



Mother Frances Mary Teresa Ball
(born in Dublin 9 January 1794;
died 19 May 1861)
was the founder of the Irish Branch of
the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary
(IBVM).

Early Life

Frances Ball was born into a wealthy Dublin family. Her parents were John and Mabel Ball. She was born on January 6th, 1794.

Catholicism was still suppressed in Ireland at this time.

The lack of formal schools in Ireland acceptable to Catholics in the 17th and for most of the 18th centuries led many Catholic families, who could afford to do so, to send their children abroad to be educated.

Frances was therefore sent to England at the age of nine to the Bar Convent in York, which was an IBVM school, although Mary Ward was not acknowledged as the founder.

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Her Calling

Frances returned home to Dublin at the age of sixteen.

She was youthful, talented, had a striking presence and personality, and was much sought after by eligible young men.

She was expected to make an admirable wife for the son and heir of some rich Catholic Dublin merchant family.

At her debutante ball, a fashionable and lively occasion, she realized that she did not belong in the ballroom or in the life it represented.

In the midst of the music and wine and swirling dancers she knew with total certainty the direction of her future life.

She heard the words clearly and unmistakably 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all things else shall be added unto you'.

God was calling her to dedicate her life completely to his service. He wanted her to be a nun.

She confided to Fr Daniel Murray, a family friend that she wanted to become a religious as soon as she could get her mother's consent.

In 1809, Fr Murray was ordained Coadjutor Bishop of Dublin.

He was to become one of the greatest Archbishops the Dublin Diocese has ever had, and was instrumental in the foundation of the Irish Sisters of Charity and of the Sisters of Mercy.

Archbishop Murray realized that if the Catholic Church was to be revived after the persecution and suppression of the penal days, it was essential to provide Catholic education for the people.

He invited the IBMV Sisters at York to establish a school in Dublin but they were not in a position to send sisters at that time.

Her Mission

With the support of the Archbishop of Dublin, who hoped that she would set up an IBVM community in Dublin, Frances returned to York to enter The Bar Convent, where she took the religious name of Teresa.

Mother Teresa Ball returned to Dublin and set up the Irish branch of the Institute at Rathfarnham.

Mother Teresa and two companions moved to Rathfarnham House on November 4, 1822.

Because there were three of them in Rathfarnham House that first evening, Mother Teresa decided to call the house 'Loreto' after the village in Italy to which the Nazareth house of the Holy Family was said to have been miraculously transported.



The first of many Loreto schools began at Rathfarnham Abbey in Dublin.

For almost forty years after bringing the IBVM to Ireland Teresa Ball established a wide network of convents and schools across Ireland, as well as in India, Mauritius and Canada.

She died in 1861 after a long and painful illness.

Her Character

A notable feature of Teresa Ball's character was her unshakeable determination to carry out to the end any work she undertook.

She was a gracious and imposing figure, aristocratic, even a little awe-inspiring, especially to the younger sisters.

She was described as possessing modesty, gentleness, dignity, elegance and refinement, but her reserved manner led many to misunderstand her.

She faced prejudice and bigotry from many people in Ireland, difficulties with some Bishops and priests, as well as with her own religious sisters.

However, she often gave the impression of sailing through life like a ship under full sail, serene and untroubled, without any of the trials that lesser mortals had to face.

Mother Frances was a woman of great piety and administrative ability.

Her energies were devoted to the establishment of schools and to the development of the sisterhood which now has members in many countries.

Her natural reserve was allied with a natural authority: she was only eighteen years old when told by Archbishop Murray that she was to be the head of a new religious congregation, and twenty-seven when she returned to Ireland as superior of the Irish branch of the IBVM.

Generosity and the spirit of self-sacrifice she had in abundance.