usurped the English throne and exiled Edmund's two young sons, Edmund and Edward, to Sweden. Canute asked the Swedish King to put them to death. He, however, secretly sent them to Saint Stephen, King of Hungary, who treated them as his own children.

Prince Edmund, on reaching maturity, married Saint Stephen's only daughter. Of this union were born a son and two daughters, of whom Margaret was the elder.

An ancient biographer records of the child Margaret that 'she was more beautiful than any other girl of her time.' Margaret was endowed with great intelligence. Saint Stephen's court was a model one, and from the saintly king, Margaret learned the lessons of holiness, which rendered her so illustrious as Queen of Scotland. Renowned for her beauty, she was deeply admired for the modesty of her demeanour and gentle disposition. At an early age, she showed a great love of prayer and liked to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament and at shrines of Our Lady.

Taught by Saint Stephen, she was prodigal in her generosity to the poor. So much so, that she earned the beautiful title of 'Mother of the Motherless and Treasurer of God's poor.' At the death of her father, Prince Edmund, Margaret resolved to leave the Court and enter the convent. Such, however, was not the Will of God. It was left for her younger sister, Christina, to become the nun.

History was being made in England all this while. Canute, the usurper, died and Saint Edward the Confessor became King of England. He immediately sent for the exiles. Margaret and her brother, Edgar, thus came to the English court. Great joy attended their return. But Edward the Confessor died soon after their arrival. Prince Edgar, Margaret's brother, was now heir to the throne. Edgar was young and Harold, who was afterwards defeated by William the Conqueror, seized the throne. Edgar was forced to flee for his life. Margaret accompanied him. They were shipwrecked off the coast of Scotland. Malcolm III of Scotland received them royally and gave them a permanent home at his court.

The characteristics that distinguished Margaret in Hungary were to the fore in Scotland. All admired beauty, fortitude under trials, evenness of temper, and unbounded sympathy for the sick and the poor. King Malcolm requested Margaret's hand in marriage. Margaret still longed for the religious life, but, persuaded she was fulfilling the Divine Will, gave her consent. In 1070, at Dunfermline, she became Queen of Scotland. She was then twenty-four years of age.

As a thanksgiving to God, she endowed Dunfermline with a magnificent church, dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. 'Whilst honouring the Three Divine Persons,' she said, 'I wish to ensure, as far

as I can, the salvation of my beloved husband and of any children God may give me, as also my own.’

God blessed her with children. Six sons and two daughters were born to the royal couple. The children were early trained to virtue by their saintly mother. She personally superintended their education.

She chose their instructors herself so that none but virtuous tutors should influence them. She even administered corporal punishment, if she deemed it necessary.

Her love for the poor increased, if anything, with her years. Malcolm gave her free access to the royal coffers. She dotted the country with abbeys, schools, monasteries and hospices for travellers and the sick.

Margaret had her slanderers, but her virtue was proof against all evil tongues. There were those who would play Iago to Malcolm’s Othello. Their filthy suggestions were refuted by Malcolm’s own investigations.

Following her to a supposed assignation in the forest, the mentally tortured King found her in a cave she had transformed into a chapel. Burning with shame and self-reproach, the royal eavesdropper heard her praying aloud, beseeching God to “fill the mind of my dear spouse with Your Divine light. Incline his heart to all that is highest and best. May he love You more dearly, follow You more nearly and realize the truth of Your Divine words: ‘What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?’ Amen.”

Malcolm burst in with the heartfelt prayer, ‘My God, forgive me. All unworthy that I am, I render You thanks for the woman You have given me, my holy queen.’ Falling on his knees, he humbly confessed his unworthy thoughts and begged Margaret’s pardon, which she lovingly granted.

From then on, the chronicler of the times tells us, Malcolm would often ‘watch the night in prayer by her side.’

Margaret passed to her eternal reward on the day the now pious Malcolm fell in battle at Alnwick. On November 16, 1093, she heard from Our Divine Lord the ‘Well done’ of the good and faithful servant.

Saint Margaret of Scotland, wife, mother, queen, pray for us.

Isabella of Spain.

A great ruler was Isabella, as history admits, but also a great woman, a great wife and mother. Hers was not a long life – 1451 to 1504 spans a mere 53 years. [In March 1974, Isabella was declared a ‘Servant of God’ on the road to possible formal canonization.]

The daughter of Isabella of Portugal and John II of Castille, Isabella absorbed the chivalry, the patriotism, religion and proud sense of independence of the Castilians.

Her pious mother’s first care was to train her daughter in practical piety, to fill her with that spirit of religion, which was the most evident characteristic of her later reign as queen. Uninfluenced by the licentious and frivolous court, the maturity and balance the growing girl displayed was remarkable in one so young – the direct result of her early training.

Described by one of her household as ‘the handsomest lady whom I ever beheld and the most gracious in her manners,’ it was little wonder Isabella had many suitors. Factions sought to use her in the political game, but Isabella knew her own mind. Marriages were arranged for her for reasons of State. She rejected them. Confederates sought to proclaim her queen of Castille. She refused. The crown belonged to her brother.

She was proclaimed queen against her wish. Surely now a young girl would acquiesce – fancy refusing a kingdom! Refuse she did, but agreed, as was her right, to be recognized as heiress to the crown, only on condition that she would not be forced to marry against her wish.

At 19, she married Prince Ferdinand of Aragon, eloping to him at Valladolid. At the time of marriage, the couple were so poor that they had to borrow money to defray the expenses of the ceremony. When Isabella was 23, her brother Henry died, and she succeeded to the throne. Castille was dismembered by factions, the treasury bankrupt, and public and private morals were a byword.

This Augean stable, Isabella set herself to clean. Crowned, her first act was to go with a great procession to the Cathedral to sing the solemn Te Deum. (‘You, O God, we Praise.’) She then prostrated before the High Altar to invoke God’s blessing for the future. And blessed she was, for in her rule one has little difficulty in discovering the Providence of God.

Trouble came quickly. Portugal declared war on the weakened Castille. Isabella met this first great care of State with the decision that characterized her. Long and tedious journeys on horseback were her daily lot. She saw to everything. Spanish chivalry warmed to this valiant woman, and in six months, the whole kingdom acknowledged the supremacy of Isabella and Ferdinand. Castille and Aragon, separated for more than four centuries, were united.

Justice characterized Isabella’s reign, abuses were reformed. She herself sat in judgment. Robbers and bandits who had been terrorizing the country were quickly suppressed.

In a few years, the country was transformed. The Moslem power in Granada was destroyed forever. It had lasted over seven centuries. In the wars, Isabella pioneered military hospitals and supported them from her own purse. The Moslem wars were a veritable crusade; and the inspiration was Isabella, who was determined to replace the Crescent with the Cross.

Isabella had one son and four daughters. She, personally, saw to their education and they all inherited her own virtues.

One daughter was that Catherine of Aragon, shamefully repudiated by Henry VIII of England in favour of Anne Boleyn. Sorrow marked Isabella’s reign. Prince John, her only son, died at the age of twenty; the eldest daughter, Isabella, Queen of Portugal, soon afterwards. Joanna, wife of Emperor Maximilian’s son, Philip, became mentally deranged.

If John’s death was a mighty blow, Isabella’s crushed her heart. But her truly religious spirit, resigned to God’s Will, made her realize that the sorrows of this life, like its joys, are but passing. Nevertheless, the combined sorrows must have contributed to her early death in 1504.

Isabella’s last will has been called a famous will. Her funeral was to be as simple as possible (the money saved to be used for the poor). She gave money to charities; marriage portions for the daughters of poor parents; money for the redemption of Christian captives in Barbary; and for the conversion of the Indians; her jewels to Ferdinand, that seeing them, he may be reminded of ‘the singular love I always bore him.’

Her last words were typical of Isabella, the Catholic. 'Do not weep for me, but pray rather for the salvation of my immortal soul.'

Even hostile critics regard Isabella, the Catholic, as one of the greatest rulers of all time. An historian, Irving, has summed it up: 'Contemporary writers have been enthusiastic in their descriptions of Isabella, but time has sanctioned their eulogies. She is one of the purest and most beautiful characters in the pages of history.'

Donna Anna Cavalieri.

At least five biographers have written of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. The first of these, and the most competent to speak, was Father Tannoia, a contemporary of the Saint.

It is from Father Tannoia that we learn some intimate details of Donna Anna, the Saint's mother. In his biography, Father Tannoia introduces Donna Anna by saying that she was venerated by all who knew her in Naples, for her spirit of prayer, her many penances, her detachment from worldly amusements, and, above all, her love for the poor.

He gives us, too, a perfect picture of Donna Anna, the mother, by recording her relation to her children. 'I was privileged to know this noble lady and to speak with her. Her memory, as I look back now, calls up before me the image of the great Queen Blanche of Castille (the mother of Saint Louis IX of France). I learned from Don Cajetan, the brother of Alphonsus, that every morning the good mother, after blessing her children, had them kneel down and say their prayers. Every evening she would gather them around her and teach them the truths of Faith with her own lips. She would always say the Rosary with them and taught them exercises of devotion to many saints. She was watchful of their companionships and would not let them mix freely with children of their own age, preferring to forestall sin by sanctifying grace rather than run any risk of their falling. She taught them to hate sin by every means in her power. For this reason, she took them to confession each week to her own spiritual director and kinsman, Father Pagano.'

Alphonsus himself, in later life, gave ample testimony to the goodness of his mother. 'I must confess,' he said, 'that if I was good at all during my childhood, if I was preserved from evil, I owe it entirely to my mother's care. Most of the time, my father was away at sea and could not devote himself as he might wish to the education and training of his children. Thus the whole burden fell on my mother.'

Donna Anna Cavalieri was the wife of Don Joseph Liguori, a distinguished nobleman and captain of one of the royal galleys. She was the mother of eight children, of whom Alphonsus, the eldest, was to become priest, bishop, founder of the Redemptorist Congregation and Doctor of the Church.

If it is true that opposites attract opposites, we have an illustration in the characters of Don Joseph and Donna Anna. Their temperaments were diametrically opposed.

Don Joseph was choleric and severe, and, by his naval training, a strict disciplinarian. A product of his age, he saw nothing contrary to religious principles in fostering great worldly ambitions for his first-born son. In contrast to Don Joseph, Anna's one ambition was that the children should all do the Holy Will of God. The effect of her influence and early training on the children is seen from the subsequent history of the members of the family.

Of her eight children, Magdalene died in infancy; Antonio became a Benedictine monk at Monte Casino; Cajetan was a diocesan priest, known for his holiness; Hercules married, and the affection of Alphonsus for his brother and his children shows the strength of the family ties. Of the girls, Mary Louise and Mary Anna entered the Convent. Teresa married the Duke of Presengano. The life of each one of them paid some tribute to the sterling character and qualities of their mother.

Donna Anna cherished the hope that her first-born might one day be a priest.

But when Alphonsus became the brilliant lawyer, her dream seemed to fade. When God did call Alphonsus to the priesthood, Don Joseph strenuously resisted his son's vocation. Anna sought the advice of her kinsman, Bishop Cavalieri. He counselled a continuance of her wise silence. Finally, Don Joseph requested the bishop to dissuade Alphonsus from giving up his brilliant legal career. The bishop's answer sounded the death knell to Don Joseph's ambition. 'I myself renounced my rights as eldest son in order to save my soul. Would you have me advise your son to do the opposite at the risk of losing my soul with his?'

Time, God's great healer, and Donna Anna's evident joy softened the blow of Don Joseph's disappointment. In the evening of his life, he bitterly regretted his opposition to his son's vocation.

Anna lived to see her dreams realized. Alphonsus was ordained in 1726. He founded the Redemptorists in 1732. Her long life of 85 years came to a close in 1755, seven years before Alphonsus was consecrated bishop.

Alphonsus was at her side to bring her comfort in her last days, but was forced to leave two days before her death. He went on God's work, as so often before, with Donna Anna's blessing ringing in his ears.

Margherita Sanson.

Antonio, we are told in Shakespeare's play, 'The Merchant of Venice,' commissioned his dearest friend, Bassanio, to write his epitaph. Robert Emmett would have no man write his epitaph, insisting that he and his cause be left to the verdict of history. Both history and the one dearest to her could be said to have written the epitaph of Margherita Sanson, the mother of Saint Pius X.

The historian would crystallize her greatness into a brief, impersonal, 'She was the mother of a modern Pope who was raised to the honours of the Altar.'

Antecedent to history's verdict are the words of an unpretentious tombstone over a humble grave in the Italian town of Riese. Saint Pius X, or Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, as he then was, left over her grave this tribute to his mother: 'Margherita Sanson: the exemplary wife, the prudent woman, the incomparable mother, who, May 2, 1852, lost her husband, Gianbattista Sarto. In sad and happy days, she kept brave-hearted courage and devotion; raised as good Christians her nine children, and crowned a life of toil and sacrifice by her death, February 2. 1894. Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto and his brothers and sisters pray for everlasting peace for their dear parents.'

By these words, Cardinal Sarto did more than show his filial affection for the woman whom God gave him for mother. 'The exemplary wife, the prudent woman, the incomparable mother,' was the ideal he would keep before all mothers as their true vocation. The epitaph and the subsequent history of her son give us the real picture of Margherita Sanson. The son painted the picture; history

has projected it and, in the process, focussed the attention of mothers throughout the Christian world.

Margherita Sanson never occupied an important official or social position. She lived the ordinary life of a simple, hardworking mother of a large family. 'In sad and happy days she kept brave-hearted courage and devotion; raised as good Christians her nine children.'

But Margherita was by no means an ordinary person – no mother is. Her influence was as deep and as enduring as it was far reaching; for Margherita influenced, as God would have her influence, those whom He entrusted to her care, and, of these, Giuseppe was to influence the whole world.

For this woman, who never spared herself in her 'life of toil and sacrifice,' motherhood was not a burden to be dreaded or a last shift to be endured. It was a vocation from God, and it was part of the mother, Margherita, to fashion under God, a soul to whom God was to give the highest possible honour on earth – the occupancy of the Chair of Peter.

Margherita Sanson was not destined to live to see her son – the parish priest of Tombolo – crowned Pope and become the parish priest of the world; nor were her ears to hear the world's acclaim, June 3, 1951, when he was raised to the honours of the Altar.

But Margherita had her consolations. She experienced a mother's pride when her beloved Giuseppe was ordained, became Archbishop, and later, a member of the Sacred College of Cardinals. Observers have recorded her simple utterance when she met her son after his Consecration as Archbishop. Pointing to her wedding ring and to the episcopal ring of the future Pius X, she said: 'My son, if I had not had this, you would not have had that.'

Margherita knew that Our Divine Lord instituted Sacraments for two states of life only – the married and the priestly. It was not in spite of marriage, but in and by marriage that she herself was to be sanctified. Such was the calibre of her soul that marriage, mutilated and debased and rendered sterile by selfishness was simply beyond her comprehension. God's Will alone counted. Does not marriage supply God's Church with priests and religious? This was Margherita's truly Christian outlook. How pleasing to the profound, theological mind of her son must have been that simple utterance: 'If I had not had this, you would not have had that.'

Margherita was of the people. Her skill later withstood many demands when providing for the needs of her rapidly growing family.

Widowed after nineteen years of marriage, Margherita held the large family together by the sheer force of her maternal love and influence. She provided for Giuseppe's education to the priesthood and balanced the domestic budget as only the good housewife can.

The years passed and left their mark. Giuseppe was made a Cardinal in 1893. He hastened to the aged and infirm mother at Riese as soon as official ceremonial permitted. Margherita's cup of happiness was almost overflowing. Almost, but not quite. Real woman that she was, Margherita had one request. Would Giuseppe don his Cardinal's robes that she might see him in them? He agreed and changed. Margherita could only sit and look at him speechlessly, while the tears of pride and joy and gratitude to God ran down her cheeks.

Then the mother faded into the true daughter of the Church. She tried to kneel for his blessing. His Eminence gently restrained her. Having blessed her, he kissed her affectionately. It was

Margherita's 'Nunc dimittis.' ('Now, O Lord, You can dismiss Your servant.) After that day, she never saw her son again in this life.

Giuseppe Sarto never forgot the influence of Margherita, his mother. He could declare that, through the years, he had always been aware, even when distant from her, of her love reaching out to him; of her strength giving him strength.

Whatever may be added of Margherita, her son's wording of her epitaph – 'the exemplary wife, the prudent woman, the incomparable mother,' remains the highest tribute that could be paid to any mother.

Zelie Guerin, Mother of the Little Flower.

Zelie Guerin and Louis Martin were united in the Sacrament of Matrimony, July 13, 1858. [In 2008, both Zelie and Louis were beatified by Pope Benedict XVI.]

Had they but known it then, a saint was to be fashioned in the home circle of the young people. Sixty-nine years later, to the very day, Pope Pius XI extended to the Universal Church the Office and Mass of their daughter – Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, the Little Flower.

Years later, an unknown pilgrim, with more enthusiasm than reverence, scribbled on the tomb of Zelie and Louis these words: 'Thank you, dear Christian parents, for giving us a saint to look after us.' This sentiment expresses the attitude of the Christian world towards these parents.

It was primarily a family lesson that Cardinal Mercier would have us learn from the history of the Little Flower. 'How glad I am,' he exclaimed, 'to know that she is the recompense of an exemplary family. We must never weary of repeating that everywhere.'

The home, which produced Saint Therese, enters into her way of glory. So, our emphasis is not so much on the product of the home, as on the home of the product.

Zelie received at birth the heritage of religious tradition and military bravery. Her father, Isidore Guerin, a soldier, witnessed the sacrilegious activities of the French Republican troops. He frequently took his life in his hands to assist the clergy, proscribed by law.

Whilst still in the army, he married, September 5, 1828. Zelie was born in 1831. Zelie's mother seems to have been very rigorous. 'My childhood and youth were shrouded in sadness. Good as she was mother did not know how to treat me, so that I suffered deeply.' Thus wrote Zelie in after life.

A convent school gave Zelie the spirit of faith and the thorough religious instruction she was to use to such effect in presiding over her own home. Although she was attracted to the Religious Life, God guided her to Louis Martin. He, likewise, had aspired after complete detachment from the world. After an engagement of three months, they were married, July 13, 1858.

Then was evidenced their somewhat unusual concept of married life. A year of continence followed, due on Zelie's part to a modest terror of the things of sense, and on the part of Louis, to the retention of an attraction to the ideal of a dedicated celibacy. However, by further study of the Church's teaching on marriage and by wise spiritual direction, their concept of marriage widened. Their pious experiment terminated with a longing to give sons and daughters to the Lord.

Two sons were born to them, but died in infancy: Marie Joseph Louis, at five months, and Marie Jean Baptiste, at nine months. Two daughters also died very young. Marie Helene, at four-and-a-

half years, and Marie Melanie, at three months. Their five other children, daughters, all entered Religion: the youngest, Marie Therese, becoming the world-famous saint, known as the Little Flower.

Their source of perfection now clear to them, Zelig and Louis began the ascent of the mountain of married holiness, the more eagerly that they were mutual support to each other in their noble ideal – the conviction that God wills parents to co-operate with Himself in bringing new souls into the world.

They were to experience the joyful stage, marked by four cradles, the sorrowful stage, five more cradles, but four little coffins; the Gethsemane of sacrifice of five children to the service of God; and, as part of their reward in heaven, the glorious stage when Therese would carry their names to the very altars of God's Church.

Three principles governed Zelig's home: God's supreme rights; faith in His Providence; a trustful, happy acquiescence to His Will. Zelig's was a life of generosity with God, and God was generous with His Grace at her death, August 28, 1877.

Therese, whose glory was to constitute Zelig's most authentic title to nobility, left us this little pen picture of her mother:

I loved my mother's gentle smile, Her pensive gaze would say the while: Eternity has drawn me from exile, I go unto the God of Love, above.'
