

# Mary Kasper, A Singular Flower

Following is the general address given by Pope Paul at the general audience on April 19.

By the grace of the Lord, we have had the spiritual joy, one of the loftiest moments of our ministry, of declaring "Blessed" Mary Catherine Kasper. In the last century she founded in Germany a religious congregation of women — the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. It is now spread throughout the world, and is dedicated to the service of neighbor, in so many works of charity. This beatification has recalled and spread the knowledge of this charitable institution, which merits on the part of the Church of today a reflection on our part.



This fact is now recorded, and forever, in the religious history of the world alongside other similar foundations, which characterized the life of the Church in the past century, particularly, and in ours. We can regard it as a flourishing of institutions, marvellous on the evangelical and social plane, so much so as to constitute a qualifying and strengthening phenomenon for the presence of the Church in a society in evolution, which in itself is certainly not turned towards the faith and towards the morals of preceding centuries. But in the 19th century, a new vitality awakens the Christian religious sense, and is manifested particularly, in works of human interest mainly inspired by a Catholic religious spirit.

This aspect of the lively spiritual renewal of Catholicism is centered in particular initiatives, each of which has at its root and in its heart a human, very human figure, who generates, summarizes, fixes and perpetuates for the initiative in question a specific religious character of its own. Holiness confers amazing energy on each of these figures, to such an extent that the Church is really reborn in beauty thanks to them, and shows, even in worldly and hostile eyes, an extraordinary vitality, which today we like to call charismatic. What holiness? It is a holiness that is always so unique and original, even if it is expressed in similar forms, that the earthly and historical face of the Church seems that of a spring garden.

In this garden — which botany, we mean the hagiography of the Church has difficulty (there are so many!) in classifying, that is in distinguishing and in recognizing sometimes the best flowers — we admire the modern saints, who bring joy to the Church and reveal to her the permanent note of her holiness drawn from the sources of inextinguishable divine grace.

Let us rejoice in the Lord! And let us all pause for a moment to contemplate the flower that has now been proposed to the veneration of the Church. Mary Catherine Kasper is a flower of singular beauty, who deserves to be admired and imitated. She was born in an austere land, but with what friendly affability for that fortunate land! She was born of the people; and how much this condition benefits the natural simplicity and molds the strength of the woman who dedicated her own existence to service of the people. She was born poor; but what charism of evangelical riches she succeeded in drawing from the experience of evangelical poverty in real life: humility, work, social sympathy, the spirit of service, the sense of obedience and of order. She was born a worker: and

she dedicated all her energies to work for bread, particularly for others.

She was born and grew up outside the spheres of secular culture, but what wisdom, what insight into human reality could be seen from her life among the people of her environment and of her time. She was born a woman; and how much goodness; how much delicacy and how much love she spread around her in the virginal purity of her behavior. Mary Catherine was born again as a Christian with holy baptism and with the pious and popular education of her profession as a humble, simple, and, one would think, ordinary daughter of the Catholic Church.

This is, it seems to us, the focal point in which the halo of her virtues is concentrated and from which there radiates the splendor of her vigorous, calm, masterly holiness. It is the coincidence of love for Christ, and in Christ, for the divine mystery, from which is derived the first, the supreme, the gratuitous vocation for the Love which "first loved us," the coincidence, we say, with love for one's neighbor, whoever he may be, who needs to be loved, served, looked after, forgiven.

Coincidence, however, does not describe correctly the relationship between love of God and love of ones neighbor. It is more correct to say derivation. Love for one's neighbor, in the economy of the Gospel, is derived, must be derived from love of God, received and returned. Love for one's neighbor, social love, if it is to be genuine, strong, inexhaustible and therefore holy and truly Christian, must have its source in love of God, in religious love.



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