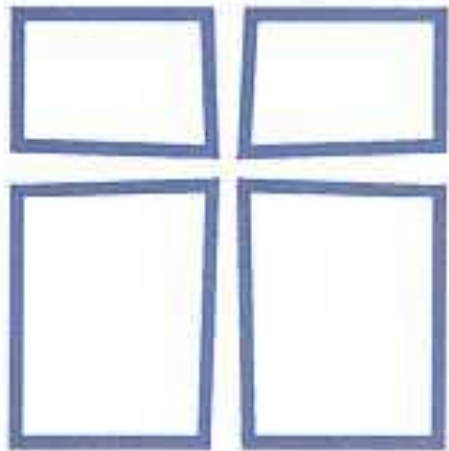

Theodosia



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of the Sisters of Mercy
of the Holy Cross
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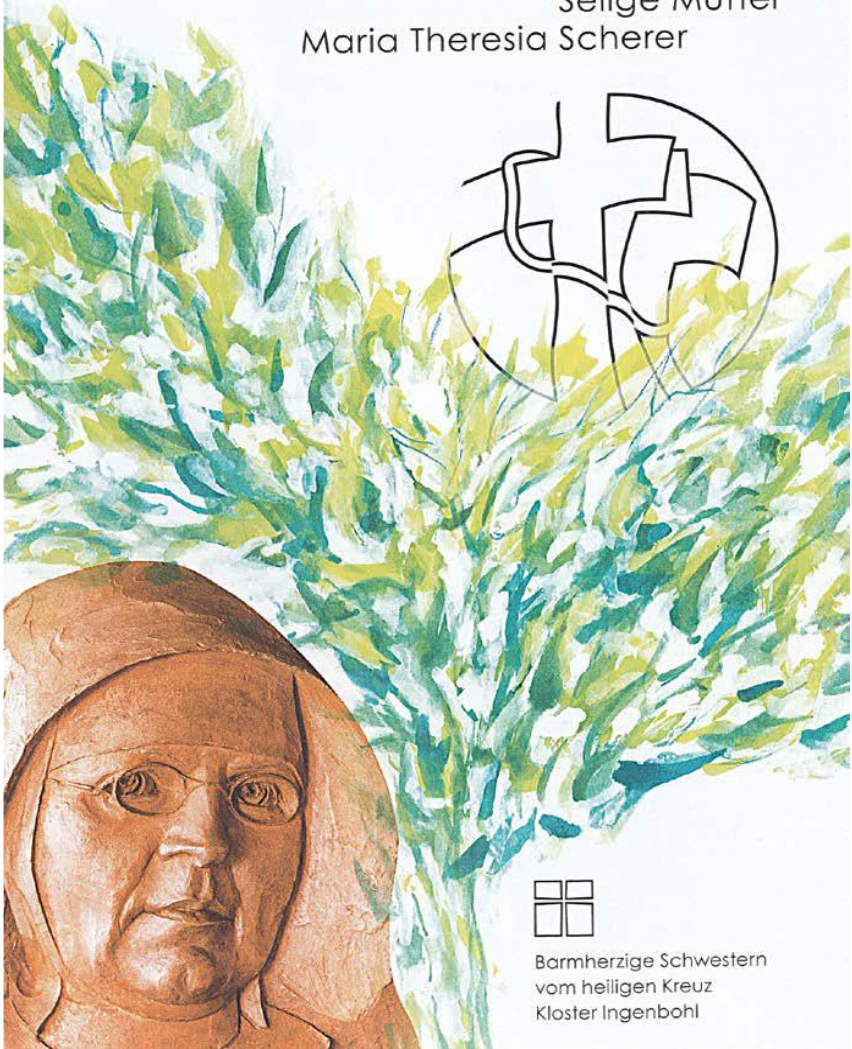
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200. Geburtstag

Selige Mutter
Maria Theresia Scherer



Invitation to the bicentenary celebrations, designed by Sr. Gielia Degonda

Editorial

In one of her poems, Hilde Domin, the lyric poet used the phrase, 'Do not be afraid. It blooms after us.' This comes to mind when I think of Mother M. Theresa, when I look at the poster commemorating the 200th anniversary of her birth. Yes, it blooms after her. It blooms in hearts. It blooms in people. It blossoms in works. By this I do not mean that it is always springtime. There have always been difficult times – for her and for us. Mother M. Theresa exemplified a courageous 'nevertheless' by doing what she could, day after day. Thus she remains a role model and advocate to this day – far beyond our community. It truly blossoms after her.

Albert Schweitzer once said: 'The most important thing in life is the traces of love we leave behind when we depart.' We want to find out about these traces in this present Theodosia. All of the articles paint a picture, each in their own way, of a great woman who still speaks to us and inspires us even after 200 years. Be it Dr. Markus Ries' portrayal of her life in the historical context of the 19th century, be it Abbot Urban Federer's view of her as a compassionate sister for whom love was everything, be it sisters' different ways of interacting with her – all of this is a sign that she is still thriving today.

We can only express our gratitude and delight at the diversity of the contributions. May reading also bring many things to fruition!

Sister Christiane Jungo

Mother Maria Theresa

A hopeful voice from a different era

Presentation by Prof. em. Dr. Markus Ries, church historian, Lucerne, on the Day of Consecrated Life on 1 February 2025 in the Convent Church, Ingenbohl



Mother M. Theresa Scherer

For almost 30 years, the Church and our monasteries in particular have been celebrating the Day of Consecrated Life on Candlemas. This year there are two occasions that motivate joyful reflection, because on 31 October it will be 200 years since Mother Maria Theresa Scherer was born. The theme of the bicentenary is: *'In all fragility a nevertheless - growing in becoming smaller'*. Both parts of this motto are relevant: the first for Mother Maria Theresa, the second for us today. We are all aware that

Maria Theresa experienced and lived through fractures, but in her case it was a time of growth. I would like to highlight this two-sidedness in four steps below.

1. Mother Maria Theresa and her experiences

Mother Maria Theresa experienced countless trials and tribulations - some of which are still with us today in certain ways. When we look back, these episodes awaken our compassion, because we have all reached our limits. But - in the spirit of the jubilee motto - they can also be a source of encouragement: Sr. Maria Theresa dealt with the challenges, she doubted and suffered, but she also drew strength from them. In this perspective, I would like to draw attention to five such hardships and pressures. For once, not in chronological order, as would be traditional in history, but rather by weight. If I read biographical contributions - and read her letters and texts in particular - then an order can be found on this basis. The question is: Which were the

most difficult moments for Sr. Maria Theresa?

a) Experiences of separation

In my opinion, the story of the separation between Ingenbohl and Menzingen should be placed at the very beginning. On the one side the hospital sisters, on the other the teaching sisters. From the spring of 1854, Mother Bernarda Heimgartner wanted to continue on separate paths, as the risks seemed too great for her. Father Theodosius, on the other hand, was convinced of his course of action: he wanted to further expand his extensive work, demanded teaching for schoolgirls and at the same time also care for the sick, poor, orphaned, deaf-mute, disabled and prisoners. School and charity. Tensions arose between him and Sr. Bernarda, and Sr. Maria Theresa stood between them; she suffered and came into conflicts of conscience. With the help of the bishops of Chur and Basel, the separation was achieved in 1856. Sr. Maria Theresa's suffering is clearly revealed in a letter she wrote to Mother Bernarda in the summer:

"You will understand that it must be the wish - not the command - of the Reverend Father Superior that I remain with him, because there is not yet a sister to whom the whole thing could be entrusted with complete confidence. On the basis

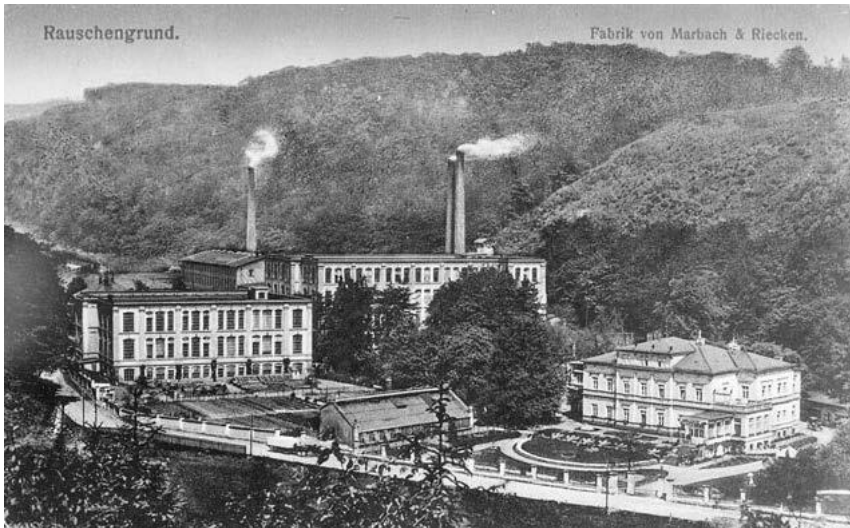


Mother Bernarda Heimgartner

of the advice and wishes mentioned and after listening to the voice of my inner self, I believe I can take the step of joining the Institute, which has its Motherhouse in Ingenbohl, without being an enemy of the one I am leaving. Oh no, dear Mother, I wish you could see into my heart how much I am attached to the Institute and have always loved and still love you ...". (Sr. Maria Theresa to Mother Bernarda, 30 July 1856, Writings of the Founders p. 75 f.)

b) Debts

The second major rift affected the whole community ten years later, after the death of Fr. Theodosius on 15 February 1865. We are talking about the financial adventures that the founder had entered into, in particular with the



Oberleutensdorf factory

takeover of the cloth factory in Oberleutenstorf and the corn straw factory in Thal. Sr. Maria Theresa had expressly spoken out against this, but it had not helped. Father Theodosius was convinced of his path - he wanted factories to become monasteries and he was determined to set an example of justice and labour peace to the whole modern industrial world. And again, the rift becomes clear in a letter:

"Because I was against this factory system and had to be, because it was completely against my conscience, Father Superior became suspicious of me. Of

course Sr. Alexandrina, Sr. Sophie etc. became aware of it, and so a rather unfriendly relationship developed". (Founder's writings p. 91).

The big shock came after the death of the founder: 93 creditors came forward, debts totalling 425,402 francs and 17 centimes! Fr. Anicet Regli, the successor to Fr. Theodosius, was barely able to recover:

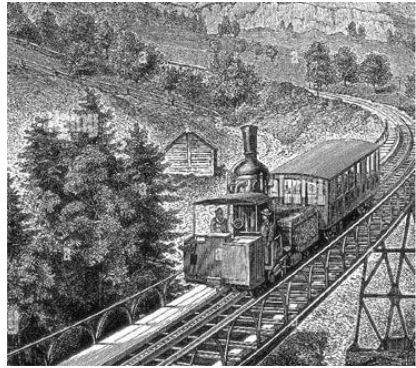
"When I was appointed as Superior and took a closer look at the situation of the institute, I was terrified. My courage began to sink and, according to human

calculations, I could not believe in a favourable outcome! I was afraid that the Institute would collapse under this burden of debt". (Founders' writings p. 104).

Mother Maria Theresa was not to be misled: she rejected unjustified demands, even those that were only presented later, and she kept on working and scrambling and collecting. It is hard to imagine what a challenge it must have been for her.

c) Childhood

Katharina Scherer experienced her first serious hardship as a little girl. She was seven years old when her father died on 15 February 1833 - as a result of pneumonia at the age of just 48. Confronting death and dying was no exception for children of the time, but Katharina was hit harder than usual. She had been close to her father and was therefore left helpless. The family was broken up and only the two youngest siblings were able to stay with their mother. She apparently had little contact with Katharina, which was a burden for a long time. Thanks to good care in the foster family, she was able to cope with this restriction. And what was

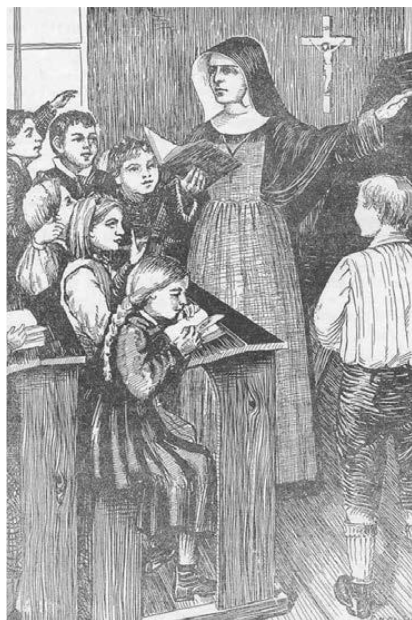


Industrial age: 1875 Rigibahn, Europe's oldest cog railway

important to her later: she received a solid religious upbringing there, which was of great benefit to her.

d) Training

Maria Theresa made her profession on 27 October 1845 in Wurmsbach. She was thus accepted into the community that Father Theodosius had founded with Bernarda Heimgartner, Cornelia Mäder and Feliziana Kramer in 1844 as a congregation of teaching sisters in Menzingen. In the same year, on 5 October, Maria Theresa and Father Theodosius met for the first time in Altdorf. It must have been a special moment: They both saw that they wanted to work in the same direction. They later explained that Katharina's acceptance into the



Sr. M. Theresa as teacher, drawing Sr. M. Agniete Steponaityte

young community was already a matter of forethought at the time. When she joined, she naturally assumed that she would also be destined for training as a teacher. But things turned out to be different. Immediately after her profession, she was assigned a job at the school: Her place of work was Galgenen in the district of March. It was a personal disappointment for the young sister, as she was given the opportunity to train herself as a

teacher. She was also not independent in the school, but had to do unskilled labour for Sister Feliziana. She wrote about this:

'It was difficult for me, all the more because I was very frightened of my sister because of her strictness'.

The lack of training changed her and initially turned her into a rather anxious woman who saw the work as a burden. And again, she struggled against it so that Fr. Theodosius would write:

"Our sunny child from Meggen is a cheerful person who gets on with everything and likes to oblige. She also has pedagogical talent and a rich intellectual gift, as I was pleased to notice in Altdorf."

Nevertheless, the feeling of oppression remained. Even at her next place of work, in Baar, she still had to realise:

"My anxiety had not yet left me [...]. I never dressed warmly in the very cold weather, often slept on the floor or in bed on a mattress, but I did not do this with permission. [...] I also read spiritual books in secret and whenever I could find time'.

e) Political situation

Finally, the fifth book resulted from the political situation. In Switzerland, an increasingly hostile wind had been blowing against the religious orders since the early 1930s. Monasteries were seen as obstacles to the desired progress, because they were rooted in the old order. In 1841, the canton of Aargau abolished all religious houses, and there was also opposition against them in traditionally conservative Catholic cantons. In Zug, the new schools of Menzingen and Baar had to fight against much mistrust. Other congregations also felt an opposing wind at this time. The canton of Lucerne cancelled the community of the Baldegg Sisters, which Chaplain Josef Leonz Blum had already founded in 1830, twice: in 1848 and 1853.

2. Women and female congregations in the Church of the 19th century

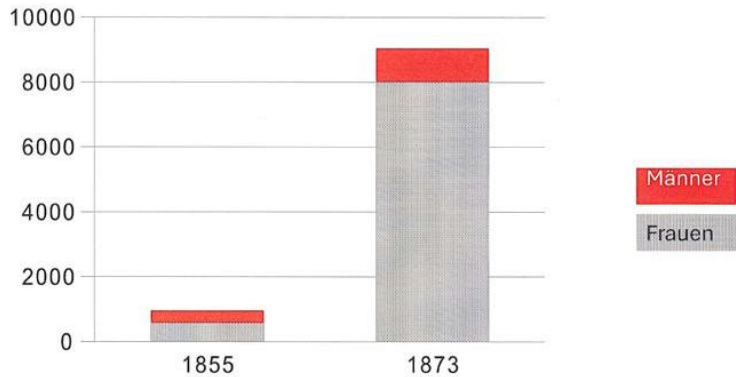
Women's religious communities were of particular importance. They emerged as a result of enormous changes in politics, the economy and the Church. The

changes can be summarised in six key words.

a) The French Revolution and its consequences

In the 18th century, a new social order emerged, which was first implemented in France after 1789 and then in numerous European territories. The associated world view is known as 'liberalism'. It was based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment and its view of humanity. A person should be what he or she has made of himself or herself through his or her own efforts - and not what descent and origin have dictated. The world and responsibility belong to the capable, not the high-born - feudalism and the estate-based society must be abolished. This intellectual orientation found expression in the Declaration of Human Rights of 1789. It granted everyone their own, independent freedoms and freed the individual from the official regulation of private life. Everyone has personal and indispensable protective rights vis-à-vis the community. Because the church and its institutions were the pillars of the previous order, liberalism developed an anti-

Ordensleute in Preußen 1855 und 1873



Claude Langlois, *Le catholicisme*
521

The female century

clerical mood. It primarily affected contemplative monasteries, which were regarded as unproductive places of idleness and considered to have fallen out of time. As a result, hundreds of convents were nationalised and dissolved. In view of the state's claimed control over religion and the demand for religious freedom, the Pope condemned the Declaration of Human Rights in 1790. It took a long historical development to change this relationship. The Church now fully supports human rights.

b) Swiss constitutional struggles

The first half of the 19th century in Switzerland was characterised by the search and struggle for a new constitutional order. This was followed in quick succession by overthrows, coups d'état and revolutions. No constitution was really long-lasting: The Helvetic Republic began in 1798, followed by the Helvetic in 1803, the Restoration in 1815 and the Regeneration in 1830. In the end, the ideological and political tensions erupted into an armed struggle and the Sonderbund War

within Switzerland. The victors were the liberals, who were committed to the new social order; in 1848 they founded the modern federal state that still exists today. This development penalised the monasteries, the dioceses and the clergy and this is why the clergy opposed the changes for a long time.

c) Economic reorganisation

The renewal of the state and society was accompanied by a considerable change in the economy - the term 'industrial age' is used for the 19th century. The processes were driven by a series of technical achievements that fundamentally changed the way people earned their living and social structures. Keywords are: 'industrialisation', 'railways', 'lighting', "telegraph", 'steam engine'. On the downside was the resulting emergence of a new form of poverty, as there was no social security for the labour force. No one received an old-age pension and no one was insured against accidents, illness or unemployment. Maximum working hours or holidays were still unknown and child labour was widespread. The emergence of an

entire class of underprivileged people is characterised as 'pauperism'. It was significant because the family structure changed at the same time: farmers and tradesmen had lived together in large households of relatives and employees: mother, father, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, maidservants and farm labourers. This way of life was now replaced by the small family household, which only comprised two generations. Unlike in the past, it was no longer able to absorb the blows of fate and social problems. Others stepped into this gap - above all the women's congregations for religious reasons. Their work was extremely important to society before social welfare organisations were created over time and new laws were passed to protect workers.

d) Polarisation in the church

The contrast between friends of the new social order and its opponents developed within the church - here, too, liberals opposed conservatives. While the enlightened side was a considerable force at the beginning of the 19th century, its influence dwindled more and more. Leaders

at all levels - right up to the Pope - opposed modern society and sought to limit its influence. They saw themselves vindicated by numerous anti-clerical measures taken by modern states. At the end of the century, the Catholic Church stood as a largely unified entity against civil society and at a distance from the republic and democracy. The monarchy, which was regarded as a form of government willed by God, was held in higher esteem. The ideal image was also to apply to the church, because of which the Pope became a figure of identification. His position was consolidated and the faithful admired him greatly.

e) A period of renewal for religious orders and congregations

After the destruction and devastation caused by the secularisations, the religious orders recovered within a few decades. New monasteries were founded in large numbers - including in Switzerland. A new form was added: women's congregations under the leadership of a superior general. Originally, these were third-order communities with Franciscan-

oriented rules. The members took vows and lived according to the evangelical counsels. Like the Jesuits, however, they were not bound to a religious house or the cloister. Instead, they were involved in social work, nursing, schools, orphanages and retirement homes. Their work thus corresponded exactly to what the times demanded. Congregations came into being in many different ways and in very large numbers: from 1850 to 1860, 42 new congregations were approved, and from 1862 to 1865 alone there were 74. In France, a total of around 400 new congregations emerged between 1800 and 1880. The number of members grew to great heights; it was a real model of success. In Switzerland, the three main congregations of Ingenbohl, Menzingen and Baldegg were the most important.

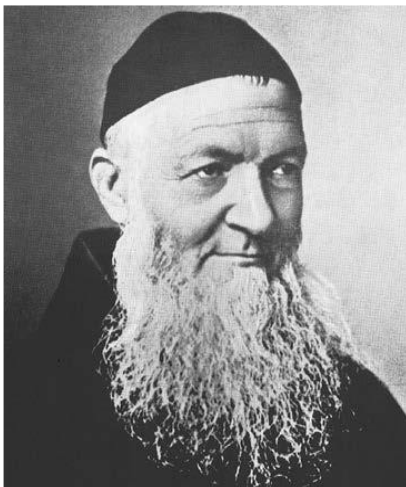
f) Feminisation of religion

For the period after 1800, some historians speak of a veritable 'feminisation of religion'. From a practical point of view, divine worship and the church became women's affairs. This trend can be seen in several characteristics, including the gender distribution of

attendance at church services, the growth of women's congregations and the share of women in extraordinary religious experiences.

3. Superiors and Father Theodosius

Father Theodosius Florentini was able to realise his pioneering work. Thanks to the cooperation of two women who would later lead the two congregations as the first Superiors General. Their collaboration was characterised by respect and trust, but also by tensions. Bernarda Heimgartner, from Aargau, was one of the three



Father Theodosius Florentini, around 1860

teaching sisters who joined the newly founded community in 1844; Maria Theresia Scherer took her vows a year later. We know a lot about how these three personalities worked together, because Father Theodosius travelled a lot, so he was always in touch with the sisters through letters. Many letters have been preserved and show how he acted as a charismatic inspirer and how the sisters faithfully followed him. After a period of growth, tensions arose and crises ensued. Florentini aspired to a single, large community, but this proved too complex and diverse with schools, hospitals, homes and factories. The result was a split into two congregations in 1856. The Capuchin priest found this difficult to cope with, as he saw himself as primarily responsible and wrote:

"I consider myself to be the sole founder and founder of the institute and therefore claim all the rights of a founder [...]. I never wanted to be a Superior, as the rule prescribes, but rather the centre, the soul. My position is therefore not that of the rule, but [...] I consider myself [...] to be the father of this community, appointed by God, apart from

which it can have teachers, educators, co-workers, but no other father. [...] From this point of view, I called and still call the institute my own [...] I call it mine like a father calls his child, whom he has begotten and raised, his own; like a writer [...] calls the ideas he presents his own.'

Sister Bernarda, on her part, complained bitterly that the founder treated the members of the community as *'a commodity that could be disposed of as one pleased'*.

The outcome of the story hit those involved hard, but it directly benefited both congregations. Maria Theresia Scherer was now responsible for the Ingenbohl Holy Cross Sisters, who had become independent; she worked well with the Founder and maintained close relations. The diversity and scope of his projects became a burden. He wanted to solve the social problems of the time by founding his own enterprises, which were organised like monasteries. However, he needed a great deal of money for this, which he obtained by all possible means: with sermons begging for alms or

collections from private individuals, for which the sisters also had to set out on their travels and endure many adventures, but also with the help of lotteries or – in all seriousness – by issuing shares. At the seminary in Chur, the students were required to join a 'ten-cent club' and commit to paying 10 cents into a donation fund every month. When, in 1858, there were once again large gaps in the budget and not enough money could be raised, Theodosius wrote to Sr. Maria Theresia:

'Pray for me, and let others pray, that God may give his blessing, without which everything is nothing. I would like to send money for Ortenstein, but I have none. However, I hope that the good Lord will not abandon his own.'

Mother Maria Theresa consistently supported Father Theodosius, even when she had doubts about his plans. In 1860, she wrote to Countess Mathilda von Revertera-Salandra (1825-1914), a great benefactor of the congregation, about the expansion plans at that time:

'I do not yet know what the Reverend Father Theodosius is

doing in Bohemia. [...] There is no doubt that all kinds of difficulties may arise, but this should encourage us. "What costs nothing is worth nothing," as we say in Swiss German.'

4. On the 200th anniversary of her birth: listening to a voice of hope.

Anyone reading Maria Theresia Scherer's letters today will encounter her as a prudent, determined mediator; her advice and guidance were well-considered and testify to her personal maturity and experience. She drew her energy from prayer and from an unshakeable trust in God's help. She sought to guide her fellow sisters along the same path: she mobilised spiritual forces to overcome both external obstacles and internal temptations. In this way, it would be possible to persevere in illness and accept suffering. In keeping with a great ascetic tradition, she recognised in the determined fulfilment of duty a way of following Christ, in particular following the cross. She demanded unconditional fidelity to the rule, but also practice in patience and humility. To this end,

she gave instructions that went into great detail, for example on the correct practice of penance, but also on fasting and general renunciation. The advice was related to specific circumstances and experiences described by the sisters seeking help. Maria Theresia Scherer reveals herself to be a person who herself had dealt with many difficult experiences. Since she spoke as Mother Superior, her own searching and struggles remained largely in the background. Her burdens are only hinted at in many places to her fellow sisters; at best, they can be inferred indirectly from the instructions she gave. As Mother Superior, she was conscientious, patient, reliable, intelligent and cheerful. Long before her beatification, a writer named Anna von Liebenau (1847–1915) came to a really nice conclusion:

'The greatness of this woman, who rose from the most modest of circumstances and had only a poor and patchy education, lies in the fact that she found herself, as it were, suddenly confronted with the most important problems, the mastery of which required a universal mind, experience and skill in dealing with life.'

The Greatest of All Is Love

**Homily by Abbot Urban Federer OSB, Einsiedeln Abbey
on the feast day of Blessed Mother Maria Theresa, 16 June 2025,
in the convent church, Ingenbohl**

Readings: 1 Cor 13:1-13; Mt 25:34-40

Dear sisters and all of you present here,

On this death anniversary of Blessed Mother Maria Theresa, I would like to begin my homily by asking the question: What will God say to us when we meet Him after our own death? We know what He will say to us, for we have heard it in the Gospel: 'I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to see me.' For us religious, this call from the Gospel of Matthew is a challenge. Christ does not say: I was in church and you came to me. The bell rang and you prayed. For Christ, prayer and silence are prerequisites for a genuine relationship with God. What is more important to him is that our faith is concrete: we do not find Christ only on the altar, in the Word, in the tabernacle. We find Christ in our neighbour, in the

person who needs us: 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

My dear brothers and sisters, this is what made Mother Maria Theresa famous: she did not merely contemplate works of mercy, but together with Father Theodosius Florentini, she founded an order centred on active mercy. She put Christ's call into practice in her own time. Why do I not simply say 'Amen' at this point, break off the homily and allow this anniversary to be celebrated? For it is never easy to live the Word of God in a concrete way. For history shows that we religious must never cease to seek what God's will is for today and how it is to be implemented. Blessed Mother Maria Theresa gave her answer in her time – we must do so today! Have we not sometimes



Mother M. Theresa, drawing by Sr. Immaculata Weidinger

implemented the Words from the Gospel of Matthew one-sidedly? Over the past nearly 200 years, thousands of sisters have followed in the footsteps of Blessed Mother Theresa, striving to serve others through nursing, caring for the poor and disabled, and educating girls. Often they reached the limits of their strength, and were even overburdened because society used them as cheap labour. They worked tirelessly, gave their lives – and then had to hear from younger

women that they did not want to enter a religious order where the main focus was on work rather than contemplation.

In fact, our religious orders must constantly ask themselves how we can correctly understand the Words of Christ: 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine.' Have we sometimes placed too much emphasis on action? Today, when the cantons are responsible for healthcare and education, is our action still needed? Can we still simply focus on the Words of Jesus: 'What you have done?' We may therefore ask God anew with the Gospel on this feast day: 'When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? It is not only about action, it is also about relationship: recognising God in our neighbour. We should therefore read this exhortation from the Gospel of Matthew together with the words from St. Paul's hymn to love. If we do works of mercy but do not have love, it is useless. When we work and work – outsiders would be amazed at how much work is done in a convent – we must not stop

believing that we can never finish a task ourselves. God completes what we can only begin: the Letter to the Corinthians says: 'But when the perfect comes, the imperfect disappears.'

So, my dear friends, this is how I understand the words of Blessed Mother Maria Theresa, which we have already sung: 'Do it day after day.' It is not just a matter of doing and working, but of 'do day after day what lies in your power.' On the one hand, our actions are always fragmentary, which God wants to complete. And we have also sung: 'Help us to persevere in loving you.' As religious, we should first and foremost be loving people. So today, on the death anniversary of Blessed Mother Maria Theresa, we celebrate what Christ will say to us at our death – and now I connect the two readings: 'As you loved one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you loved me.'

Dear sisters and my dear people, we are grateful for the work of Blessed Mother Maria Theresa. We are grateful that women in her order have served people for almost 200 years and continue to do so today. But we do not want to focus solely on their actions. We are grateful for the love they have shown to people – and thus to Christ. Personally, I am grateful that I was able to get to know God under the care of the Ingenbohl Sisters since my kindergarten days. It was the Ingenbohl Sisters who brought me closer to God. These sisters were for me a mirror of God's love and presence in my life, as St. Paul says in the reading: 'Now we see in a mirror, but then we will see face to face.' So I conclude this Holy Year with the words of St. Paul to all of us, so that we may be pilgrims of hope: 'For three things remain: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.' Amen.

Conversation between Mother M. Theresa and Sr. Ulrika

Homily through conversation between Sister M. Jacobe Wetzel and Sister Therese M. Wetzel in the Convent Church in Hegne on 15 June 2025

Sr. Ulrika: Dear Mother M. Theresa, this year is your special anniversary: you were born 200 years ago in October. Unfortunately, we did not meet in earthly life. When you died, I was only six years old. But we have a lot in common.

Mother M. Theresa: Yes, Sr. Ulrika, you are very close to my heart. You carried a great love for Jesus, for the Crucified One, within you. We also have a lot in common from our

childhood: I lost my father very early in life and with him my home; you grew up in a very poor family and had to work hard from an early age because your family was the poorest in the village. My parents were also poor.

Sr. U.: Yes, poverty became familiar to both of us at an early age. But I have always experienced and felt that although I am poor, I have everything, O life, O wealth. What a gift life is,



Mother M. Theresa



Sister Ulrika

especially life in and with God.

M. Th.: Yes, through our poverty we have taken in the riches of God – and connected ourselves with the poverty of Jesus. He who was rich let go of everything to make us rich. His love has no end. Until the end, until his death on the cross, he loved us.

Sr. U.: Your motto also appealed to me in a special way, and I wanted to live it: 'Totally given to the Crucified, therefore totally given to their neighbour - true witnesses of the love of Christ', and I felt that love knows no measure, so I wanted to suffer and do everything in love and for love.

M. Th.: You understood me very well. It is not important where each one has a place, but how she acts in her place: loving, in the service of God and people, a representative of Christ's love.

Sr. U.: You found your calling in your love for Jesus, the crucified one, and for people. Actually, you didn't want to enter the convent, nor did you want to get married. What made you change your mind? Was it your encounter with

Father Theodosius, who inspired you with his passion?

M. Th.: It was very strange. At first, I was not interested in religious life. Then I went on a pilgrimage to Einsiedeln with a friend. There, I began to think about religious life again, but I knew that was not what I wanted. Nevertheless, I spoke to my confessor about my questions. He recommended me to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Within a short time, I was firmly resolved to enter religious life. That is why, the Immaculate Heart of Mary has remained so important in my life.

It's wonderful how God has guided and planned everything for you. You also say, 'God will provide,' and you have experienced that. God plans everything, including your meeting with Father Theodosius.

M. Th.: That is certainly true. I actually wanted to visit a convent in France, but then I heard that a convent was also to be founded in Switzerland. I liked the idea. This led to the memorable meeting with Father Theodosius in Altdorf on 5 October 1844. I will never forget that day. In him, I experienced an

individual who carried such a compelling vision in his heart that it sparked a passion within me. No one could stop me from making this decision.

Sr. U.: I got to know the Holy Cross Sisters at the hospital in Rorschach as they cared for me. Their dedication and their way of being convinced me that I too should follow this path in this community.

It is always people who radiate God's love and mercy who convince others and whose lives invite others to do the same. I wanted that too in my place in the kitchen.

M. Th.: You did that too, that's why people still confide their concerns and needs to you today. It's amazing how you touched people's hearts. You didn't write any books, you didn't hold any leadership positions, you were simply there, loving everyone around you. People could become better when they were with you.

Sr. U.: I have tried to live that way. Always being in the moment and perceiving the needs of the time, when I was working, I was completely focused on my work,

with my cooking students I was completely focused on them, and in prayer I was completely focused on Jesus. Just as you did.

M. Th.: Yes, in my many tasks, I tried – like you – to always live and act in God's presence and thus be totally present in everything.

Sr. U. Dear Mother Maria Theresa, my province of Baden-Württemberg is celebrating its 130th anniversary this year. What can we give the sisters today, what can we recommend to them?

M. Th.: Do what lies within your power day after day, no more and no less. And be completely devoted to God in everything you do and be there for the people who need you. And always trust in God, he will provide, and he will always show you the way. We are always in the hand of God.

Sr. U.: I also wish for my province that every sister never loses sight of the greatness of her vocation given by God and that they live together in such a way that people who come to Hegne feel that God is in their midst, tangible in the way they interact and live with one another.

M. Th.: Yes, they should never forget that God's goodness knows no bounds and that He never abandons His own.

Sr. U.: Dear Mother M. Theresa, I wish every sister the same trust in God that you have, and the experience that with God and for God much can be done, indeed everything. You experienced this many times, even right at the beginning. You were a teacher with all your heart and you loved the children. Establishing the school system was a concern of Father Theodosius.

M. Th.: Yes, you're right, I was a teacher with heart and soul and loved being with children who hungered for knowledge. Things turned out differently. You know, Father Theodosius was a visionary; he saw the needs of the time and wasn't content with just doing something. He wanted to do everything in his power and beyond. He exhausted himself. He saw the plight of the poor, people without a roof over their heads, and he wanted to help them. He saw in me what I myself did not yet see.

Sr. U.: He saw great strength in you and rediscovered his own passion

in you. At the age of 25, you were already a mother to the poor in a poorhouse. That must have often been beyond your strength?

M. Th.: Yes, I learned from this experience that much can be done with God and for God, and in love, just as you have recognised and lived.

Sr. U.: At that time, the young community was growing rapidly, with young women constantly arriving who wanted to join the community and needed a place to stay, a mother house.

M. Th.: And how fortunate it was that Father Theodosius purchased the Nigg'sche Hof and we were able to renovate it for ourselves.

We had a home for the many sisters. And everyone lent a hand.

Sr. U.: A tremendous time of blossoming and growth.

And you were in contact with all your sisters, you were connected to each one of them. That's wonderful. You have a heart full of love.

What was the most difficult time for you during all those years?

M.Th.: Many things were very difficult, but we got through them together and grew ever closer.

But then came the sudden death of the founder. That was the hardest thing.

God was with us.

I was only forty years old. Father Theodosius' strength was exhausted. He saw the plight of the people and then took on too many projects. The donors withdrew, friends withdrew. I warned him early on. I suffered with him, I knew his temperament, and I knew that in his enthusiasm he was getting carried away with completely unreasonable projects.

Then he died on 15 February 1865, leaving behind a huge mountain of debt.

We, his children, took on the debts, and so this was the first duty and certainly also the greatest wish of the blessed man. I had great faith in our God, who helped us to stick together and keep our eyes on the glory of God and the good of mankind. And we sisters stood together and fought together.

Sr. U.: This great burden did not take away your cheerfulness, which you already possessed as a child.

M. Th.: I drew the strength to do so from my faith in a merciful God. For me, the Gospel was a joyful message.

And, dear Sister Ulrika, we both lived with our eyes fixed on the cross. We are both Holy Cross Sisters.

Mother Maria Theresa, When I Think of You

Sisters reflect on Mother M. Theresa

As we commemorate the 200th birthday of Blessed Mother Mary Theresa Scherer, we honour a remarkable woman whose legacy embodies the essence of compassion, selflessness, and devotion. Her life's journey, marked by unwavering faith and trust in God, continues to inspire generations. Blessed Mother Mary Theresa's timeless wisdom guides us to "be courageous and strong," drawing strength from the Divine. Amidst life's turmoil, she assures us that "soon the sky will be clear again." Her spiritual life, nourished by hours before the Blessed Sacrament, was the source of her interior strength. She urges us to "always move forward, never stop, and persevere courageously," faithfully following our crucified Saviour. As we strive for peace, Mother Mary Theresa invites us to discover the "grain of gold" hidden in every person's heart.

Sr. Celine Kurien, Mid India Province

Blessed Mother Maria Theresa Scherer, the "Sunny Child of Meggen," is a unique personality whose profound personal experiences deeply touch my

heart. She is more than just a foundress; she is a guiding presence in my journey of faith. The more I reflect on her life, the more I realize how much she has done for our congregation, her love for the poor, her care for her sisters, and, above all, her unwavering trust in the Lord. She teaches me not only through her words but through the way she lived.

What moves me most is her compassion. She was not just a leader; she was a mother, a healer, and a guide. She teaches me that true leadership is not about authority, it is about service, humility, and love.

Her final years were marked by suffering, yet she bore it all with patience. It makes me reflect on my struggles - how often I complain about small inconveniences. But she, even in pain, remained steadfast, never losing sight of her mission. It humbles me and challenges me. She teaches me that a life of love and sacrifice is never in vain. She is not just a figure of the past; she is my mother, my inspiration, and my strength. There are times when



Mother M. Theresa, sculpture by Mauro Baldessari

my efforts feel small, when my faith feels weak, but she reminds me that every act of love, no matter how small, holds meaning in the eyes of God.

Sr. Bincy Xavier, Mid India Province

I am inspired by the advice of Mother Maria Theresa on Fasting and Penance:

A Sister asked Mother Maria Theresa for advice on fasting and penitence. She answered, “The Sisters should not fast to the extent of compromising their health. They require their strength to serve their neighbors effectively. I value self-control, kindness in our words, and the struggle against self-love even

more. Our true mortifications lie in being content with what we receive, going where we are sent, and maintaining a positive spirit.”

I am enlightened, energized, encouraged, and inspired to follow the path she lived. Her presence seems to whisper to me that I am called with a purpose, blessed and gifted abundantly. I am rightly placed in my present mission, where human needs are great and the challenges of our time demand attention.

Sr. Phulmanti Nagesia, Mid India Province

We sisters at Casa Sant'Agnese in Locarno were moved by a portrait of Mother Maria Theresa that accompanied the February newsletter with reflections from the Swiss Province. Here are some excerpts from our discussion:

I sense a kind and simple gaze that says to me, ‘I am here for you.’ This gaze applies to every sister.

She had and lived the charism of readiness. She desired to do good for everyone.

She had a difficult life, but she was never discouraged. How did she feel at night? When she had to struggle and was alone? She encourages me to face my difficulties.

When I go to the crypt, she says to me, 'What do you want? I am ready to help.' We can always turn to her, and she provides what we need.

I am touched by her serenity. She encourages me to be content.

Trusting in God's help, she was able to be joyful, but also serious.

She had within her the right solutions and responses for the sisters, and they were quite different.

Sisters of Casa Sant'Agnese, Locarno, Province Switzerland

I was away for my annual retreat from March 25 to April 1 and I wanted to share something I learned during my retreat. You are all aware of the fact that 2025 is the Jubilee of Hope. This jubilee year occurs for the Church every 25 years and Pope Francis opened the Jubilee Door at St Peter's on December 29, 2024. There have been multiple special events throughout the year so far and more will be coming.

The whole point of a Jubilee year is to renew the spiritual life of all the People of God. For Sister Pam and me, as well as all the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross around the world, 2025 is also a community jubilee year. We are asked to remember our foundress,

Blessed Mary Theresa Scherer, who was born on October 31st in 1825. We celebrate 200 years since her birth. Each month we have been receiving something to reflect on that connects us to her life and to our current lives as Sisters.

I have always been disappointed by the fact that we have so little in English about Blessed Mary Theresa and have been longing for the translation of the book prepared in 2016 that catalogues the important letters of both our founder, Theodosius Florentini, ofm cap as well as Blessed Maria Theresa Scherer.

While I was on retreat I had access to a rough translation from the German. Each day, I would spend time reading one or two letters and then ask myself, "What can I learn?" Here is what spoke to me from the letters of Blessed Maria Theresa.

When Blessed Maria Theresa wrote letters to individual sisters, she almost always signed the letter as follows: "your Mother, sister Maria Theresa, who loves you dearly." Even if the letter included some correction or suggestion for change or improvement, it ended with "who loves you dearly". Wow! We could all benefit from hearing that on a daily basis. What a motivation to change and to grow!

The letters to which she responded were not included in the book but it was clear that sisters in every stage of their religious life were writing to pour out their troubles and to ask for advice. Many times, they were young sisters without much experience or training who were struggling to continue to serve as was being asked of them. She always started with: "Calm down". Then, seek God's will, trust God, do what you can, and pray". Since I returned from retreat I have been trying to repeat this advice as a mantra to support my daily struggles and efforts.

Oh, and as I thought about this list of advice, I added one more that I think she would have said: "Ask for help!"

So, please remember you are dearly loved and therefore you can calm down, seek God's will, trust God, do what you can, pray and ask for help!

Sr. Pat Cormack , House USA

I see your portrait before me,

Mother Mary Theresa. What does it tell me about you?

That you are a woman of serenity and peace. A woman with an impressive demeanour that radiates your soul. A woman completely immersed in God, calm and serene.

You know what it means to be courageous and strong, and to look to the one who gives strength. Storms can stir the soul, but they cannot crush it. Discover the gram of gold hidden in every person! Above all, dwell in the centre of God's heart so as not to lose your footing! You were a praying soul who knew how to open yourself to God in a prayer that was one with you and the world.

God flowed through your whole being, enlightening and inspiring others.

This portrait says it all and awakens in us the desire to follow in His footsteps and to unite our hearts with Him.

Sr. Françoise-Romaine Alber, Fribourg, Province Switzerland

From the Letters of Mother M. Theresa

Excerpts from letters in the archive of the Generalate

Note on our own behalf: In the 19th century, there was no standardised spelling system for the entire German-speaking world. For example, various words had to be spelled with 'th': Thal, thätig, Theil, theuer, Thon, Thor (der und das), Thräne, thun, Thür. The following excerpts from letters have been orthographically adapted.

The good Lord will help us if we stick together and keep the honour of God and the welfare of mankind in mind.

(24 September 1864)

Do what lies in your power day after day, and God will surely be pleased with you.

(19 September 1872)

As far as your spiritual life is concerned, you must also be patient, for perfection is achieved gradually, and even if we were to live to 100 years, we would still not have attained it despite all our efforts. Therefore, work on it daily and cooperate with the grace.

(16 December 1873)

My dear sister! God be with you!

I am glad that you are feeling better again. May God restore you to full health. If you are feeling well, you should strengthen yourself with some wine and milk.

(16 December 1873)

Take once again the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph as your special patrons, and trust in the intercession of our Fr. Francis and St. Elizabeth, our patron Saint.

(26 August 1874)

All good gifts come from God, and without Him we are nothing, so let us all earnestly pray for one another, that with God's grace we may do many things for His glory and honour.

(21 January 1875)

Do not be discouraged, dear sister, even if the cross sometimes weighs heavily upon you, but always remember that the way of the cross is the sure way to heaven. Turn always in truth and sincerity to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, for there, my child, we always find comfort, courage and help. Let us pray for one another every day.

(21 January 1875)

May God bless you, keep you and strengthen you!

(9 January 1877)

That is how it is in our poor human life: sometimes God sends us comfort, strength and courage, and at other times he makes us feel our inadequacy and poverty more strongly, so that we turn to him more and seek strength from him, rather than relying on our own strength. We need to be grateful to God for both.

(10 January 1881)

Walking in God's presence is a very powerful means of regulating our actions, both inwardly and outwardly.

(18 February 1882)

Thus, the good Lord leads us to various places to work for His honour and for the good of people. Let us make a good use of this beautiful and precious time.

(28 February 1882)

May God grant you health and all graces to become a perfect and holy sister. Let us pray for one another every day that we may truly become holy sisters.

(17 January 1884)

Dear sister, live as long as God wills, and work as much as you can; neither God nor your superiors



With warm regards in Jesus and Mary, your dearly mother and sister M. Theresa. Closing of personal letters.

demand more, and you need not concern yourself with ignorant people. It seems to me that your illness has also made you feel a little down, but you must overcome this and be cheerful, for this is pleasing to the Lord and also good preparation for death, which I believe is still a long way off. With the warm weather, you will certainly feel better again.

(18 March 1884)

Enjoy the present moment and do not worry about what will happen in a year's time; then everything will surely turn out well.

(To Sr. Dolorosa, on 21 November 1884)

In God's name, we are called to carry the cross, but I have not yet mastered this skill. I cried silently today because it was so hard for me.

(To Sr. Pankratia Widmer, 7 December 1884)

Before I take leave, I would like to remind you, beloved daughters, that my term of office expired on 16

August. I therefore urge you to pray for the successful election of a Superior General and her council members, especially during the Holy Mass. Besides, I request you to keep praying for our many sick sisters, the concerns of the whole community, and its growth. Praying in community has a great power to make things successful.

Finally, I assure you that I will include everyone in my humble prayers every day, and so we will come before God's throne together in spirit every day to offer our intercessions. In Jesus and Mary, I remain devoted to you in sincere and deep love, Mother M. Theresa.

(To all sisters, January 1886. - Mother M. Theresa was re-elected at the General Chapter).

As you already know, your task will be difficult and demanding; but you must not despair because of this, but look up to Him from whom all strength proceeds and who supports the weak. Hold fast to prayer in particular, for from it you will always receive the grace you need.

(4 June 1886)

Just as Rome was not built in a day, you cannot build your virtue in a year, so God has given you another

year to continue the construction. But you must always have a good sense of humour while building, even if a stone falls from the structure now and then. There is no point in becoming discouraged when you make mistakes. In that case, you will not make any progress. Always start afresh, ask God for help and guidance, and then you will certainly succeed.

I am well, only my legs are old and my breathing is heavy, but the cart still runs.

(20 January 1887)

Where there are many miserable and weak people, it can easily happen that one is misunderstood or that what one says is interpreted and taken differently than one means it, etc. This certainly hurts our self-esteem, but if we bear it with patience and humility, it has great value for eternity in the eyes of God. When one has to live in such an environment, it is good to be wise and speak little, but not so little that others notice or find one's silence annoying. It is always good to stick to the golden mean.

(11 February 1887)

It would not be possible to fulfil my duties in any way if I was not kept in prayer constantly. The worries

become greater and more difficult with each passing year.

(17 October 1887)

What would have I done if so many Holy Cross sisters had not prayed for me ? It would be impossible to fulfil my duties well if strength, courage and enthusiasm didn't come constantly from above.

(To Sr. Lidwina Müller)

We always have many sick people. Sick sisters, novices and candidates. It is sad that so many die. The lack of sisters is still growing, and almost one fourth of the candidates have to be sent home.

(27 February 1888)

We are always in God's hand, and whatever the dear Lord does with us is well done. Let us worship His divine providence.

(16 March 1888)

In personal letters to sisters, she loved and cultivated the closing line: With heartfelt greetings in Jesus and Mary

Your dearly loving

Mother and sister M. Theresa

Mother M. Theresa describes the sisters' activities in a letter to the

Municipal Council in Bühl in Baden, Germany, dated 14 February 1873 (Under the influence of the Cultural Struggle, the work of religious orders was carefully scrutinised with the intention of restricting or abolishing it.)

'We visit the battlefields to nurse the wounded soldiers; we enclose the sick in our arms, even though with contagious diseases, sacrificing our lives for them; we let ourselves be locked into the state prisons so that we may comfort the unfortunate ones there; we take in waifs so that we might protect them from delinquency; we regard the poor and the rejected (old word for infirm people, editor's note) as our special loves, quiet their hunger and soothe their pain – in short, we hurry at the call human misery every and anywhere. We thank the highly esteemed Municipal Council of Bühl, which has placed such great trust in us to work in the hospital for a number of years. But we would be extremely sorry if we were no longer allowed to carry out our charitable work among you, especially as some of us regard the Grand Ducal State of Baden as our beloved homeland.'

Mother M. Theresa – Being Re-read

Excerpts from the early writings

Staying true to God's will

In words and pictures, Mother M. Theresa Scherer is always seen as a powerful woman 'with boundless energy,' a 'manager in a leadership position.' It's true: she was blessed with many gifts: intelligence, vitality, willpower, a cheerful disposition, courage, open-mindedness, kindness, a warm heart, and a great sense of humour. Nevertheless, there is another reality in her life that allows her to unwaveringly follow the path she recognises as her calling and mission.

One desire runs like a common thread through her entire life: to be obedient to God's will. This touches on a profound mystery of her life, which finds expression in many testimonies. Towards the end of her life, on 30 April 1886, she wrote to a sister: *'God's will shall always be done in me. I want nothing other than what God wants.'*

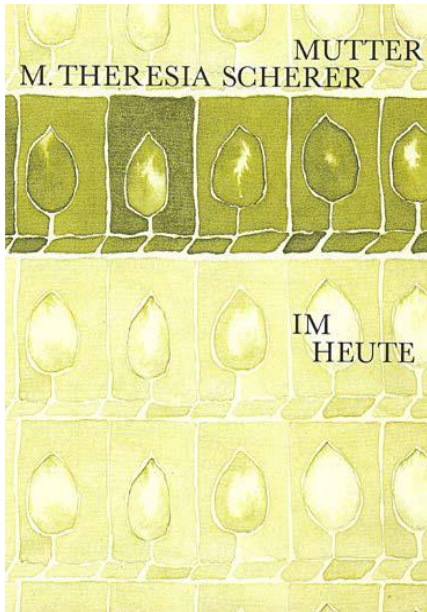
Sister M. Theresa wants to contribute to the realisation of God's plan for the world, so that God can come into the world. Her life makes it clear that God's will is to be close

to people, especially those who are weary and burdened, and to give them life in its fullness. In doing so, she experiences that the salvation of the world can only be achieved through resistance, suffering, the cross and death. Thus, her entire life is lived in the shadow of Jesus' cross. Even though Mother M. Theresa often experiences God's will as oppressive and painful, she is convinced that 'God's goodness has no limits.' Despite all her hardships, she has repeatedly experienced that 'we are in God's hand'.

Sr. Zoe Maria Isenring in: *Inspired Freedom, 800 Years of Francis and His Movement*, Herder, 2008, pp. 194–95

'Lighting the lights of hope'

Sr. Maria Theresa Scherer was a woman of integrity and a devout Christian who was not afraid to speak up! She had the courage to swim against the tide in her time. She was not simply critical of injustices, but also had the courage to 'give an account of Christian hope'. She and her sisters lit the lights for the humanity in many large and small places in our country and



Commemorative publication 1988, designed by Sr. Gielia Degonda

abroad, and that flame still burns today. Sr. MariaTheresa Scherer was a maternal woman, and she was not insensitive to human dignity or inattentive to human destiny.

She lit the lights of hope and mercy, and they were to burn for all those who lack true fellow human beings, for the abandoned and forgotten, for the marginalised young and old, the sick and disabled, the uprooted and frightened, the abused and oppressed, the neglected and shunned, the rejected and dying. She lit the lights and to this day is herself a light of hope and guidance

for their community and for many people.

Werner Vogt in: Maria Theresa Scherer, A Christian Woman who gives courage, Kanisius 1998, p.17

Divine proximity

How did she cope with all this, the manager in a senior position, as we would describe her position today? All this excitement, incidents, friction and demands, for which the Viennese doctor Hans Selye coined the term 'stress' in the mid-1930s? In her younger years, she still had the vigour of youth, her body obeyed willingly and accepted the strain. Then the ailments of maturity set in, and her body demanded more rest. Mother Maria Theresa, who had now become a secret queen, if one were to list her provinces, but who always wanted to remain a mother, tried to cope with her ailments. Many things helped her in this: a happy disposition, courage and open-mindedness, kindness and outstanding leadership skills, plus a sharp sense of humour. She acted wisely and strongly, showing her resilience when, for example, Theodosius Florentini died unexpectedly in 1865. What a difficult legacy she inherited, what mountains of debt she had to contend with, left behind by the

founder. She countered his impetuous drive for innovation and his often unrealistic willingness to take risks with her sense of what was possible and feasible. She was a secret pragmatist, yet open to utopian ideas, but she always acted with astonishing intelligence. And there was probably something else at work that she hardly ever spoke about: divine proximity. Here she drew strength for a work that increasingly transcended not only her own space, but above all her own time.

So instead of always talking about the 'fathers of history', shouldn't we also mention the mothers? Maria Theresa Scherer was one of the mothers of European social history. Even during her lifetime, she was known as 'la mère des pauvres', the mother of the poor. She carried out her social, societal and educational revolution gently, but decisively and persistently. Her work bore rich fruit in the decades after her death, but this prosperity was not the result of calculation, leadership talent and intelligent crisis management (although all these components certainly played a part). It was more than that: it was the charisma of a female personality who combined a belief in what was feasible with a hope for what was possible and a

love for people. More than a great social ethicist, she was an important social worker of the last century.

Beatrice Eichmann-Leutenegger, Muri near Bern, in: orientation No. 20, 31 October 1995

Composure

The first thing that strikes one about Mother M. Theresa is her composure. Despite her outward activity, she lived inwardly, from stillness. Only after she had reflected on everything in silence before God did she speak, give orders, and make decisions. In doing so, she had already eliminated the superficiality. Only when she had reflected on everything in silence before God did she speak, give orders, and make decisions. In this way, she had already eliminated what was superficial. This included herself, because remaining silent before God also means bringing one's self to silence; it means putting aside what hinders service to one's fellow human beings. She remained silent in the face of great hardship and the looming dangers of the time. She did not paint a bleak picture, lament the injustice of the world, or accuse others, but instead took action. In her silence, she found the right words. And they were effective because they came from love for the truth. Diplomacy in the negative

sense of the word was unknown to her. She avoided excessive formalities. No one had to fear empty words or hints from her.

For her, silence before God also meant enduring, persevering: above all, the difficulties in building up social works, the hostility from left and right, injustices and profit-seeking, personal fears, loneliness and doubts. 'Although I must confess that I am anxious about the future, I can assure you, strengthened by grace from above, that I am not losing heart. Our Father in heaven lives, his loving heart watches over us, his children, with care,' she writes in a letter.

In silence before God, she grew beyond herself, became available to others, and personally attained that greatness which speaks to the heart. She herself knew nothing of this.

Sr. Renata Pia Venzin, in Commemorative Publication 1988: Mother M. Theresa Scherer today, Theodosius-Printing Press Paradies AG, Ingenbohl-Brunnen, pp. 21–22

Human beings at the centre

Mother M. Theresa was a simple person, uncomplicated; she had a healthy disposition and a clear mind. Her attitude to life and her piety were equally simple and uncomplicated. That is why she was able to interact

with everyone, from Kräuterfränzi on the cantonal road to Schwyz, whom she took in her carriage, to the princes and the rich and famous of the world. She had chosen to help the poor, and she stuck to her decision, even though she had been promised training as a teacher. The Ten Commandments would have been enough for her. She would not have needed any rules or constitutions for herself. Just like St. Francis. She lived from within, turned towards God, the world and her task. This Franciscan attitude corresponded to her choleric temperament. She was not attached to any picture, any piece of furniture, any book; no habit, no comfort could block her; no praise made her proud, no negative judgement drove her to despair. May one say: Did she know how to connect her inner world with the outer world? Her inner vision with her outer actions? Wasn't she Mary and Martha in one throughout her entire life? But not from the beginning. Mother M. Theresa also went through a process of transformation. She struggled and prayed throughout her life for the courage to believe and hope despite temporary hopelessness. But in the decisive hours, these gifts were always renewed. Nothing could better demonstrate her simplicity towards God, people and life than

her prayer for the sisters in Planaterra: 'Make them see your brothers in the poor and the sick, love them all truly and from the heart, stand by them in everything with unwavering and sincere joy, bear their faults and complaints patiently, always repay evil with good...' 'I had the impression that she was pure love for God and her neighbour,' writes Sr. Patrizia Faller. Where did Mother M. Theresa get this radiance? (Here, the key word is 'radiance.') High and low opened their doors to her. She always found the right word for everyone. She radiated confidence, even when she had to 'be quite strict.' She dealt with children, young people, employees and workers; she did not talk about school materials, staff or worker potential. Although her objective judgement and decision-making skills were valued, Mother M. Theresa always focused on helping people. She did not demand that the wealthy change their attitudes; she herself renounced possessions. When she encountered thoughtlessness, fixed opinions and prejudices, she found new ways to help.

Sr. Renata Pia Venzin, in Commemorative Publication 1988: Mother M. Theresa Scherer Today, Theodosius- Printing Press Paradies AG, Ingenbohl-Brunnen, pp. 22/23/25

Motherliness

She was rightly called Mother M. Theresa everywhere. Her motherliness extended to large Caritas projects, but behind them she always saw the human being, the needy, the sick, the exploited, the searching, the good-willed person. She also cared for her sisters in a motherly way. She knew everyone by name, wrote countless letters to the sisters in the outstations, and was generous with well-deserved praise and encouragement. Being honest to the core, she could also tell the truth without making excuses and reproach others when she thought it was right or when her temper got the better of her. But she never held a grudge against anyone, and her strong sense of justice quickly ironed out any misunderstandings. Her apt turns of phrase made the rounds among the sisters. For example: 'Don't scream 'fire', before it burns.' Or: 'You look as if the Mountain Rigi had fallen on you.' She expected the same motherly commitment from her sisters. They should think, guess and participate; they should be ready for anything. Was it any wonder that she encountered a lack of understanding? She did not let that

frighten her. She was too deeply convinced that true love for one's neighbour means the whole person, everyone, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and can only be nourished and sustained through a connection with God.

Sr. Renata Pia Venzin, in Commemorative Publication in 1988: Mother M. Theresa Scherer Today, Theodosius- Printing Press Paradies AG, Ingenbohl-Brunnen, p. 251/22

Unity in diversity

The Mother Superior rejects uniformity. We find a wide variety of personalities at her side:

Sister Candida, who is as good as she is energetic.

Sister Karolina, who has extraordinary physical strength and boundless trust in God.

Sister Afra, the original musician who demands a piano in the midst of the financial crisis.

Sister Anastasia, about whom Father Theodosius writes: 'You are a constant whirlwind.'

Sister Pankratia, the embodiment of gentleness and kindness.

Sister Fabiola, with her quick temper, who is clearly the daughter of an officer.

Sister Cupertina, who 'would even defend the devil if he were capable of repentance.'

Sister Theodolinde, delicate and cultured, a woman full of tact and sensitivity.

Sister Emanuela, amiable and spiritually oriented, who moved from the royal court in Bavaria to the poorhouse in Buochs.

We also find a Sister Leonie who was by no means weak: one evening in Merano, Tyrol, she goes to keep vigil over a sick person. She feels she is being followed by someone who touches and harasses her. She defends herself so well that her umbrella is left in tatters. She escapes. The next morning, when she returns to the community, she finds a new umbrella with a label attached bearing the following text: 'From the one whom a sister brought to her senses last night.'

It is the shared experiences, the common goals, and the spirit instilled by the founders that unite the sisters so much that 'they are alike.' They often complement each other, just as Father Theodosius and Mother M. Theresa do. He designs projects; she puts them into practice. He is fiery and impetuous, not

always easy to get along with, but he immediately finds a remedy for the ills of the time. In her case, she is thoughtful, realistic, and skilfully organised. He is often away on business trips, and she is capable of taking on responsibility. He relies on her; she relies on her sisters. Both act in faithfulness to Christ and his Gospel.

Sr. Marie-Eugène Gross in: Small print Mother Maria Theresa Scherer, Theodosius-Printing Press AG, 2004, pp. 32–34

Paying off debts

Seven months after the founder's death, on the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, Mother M. Theresa signed the assignment agreement (= transfer of a claim from the previous creditor to a third party, i.e. from Father Theodosius to Mother M. Theresa). Could she have done this without her trust in the Lord? She did it in honour of Father Theodosius' legacy and to preserve the good that had already been done through the many charitable institutions for the needy. Now she is here, administering the gifts and offerings of the poor and the rich. She encourages her daughters: "Strive to become truly trustworthy! Hanging your head won't do any good. The Sacred Heart will help us overcome the storms." After four

years of headaches and thanks to her daughters' ability to stand together, the Mother Superior could finally put an end to the chapter of debt.

Sr. Marie-Eugène Gross, Lower case Mother Maria Theresa Scherer, p. 42

Growing through challenges

It had been a long journey that had led Mother M. Theresa from the farm in Meggen to the convent in Ingenbohl. She had grown through the very high demands that had been placed on her. She had gone through the tough training of Father Theodosius, but she had to learn for herself what it meant to be at the "head" of a large community and figure out what was important to keep it spiritually healthy. It was only possible with the commitment of all her love. Mother M. Theresa had a great deal of love for people, and she also shared this with the sisters. But she also demanded something from them. Every sister knew that she had to take responsibility for the community and for herself, that she had to participate and contribute to the whole so that it would function. No one could live selfishly for themselves alone.

Inge Sprenger Viol in: A Life Against Misery and Injustice, The Life and Work of Sister Maria Theresa Scherer, Herder, 1995, p. 156

Mother Superior

When the Gotthard Railway was built between 1872 and 1882, a large group of Italian workers, around 100 in total, arrived in Brunnen too early for the third stage of construction between Goldau, Brunnen and Flüelen due to false information. The men believed that work had already begun, but to their horror they found themselves facing a long wait. They had made the arduous journey over the Gotthard and through the Reuss Valley on foot and arrived in Brunnen completely exhausted. They found neither care nor food, neither work nor earnings in the village. They had no money. They had come to earn a penny for their poor families. What to do? Dr Lucchini states explicitly: 'No one would have taken care of these workers in need except the founder of the well-known Convent of Holy Cross Sisters in Ingenbohl. She provided them with food and shelter until construction work began.'

In fact, Mother Theresa invited all the workers to come up to the convent, comforted them and gave them food every day. She distributed the portions herself and bandaged the men's feet, which had become sore from the long journey. She had wooden huts built in the convent

garden for the workers to live and sleep in. They revered the 'Mother Superior', who served them like a maid, and wherever they met her, they joyfully and reverently crowded around her to kiss her hand.

Sr. Beata Spörri adds to the picture with her personal recollection: '... I saw her serving, dressed in a white apron, as if it were a gentleman's table.'

Sr. M. Clarissa Rutishauser in: Mother M. Theresa Scherer, Theodosius Publishing House Ingenbohl, 1959, pp. 463–464

In commemoration of Father Theodosius

One of the most interesting new foundations under the direction of Mother Theresa is the Theodosianum in Zurich. During his lifetime, the founder had repeatedly expressed his wish that his congregation should establish a hospital in Protestant Zurich. He had the idea of convincing people with the Catholic leadership of a social, nursing institution. It was not until 20 years after his death that this idea became reality. In 1884, during the great typhoid epidemic, two Holy Cross Sisters worked in the municipal emergency hospital in Zurich. The idea of founding a Catholic-run hospital in Zurich

became topical again at that time. In the spring of 1885, at the suggestion of a Catholic doctor, a small hospital for ten patients was built. The number of sick and seriously ill people was so great that just two years later, it had to be expanded by purchasing the Hotel 'Zum Schwanen'. Now there was room for 60 patients. Mother M. Theresa was very interested in this hospital. She spared no effort to raise the urgently needed funds. 'Withdrawing from Zurich,' she wrote, 'would be a disgrace for us Catholics.'

The Catholics of Zurich belong almost exclusively to the working class. Their primary need is for physical and spiritual sustenance. It was very important to Mother M. Theresa to support the poorer population in Zurich as well. It is a sign of her broad-mindedness that she did not make denominational affiliation a criterion for admission to the hospital.

Inge Sprenger Viol in: *A Life Against Misery and Injustice, The Life and Work of Sister Maria Theresa Scherer*, Herder, 1995, pp. 142–144

Interview With Mother M. Theresa

Sr. Christiane Jungo. Ingenbohl

The questions are from today, the answers are taken from the so-called "Conscience Report" of Mother M. Theresa. She wrote it in 1867 at the request of her confessor, Dr. Carl Berlage.

(Dr. Carl Berlage later became the cathedral administrator in Cologne and sent the booklet with the notes to Sr. Adelheid Scherer, a niece of Mother M. Theresa, in 1907. Today it is in the archives of the General Administration.

Note: The spelling of the time has been partially adjusted to the present.

Mother M. Theresa, please tell us something about your origins and your early childhood early childhood.

My parents were poor. I was born on October 31, 1825, in Meggen, Canton of Lucerne, and baptized under the name Anna Katharina. When I reached the age of six, we lost our good father. We were six underage children, of whom I was the third oldest. Since the mother was not as skilled and economically competent as the father, it was considered better to sell the house and goods, provide for the older children, and leave only the younger ones with the mother. I was struck by fate on the very day of the good father's funeral, to leave the parental home and be taken to relatives.

So, did you have a difficult childhood?



Mother and Child, sculpture by Rolf Brem, memorial site in honor of Mother M. Theresa in Meggen

My relatives faithfully sent me to school, to Christian education, and kept me obedient. There was also a capable, very strict maid who instructed me in household duties

and all useful female tasks, as far as one can expect from a child.

The relatives were very musically inclined and so music rehearsals were held at the house, and there were often visits where dancing sometimes took place, to which I soon developed a great inclination and did whenever the opportunity arose.

I was with my relatives from the age of 6 to 16. I was extraordinarily cheerful and happy, therefore ready for all kinds of children's pranks. I was also very irritable, often behaving like that toward the servants and classmates. I also loved beautiful clothes and enjoyed compliments.

Meggen was a school-friendly village. Not all girls in Switzerland could go to school at that time. Were you a model student?

At school, under the supervision of the teacher, I was hardworking but otherwise chatty and distracted. I always sought and found girls who had similar traits to mine. The teacher was still very young and lenient, which I sought to take advantage of with other girls.

What happened after you left the school?

J. Leonz Meyer, the local parish priest, whom I often visited because my older sister was being educated there, was very concerned about me, as were my dear mother and my two older siblings, because they saw my liveliness and vanity and knew how much I loved music and dance. Therefore, they sought to take me away from my relatives and brought me to the Sisters of Mercy in Lucerne, I went very reluctantly and in silence. I was supposed to gain more skill in household tasks, especially in cooking, etc. become even more skilled.

Did you like being in the hospital in Lucerne?

At first, it was difficult for me to constantly see and hear only religious things and to always have the sick and the poor in front of my eyes. I was also annoyed with preachers who preached against dancing, etc. But grace soon prevailed. After a short time, I liked being there, and I also started praying more. Besides, I was cheerful and happy.

Did you have plans for the future?

Some thought I should enter a convent, which I had no desire for it; others believed I should and would marry, which I never intended, much

less than enter a religious order. I thought the virgin (single) state in the world was beautiful and sublime. It seemed that the dear God had something else in store for me.

May I ask what you mean?

It was in July 1844. I went on a pilgrimage with a friend to the Rigi (Rigi Klösterli) and to Maria Einsiedeln. In Einsiedeln, I began to think about religious life; but I did not want that and dismissed such thoughts. The confessor gave me the task of praying and sacrificing everything in my daily life in order to recognise my true vocation. I went home and did so, and in a short time I became firmly resolved to enter religious life, namely an active religious order.

Were you thinking of the sisters at the hospital?

At that time, there were Sisters of Divine Providence from France at the orphanage in Lucerne who appealed to me greatly, so my confessor advised me to apply for admission there, where they gave me every hope of being accepted. Shortly after I made this request, my confessor came to me and told me that a similar institute was being founded in Switzerland by a certain Father Theodosius of the Capuchin

Order, and so he advised me not to go to France, but to stay in the country to start with.

What happened after that?

Since I liked this idea, I asked my confessor, Father Eduard of the Capuchin Order, to write to Father Theodosius in Altdorf, whereupon I immediately received a reply asking me to come for an interview, which took place on 5 October 1844. After a brief examination in the school subjects, I was accepted.

I was given two options: either to enter Menzingen in the spring of 1845, where the institute was to be established, or to go to an institute in France or to the Ursulines in Freiburg (Breisgau) for training. Since it was very important to me to become acquainted with religious life and the holy rule at the same time as my training, and to settle into the place where I wished to consecrate my life to God, I preferred to choose Menzingen right away.

How did those around you react to your decision?

When I returned home, I encountered other obstacles, as almost everyone believed that I should not pursue this endeavour,

arguing that now was the time when monasteries were being abolished in Switzerland, so it would be impossible to establish a new institute. My blessed mother, the local priest, indeed everyone who had anything to say about it, wanted nothing to do with it; I was even threatened that I would not be given any money, etc. for it; on the other hand, people were inclined to support another monastery. No one advised me except my confessor and Father Laurenz in Einsiedeln. It was difficult, but God helped me by completely changing the minds of the people I had to listen to as a minor, so that they agreed in a short time when they saw that the more they opposed it, the more courage and desire I had for it.

How did you experience your first days in the convent?

I was 19 years old at the time. In the meantime, the three novices whom Father Theodosius had trained began the institute in Menzingen, where three rooms were rented and the owners of the house provided the food.

Two of them taught at the village school, and the third was responsible for training the candidates. As this sister was very sickly, Father Theodosius took her

to Altdorf because of the milder climate, where a room and a kitchen were rented, and where I was also called on 1 March 1845. The sister was mostly unwell, so we – a candidate and I – almost never had lessons, except when Father Theodosius gave us lessons. At that time, I had the grace of God to work my way into religious life with zeal, and the Reverend Father Theodosius, who was our confessor, made great efforts to at least get me started in this. He also examined my whole inner being in every way.

I would have had great joy and desire to learn, but I lacked the opportunity, which often upset me and made me regret that I had not gone to another institute for my education.

We stayed in Altdorf until July, then we moved to Menzingen, where I began my novitiate. There, because of the teacher's poor health, school was the same as in Altdorf, but Father Röllin and the sisters helped me a lot with my religious life. Soon Father Theodosius visited us, and I revealed my whole heart to him again and had to confess that some humiliations in the novitiate were hard for me to bear. I was also upset because I had not been given a proper opportunity for training,

whereupon he reassured me and promised that I would receive a complete education.

Your novitiate until your profession was very short. Please tell us about the rest of your journey.

The blessed Bishop of Chur then sent the blessed Auxiliary Bishop of Haller, who was the parish priest and dean in Galgenen at the time, to receive our holy vows on 26 October. We two young novices – Aloisia and Theresia – were also allowed to take our holy vows. I had already dreamed that I would now be allowed to return to Menzingen and study properly there, but how disappointed I was when one day the Reverend Father Theodosius announced that I had to go to the Upper Girls' School in Galgenen as an assistant sister with Sister Feliziana, where I could practise teaching and educate myself in the meantime. This was really difficult for me, all the more so because I was very afraid of the Sister mentioned above because of her

great strictness. So we travelled to Galgenen and on 2 November 1845 we started the institute's first school away from home.

It went well. But it didn't last long, and I became plagued by doubts, suffered greatly internally, believed that I was not able to cope with myself, felt lost, etc., etc. On top of that, I also became physically ill. Doctors were called in, pious priests gave me blessings, prayers were offered, and I was sent to a health resort, etc.

In late 1846, I returned to Menzingen for the holidays, where I hoped that I might now be able to stay for training; but at the end of the holidays, I was told that I had to take an exam in Zug at the Education Council. I obediently went with some other sisters, some of whom had been preparing for years in Fribourg and also in Menzingen, and passed the exam to everyone's satisfaction.

Thank you, dear Mother M. Theresa. We look forward to hearing more from you later.

Information from the General Leadership

From 5 to 10 July Sr. Rahela Lacković visited her Home Province, Croatia

Sr. Dorothee will be in Merrill from 21. September to 8. October 2025. During her stay, she will be engaged in various activities of the House USA.

From 29 September to 3 October Sr. Marie-Marthe Schönenberger will visit the sisters in Bozen and in Jesu-Heim, Girlan, of the Italian Province.

Sr. Sheeja Kolacherril will visit the sisters in South Province, India, from 24 October to 2 November.

On the occasion of the 70th

anniversary of the Holy Cross Sisters' mission in Taiwan, Sr. Gabriele Schachinger is invited to Taitung for the jubilee celebrations with the employees and will be there from 27 October to 11 November, engaged in the matters of the Vicariate.

Visitation

From 3 October to 11 December 2025, the General Visitation will take place in the Indian Central Province. Sr. Marie-Marthe Schönenberger, Sr. Gabriele Schachinger (from 12 November), Sr. Sheeja Kolacherril, Sr. Pratima Minj, Sr. Rahela Lacković, and Sr. Roseline Kujur will conduct the visitation.

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