



Founder and Educator

Born on: 23 January 1585
Yorkshire, England

Died on: 30 January 1645
Heworth, England

Venerable Mary Ward, I.B.V.M. was an English Catholic Religious Sister who founded the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as the Loreto Sisters.

She was declared "Venerable" by Pope Benedict XVI on 19 December 2009;

this is the first of three steps on the path to being declared a saint.

BIOGRAPHY

She was born to Marmaduke Ward and Ursula Wright in Yorkshire, England in 1585.

Mary's first word was "Jesus", which was a sign of things to come. It was a time of great conflict for Roman Catholics in England.

In 1595 she saw her family home burned down in anti-Catholic rioting.

As the home was burning, Mary and her sisters knelt down and prayed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the children were saved by their father.

In 1599 she moved to the house of Sir Ralph Babthorpe at Osgodby.

It was there at the age of 15 that Mary felt called to the religious life.

She entered a monastery of Poor Clares at Saint-Omer in Northern France,
then in Spanish Flanders, as a lay sister in 1606 and the following year she founded a new monastery of the Order for English women at nearby Gravelines.

Establishment Of the Institute

On the 2nd May 1609, she felt God calling her to do something else for His greater glory.

THE GLORY VISION:

One morning in 1609 Mary was in London and she had just made her meditation with, so she thought, very little fervour.



Whilst dressing, she decided to make amends for this by giving a large sum of money to a person of good birth who desired to enter religious life, but had not got a dowry.

At this moment Mary fell into an ecstasy during which she lost herself and her power of movement.

While in this state she saw clearly that it was not God's will for her to enter an austere order, but that she was called to a much more excellent state which would do far more to promote the glory of God.

After a space of two hours, which seemed to her like a quarter of an hour, a long time passed before she could hear anything except the word GLORY So on the 14th September 1609, she left with the approval of Fr. Roger Lee, S.J. who was her confessor.

She returned to England and went around visiting people who had lost the faith and in her quiet, gentle way brought them back to the Church.

Mary had great spiritual strength and a great gift of attracting people.

At the age of twenty-four she found herself surrounded by a band of devoted companions determined to work under her guidance.

In 1609 they established themselves as a religious community at Saint-Omer in northern France, and opened schools for girls.

Take The Same Of The Society

In 1611, Mary was lying in bed at Saint-Omer beginning to recover from a mortal illness.



She was all alone and in an extraordinary repose of mind when she understood quite plainly by an interior voice in what way she was to organise her Institute.

This brought her so great light, consolation and strength that it was impossible for her to doubt that this knowledge came from the divine Truth who is unable to deceive. Take the same of the Society. Father General will never permit it. Go to him,' were the words she heard.

This brought her great peace knowing that she was to found a congregation for women religious based on the order of the Society of Jesus, for the glory of God.

Although the venture was a great success, it was still controversial at the time, and it called forth censure and opposition as well as praise.

Her idea was to enable women to do for the Church in their proper field, what men had done for it in the Society of Jesus.

The idea has been realized over and over again in modern times, but in the 17th century it met with little encouragement.

There were other new startling differences between the new Institute and existing congregations of women; freedom from:

enclosure, the obligation of choir, wearing a religious habit, and from the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

The Just Soul Vision

In 1615, Mary decided to make an eight day's retreat. She wanted to know what special qualities were needed in a person joining this group. She got the answer on the 1st November.



On the feast of All Saints in 1615, when in Saint-Omer, God showed Mary a 'just soul' in inexpressible beauty.

All the virtues seemed to form a chain in it, as it were.

It was not only cut off from everything earthly, but was perfectly detached from self and united with God.

It also received true liberty of spirit, equanimity, heavenly wisdom and ability to accomplish whatever the perfection of the Institute required.

Her vision of holiness was of a person who was completely united with God and His will – justice, combined with total sincerity and spiritual freedom.

The "Jesuitesses", as her congregation was designated by her opponents, were suppressed in 1630.

Her work however was not destroyed. The Empress Catherine the Great of Russia welcomed her educational innovations to her realm, and there Mary Ward went, with the majority of her community.

It revived gradually and developed, following the general lines of the first scheme.

At the express desire of Pope Urban, Mary went to Rome. It was there that she gathered around her the younger members of her religious family, under the supervision and protection of the Holy See.

In 1639, with letters of introduction from Pope Urban to Queen Henrietta Maria, Mary returned to England and established herself in London.

In 1642 she journeyed northward with her household and established a convent at Heworth, near York.

She died in St. Mary's school, Heworth in 1645. After her death there, her companions thought it best not to bury her body near the city center where she died because of the dangers of desecration.

HER CHARACTER

Mary always wanted to give herself wholeheartedly – to be wholly God's. She was prepared to go on seeking and to trust God to reveal himself. She was ready to follow her truth even if no one understood her. She was ready to face criticism.

Her one aim was to do the will of God, so she surrendered herself completely into His hands.

She was sure that He would take her step by step along the path He had planned for her. She was able to love her enemies, so that a companion said, 'It was better to be her enemy than her friend'.

She forgave easily those who wronged her and prayed for them.

In her darkest hour Mary never lost hope. She knew she was right. What was striking was her personal greatness: her courage to go on hoping against hope, the charity that loved and forgave her enemies, the humility prepared to accept seeming failure, her complete trust in God, a love for truth, a loyalty to those dependent on her that would not let her remain quiet when lies were spoken against her good name or her companions.

Mary's sense of humour and deep joy made her rise above all difficulties and sufferings that came her way in following the path the Lord had marked out for her.

Mary lived and worked for others and was the centre of their joy and happiness. She consoled people in grief, was a helper in time of need, available, kind and sympathetic to all.



A pair of her rough shoes and her pilgrim's hat can still be seen in one of the CJ convents in Altötting in Germany.

**The inscription on her
tombstone sums up the life of a
woman
'Wholly God's'.**

**To love the poor, persevere in
the same,
live die and rise with them was
all the aim of Mary Ward
who lived 60 years and eight
days and died on 20th January,
1645"**



For over three hundred years, Mary Ward was never allowed to be acknowledged as the founder.

In 2009 - we celebrated in joy and hope, the 400th anniversary of her first foundation in 1609.

The work of Mary Ward is celebrated in an exhibit in the museum of the Bar Convent in York.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta writes about Mary Ward:

“Mary Ward is God’s gift to the Church and the World, for she brought to the Church and to Consecrated Life a new dimension – Religious Women involved in the field of education and in the formation of a new type of womanhood.

She could be this gift only because like Mary she was ‘the handmaid of the Lord’.” (Written in Calcutta on 8th December 1984)

In the address of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI to teachers and religious in the Chapel of St Mary’s University College Twickenham (London Borough of Richmond) on Friday, 17 September 2010 he said:

“Looking around me today, I see many apostolic religious whose charism includes the education of the young.

This gives me an opportunity to give thanks to God for the life and work of the Venerable Mary Ward, a native of this land whose pioneering vision of apostolic religious life for women has borne so much fruit.

I myself as a young boy was taught by the ‘English Ladies’ and I owe them a deep debt of gratitude.”