

SR. MARIA DEL CORPUS DOMINI VALLE (Nov 4, 1971 – Mar 22, 2017)

*"I will sing to the LORD all my life;
I will sing praise to my God while I live.
May my meditation be pleasing to him;
I will rejoice in the LORD." (Ps. 104:33)*

Sister **Maria del Corpus Domini** (Isabella Valle), was born to Alberto and Maria Isabella in Rome on November 4, 1971. She was the second of four children. She was baptized with the name Isabella on December 19, 1971 in Saint Ambrose Parish (Rome).

Her religious vocation

When she was 8 years old, shortly after receiving first communion, she felt the desire to be a religious, she was told that this thought was normal for children her age, she put it aside for the moment. Nevertheless, according to what she recounted, *"... my first communion had given fruits. I truly understood the importance of receiving the great Divine Guest of soul and body. I believe that it was then that I received for the first time, the call of Jesus to follow Him in a closer way. When I received him for the first time in the Eucharist I felt so happy that I thought I didn't need anything else in life".*

However, this first call would be renewed. When she was eleven – according to the testimony of Don Romano, her pastor at that time - Isabella confided in him that when she grew up she *wanted to be a great missionary.*

She was active in the Parish of *Corpus Domini* in the area of Casal Lumbroso, where her family had moved; she was part of the youth group of the parish. She finished High School specializing in bookkeeping. It was during this time that a two part, so to speak, pull intensified within her: on God's part, attracting her more and more to give herself entirely to Him and on her own part, a growing desire for true happiness and knowledge of the plan that God had for her, an intention for which she prayed for every day upon awaking and going to sleep.

Two providential events occurred at that time in relation to her vocation. First, a Mission that 20 diocesan seminarians made in her parish, including home visits and diverse activities with the youth. This provided the beginning of a friendship with a young girl who was also desirous of knowing God's plan for her life and who in the end decided to be a religious but had not yet decided where to enter.

Later, a group of young Argentinian priests who were studying in Rome came to the parish. They belonged to a congregation that had been founded a few years before, the fathers of the Incarnate Word. After speaking to them, Isabella found out that the fathers also had a feminine branch that had been founded three years ago. Since there was no community of Servidoras in Italy, nor in Europe, she had to travel to Argentina leaving behind her family and her country. With her heart full of enthusiasm, she traveled to San Rafael on June 20, 1991 in order to enter the convent, becoming the first European vocation of our Institute.

From the very beginning, she joyfully lived the poverty and austerities of the convent. She generously gave of herself to the community life even though she did not speak Spanish, which she bore with a great sense of humor. As time passed she began to speak Spanish so well that on her return to Italy, her fellow countrymen were surprised at how well she spoke Italian, *"almost as if she were Italian".*

A new name ... a mission

On August 3, 1991, she officially began the Novitiate and received the name of Maria del Corpus Domini. This name was in memory of the parish where she discovered her religious vocation and which Divine Providence had used to help her find the Religious Family of the Incarnate Word.



Her name held great meaning, as well, for her devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist. Once she wrote: *“Later, in the evening we had an extra gift, a little play about various saints that were especially devoted to the Eucharist, it was really nice, it made me desire to be like them: insanely enamored of the Eucharist!”*

Who would have thought that this “new” name would become a plan of life: to give of herself, adore and love the Eucharistic Jesus for love of souls. In order to become a pleasing host to God, the seed must first fall to the earth and die, only that way can it give fruit, uniting and transforming itself into Christ, Living Bread. On March 21, 1992, she made her first profession of vows in San Rafael, in order to follow more intimately and identify herself more completely with Christ “poor, chaste and obedient”.



Her contemplative vocation

Immediately after her first mission as a professed religious in the Juniorate, in 1994, she expressed that she discovered “a great personal limitation”. Her inability to resolve nor effectively aid three diverse and painful situations: a man with a terminal illness, a family in grave difficulty and a priest in an equally difficult situation. She returned from the mission and upon arriving to the convent, knelt before the Blessed Sacrament. *“I cried so much – she recounts – asking Jesus what I should do, my words (in all three situations) were worth little, my physical presence even less and again the response came to my heart: be a cloistered religious. I was a very active person who loved to travel, but I felt clearly that this was the will of God: to be transformed into an invisible missionary, to travel the whole earth and every situation, by remaining firm before the Blessed Sacrament.”*

With great joy, she entered the contemplative life in the Monastery of “*Santa Teresa de los Andes*” in San Rafael on March 25, Solemnity of the Incarnation.

At Service of the Institute

This first experience of monastic life was short. Being always ready and disposed to follow the voice of her superiors, she left the monastery in San Rafael to travel to Italy on November 7, 1994, in order to begin the first community of the Servidoras in Europe, the community of *St Monica* in Sezze Romano. She was the first local superior of that community.

On December 8th of that same year, shortly before officially beginning the foundation in Sezze Romano, in the parish of St. Peter’s, under the care of the IVE Fathers, Sr. María del Corpus Domini professed her final vows. To that first call of God that she experienced in her first communion, she once again said yes, now perpetually, so that she could repeat that *she felt so happy that she didn’t need anything else in life*.

We can say that Sr. Corpus Domini’s life is not only very linked to the history of the Servidoras in Italy, as she was to be the first provincial superior, but also to the first foundations in Russia and the Holy Land. The sisters who started these missions first traveled through Rome, where she received them with great love and maternal care, looking for numerous benefactors to sustain these missions during their first years.

The Association of prayer for the unity of Christians and Msgr. Andrea María Erba



As superior of Sezze Romano she had the important mission to receive the first European vocations, organize the arrival of the General House in Italy and make the foundation of the first contemplative monastery in Italy, under the patronage of Blessed *Maria Gabriela de la Unidad*. It would be in this Monastery where she took up again the contemplative life, entering on July 12, 1997. She ardently desired to found a Monastery in Russia feeling particularly called to work for the unity of Christians. She gave herself with total generosity to pray for the return of the separated brethren to the heart of the Catholic Church, so that there would be “one flock, under one Shepherd”.

Nearly two years later, God asked another act of generosity and donation: the bishop of the Diocese of Velletri-Segni, Msgr. Andrea Maria Erba, was insistently requesting a contemplative foundation in his diocese. Corpus

Domini was named superior of this new Monastery which would begin on April 30, 1999. There she gave of herself with generosity to the particular intention of this monastery: to pray for priests. At the same time, the Monastery became a point of reference for the whole diocese and in particular for Msgr. Erba, who found in this community an unconditional support by means of their prayers as well as their help in his work for the Congregation of Saints.

From the conversations that Sr. Corpus Domini had with Msgr. Erba concerning their common love of Russia and desire to pray for the orthodox Christians, a proposal resurged. It was to renew the work of two Barnabite Fathers, Fr. Shouvaloff and Tondini, which Msgr. Erba greatly appreciated but could not direct due to his numerous diocesan responsibilities: The Association of Prayer for the Unity of Christians especially in Russia. She proposed this idea to the General Council of the Servidoras. The re-initiation of the Association, was approved and would be promoted by the Monastery “*B. Maria Gabriela de la Unidad*”.



From 2002 until 2017, Sr. María del Corpus Domini lived her contemplative life in the monasteries of Velletri (Italy) and San Rafael (Argentina, for a few months) and finally, returned to Pontinia (Italy).

Her apostolic spirit and love of neighbor

She took upon herself the very specific prayer intention to offer up all for the Religious Family, for each of her sisters and in a singular way for the General Superior and the mothers of the Council.

“She greatly rejoiced in community time, and lovingly remembered each one of her sisters. She was always very thoughtful in preparing little humble gifts for the birthdays of her sisters, even when she was absent from the community. She was joyful, fully participated in everything. She deeply loved our Religious Family and suffered for the trials that it went through. She prayed intensely for all those involved, prayed and suffered for the enemies, and for those who most suffered by means of the persecution. (Testimony of M. Siempre Virgen).

With the warm and welcoming spirit that characterizes our monastic communities, she received the many parish groups of children, and youth that visited in order to know the monastery and she maintained contact with numerous benefactors.

It was a special joy for her to receive the visit of the missionaries of our Religious Family. As she was one of the first sisters in Italy, she had seen many missionaries leave to go out to all the corners of the world and with the maternal care that characterized her, she held them present in her prayers, and felt very much a part of each mission.

“I will sing to the Lord as long as I live” (Ps 104)

She served the Church with her special gifts: translating books and other writings, studying music, liturgy and Gregorian chant. She loved classical music and would organize piano and organ concerts in the monasteries and the General Procurate. Her inclination for music and the organ converted into a passion and with the passing of time, she gained much expertise. She constantly looked for ways to convey the beauty of music, especially sacred music, in order to make the liturgy more solemn, especially the Holy Mass.

We can say that she fully understood what the Monastic Rule says: *“The contemplative life cannot be sustained without a profound life of liturgical prayer. The contemplatives are strengthened by it, as it is an indispensable means to obtain union with God” (N. 25).*

Even in the most critical moments of her illness, she continued to study organ. Nevertheless, it was not just a simple passion for music, it was the conviction that one could praise and love God, with song, for those who did not love Him. It was her prayer; it was part of her life. Perhaps for this reason, when she arrived to the Monastery in Pontinia, upon knowing that her illness could not be cured, she wrote in her journal on January, 16, 2017: *“Lectio divina: With this desire I will live the rest of my days in this holy house ... “I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God while I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him; I will rejoice in the LORD” (Ps. 104,33).*

Paraphrasing the book of Ecclesiastes of King David, we can say that our dear sister *“with [her] whole heart [she] loved [her] Maker and daily had His praises sung; [She] added beauty to the feasts and solemnized the seasons of each year. With string music before the altar, providing sweet melody for the psalms. So that when the Holy Name was praised, before daybreak the sanctuary would resound.” (Eccl. 47:6-10)*

Her illness. The joy of the Cross.

On June of 2015, she was diagnosed with ***acute lymphoblastic leukemia***. Thus began the arduous ascent to Calvary, where the Spouse would draw her to live in deeper intimacy with Him, alone with Jesus Alone. He drew her in this way to live more fully her religious name: *María del Corpus Domini*, in order to offer and conform herself with the Eucharistic Jesus, immolating herself in a hidden and silent way, but at the same time, joyfully serene, in order to fulfill the Will of Him whom had loved her much.



She was immediately interned in San Camilo Hospital in Rome, where she remained for at least three months. This was followed by a time of continuous hospital stays and painful treatments, which did not allow her to live in the cloister. For this reason, she moved to the General Procurate of the Servidoras in Rome.

She deeply suffered this trial of being separated from her community, above all to live outside the monastery. In these last two years of her life lived amongst hospitals, she experienced her own sufferings and that of her neighbor. She was deeply moved by the death of the people that she knew during her different hospital stays, but at the same time was consoled by the knowledge that she had been able to help them prepare for death. Her charity and apostolic zeal lead her to also accompany, the family members of the infirmed who had died. In the same way, her interactions with the sick and medical professionals was one of gratitude and docility. She enjoyed bringing them little gifts, especially rosaries that she handmade. She would also calls those who had been interned with her, and try to meet up with them outside the hospital, guiding them to a conversion and the reception of the sacraments before their imminent death.

During this time of her illness, God purified her very much at different levels. She was conscious of this purification by God, and although it was difficult, she offered it to Him.

She was admirably faithful to prayer.

She had imposed upon herself a heroic schedule in which she would wake up at 5 am to pray the rosary and to have Lectio Divina and spiritual reading as well as praying all the hours of the liturgy even while being in the hospital. She would also pray novenas and other prayers for the intentions that we would entrust to her. Another thing that was difficult for her while she was in the hospital and at home with her parents was not being able to have easy access to the Tabernacle. Though not successful, she tried to obtain permission to have the Blessed Sacrament in her parent's house. Whenever it was possible, she tried to have Holy Mass in the hospital and at her parent's house. She had a great love for the Holy Mass and never wanted to miss it when possible. She had great devotion to the saints especially to the Holy Virgen Mary under the title of Our Lady of Kazan, St. Joseph, and Bl. Gabriela of the Unity, patron on her Monastery whose live she read and re-read many times during her illness. She was greatly moved when we brought the first-class relic from the monastery to the hospital so she could keep it until the end of her illness. She had the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to her tomb various times to ask her intercession during her illness. She was always very grateful with those who visited her especially the IVE priest who assisted her with exquisite charity above all during the long stays at the hospital during which they would take turns to celebrate Holy Mass for her.

“There was never a moment during the two years of her illness in which I saw her in different stages that I saw her rebel against the will of God, not even in gestures. Of course, she suffered seeing that things grew worse above all because she was always very enthusiastic and full of hope during each new treatment that they proposed to her. But she always accepted things as God willed them even if it did not turn out as she had hoped. There was even a time when she thought not to continue with anymore treatments but she readily accepted to continue receiving treatment when she knew her parents desired it.”

Unfortunately, the hope of the efficaciousness of the treatments diminished with the passing of time. Her strong desire to live allowed her to patiently submit herself to painful studies. She knew that if it was the will of God that she be healed, she had to put all the effort on her part. However on September 12, 2016 she received the news: “Today they told me that I am very sick and that a transplant is not possible...I can only undergo more chemotherapy so that the illness may not advance rapidly.” And she ends her message: “help me to love the will of God in all things...” (12 Sept 2016).

“Perhaps what was most difficult for her was to realize that she was truly dying. God granted her a great vivacity. She was also exemplary in this. She had to feel very bad in order to stay in bed. If she was not in bed, she was on her two feet helping, wanting to participate in the community life. Many times during her stay in Rome she said she wanted to return in order to be of help. It was very true. When she was in the monastery, she did not want to be exempted from anything. She wanted to do service, to cook, to pray, to be present at recreations...”(M. Siempre Virgen).

Toward the end of September she wrote: “Let us pray and offer everything...our days are numbered together with its pain and trials...then we will not be able to do more...for me these days are also difficult...50 in the hospital...” (28 Sept 2016).

Seeing that death drew near, she ask God the grace to die as a contemplative sisters. Thus on the 13th of January, 2017 she returned to the Monastery of Pontinia to prepare herself for death.

She wrote: “Dearest Mother, With great joy I am traveling to Pontinia. My parents are accompanying me. I can not believe it. After a year and 8 months without know what was to come...only God knows!!! But in the meantime I will praise and adore Him praying for everyone until He allows me to. I loved the letter of edification of Mother Mater Mundi Salvatoris...it was truly edifying...may our Lord grant us the grace to die in such a holy way and so surrendered. I always pray for your intentions. On my part, I am very serene asking very much for the grace of the joy of the Cross until the end!!! With a big hug I say farewell in Christ and Mary Most Holy.”

On January 18, she wrote from the monastery: “I am happy for every day that I am alive, happy in the monastery.”

Even in the midst of suffering she did not lose her good sense of humor: “Today is the fourth day of chemo and they told me my numbers are very low...it is hard especially the one I do at night...what’s more they are doing another that is the color blue like our habit. I return like a smerf!” (7 Feb 2017).

In February, she had to return to the hospital for a new internment. “I am very sick, today I again have a fever of 39.4 C and now transfusions of white blood cells...I lack nothing!!! We continue to pray...I still must fill the chalice...” (18 Feb 2017).

The 25th Anniversary of her first religious profession

On Wednesday, March 15, she welcomed in the parlor the sisters from the General Procure House who wished to say goodbye to her. With much serenity and enthusiasm as someone who is preparing to do something very important and much desired, she spoke of the details of her funeral Mass which should be truly a spousal liturgy since she wanted to celebrate her 25th anniversary of religious life in Heaven, seeing her spouse face to face.

To one of the sisters she said, “The chalice is almost full...come celebrate with me in Paradise.” The sister was moved and replied “I am not ready” and she enthusiastically replied, “to accept death it is enough to trust in Him, it’s a click of love that we have to do” (15 Mar 2017).

Since her health was rapidly declining, it was decided that the celebration of her 25th anniversary of profession would be moved forward to Sunday, March 19. For this occasion, we invited benefactors, friends, and members of the Religious Family. Up until the last moment, she had the hope of going down to the chapel but she was not able to.



The sisters connected her via skype so that she could participate in the Holy Mass from her cell. Sr. Corpus Domini wore her veil and the crown of flowers that the sisters prepared at her request to use on that day and which she wished to be buried with. After the homily, she renewed the formula of perpetual vows while the people listened through the speakers. Fr. Elvio Fontana, who presided the Holy Mass, took her holy communion. At the end of the Mass, she gave a message to the people present in the Church thanking them for their presence and assuring them of her prayers. During the Mass, morphine was administered to her because of the intense pain; she was very weak and tired.

After Mass, some of the apostolic sisters wanted to greet her for the last time. For all of them she had words of gratitude and good humor. She transmitted joy and the jokes she made denoted her lucidity. Seeing that some many people prayed for her and the preparations for her funeral that she herself followed closely, she said "...if I don't die of illness...I will die of the embarrassment of not dying!"

Then, looking at the booklet with the hymns and prayers prepared for the funeral rites she said "its too bad that the cover can not be printed yet. Two things are missing: the date and the deceased one! If I don't die, there are no funeral rites..."

One of the sisters present tells us: "A detail that denotes her humanity and charity with us: while we were going upstairs to her cell, they told us to make the greeting short because of her great weakness. A sister said 'I only want to give her a kiss'. To which another sisters responded 'we cannot give her a kiss because of the danger of infection'. In fact, since her illness began, the doctors advised us of the danger that she could be infected with any virus. For this reason, after entering her cell, joking around with her, and thanking us for singing in the Mass, to say goodbye I took her right hand and I gave her a kiss on her ring. She replied with all her strength: 'what are you doing giving me a kiss on the hand! Come here and give me a kiss!' After that, we all took advantage to come close to her and give her a hug goodbye. She was doing it for us! After Mass we took some refreshments with the people.



Afterwards the SSVM who were present sang Matins in honor of the Solemnity of St Joseph, and then stuk and fogon...while she was in her cell each time weaker thanking her Spouse for the 25 years."

"Arise my beloved, let me hear your voice" (Song of Songs 2:14)

To assist Sr. Corpus Domini in her last days, Sr. Maria de Narek, a professional nurse, traveled from Albania. Mother Maria de Jesus Doliente, Provincial Superior, also stayed by her side. From Rome, the Mothers of the Council as well as other sisters traveled to the monastery.

The Solemnity of St. Joseph passed and on the following day, the 21st of March, which was properly speaking her anniversary of vows, great debilitation and pain foretold her death at any moment.

How much she desired to die on the very day of her anniversary! She insistently requested it of her Divine Spouse and directed the same plea to God the Father. It seemed like the Holy Trinity wanted to embellish Sr. Corpus' wedding gown to the smallest details embroidered with every small act of love and resignation that she made to the will of God.

Perhaps the Divine Celestial Council wanted her to fully accomplish in time her 25 years of love to the Incarnate Word to celebrate afterwards "in eternity" and forever her consecration.

And so it was. On the following day, the 22nd of March, Rev. Fr. Tomas Tymchiy, IVE celebrated the Holy Mass in the presence of her parents, Alberto and Isabella, Mother Maria de Jesus Doliente, Sr. Maria de Narek, and the community of the monastery.

Sr. Corpus Domini was fully conscious. She was able to receive communion and at the end of Mass, the anointing of the sick with a plenary indulgence. Immediately afterwards while the sisters were praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Divine Spouse, called her to Himself because He no longer wanted to hear her voice from the earth below but in Heaven with Him. “Arise my beloved...let me hear your voice.”

Corpus was fully serene. It was 12:05pm in Italy.

At that same hour, other Servidoras, aware that Corpus was already entering into her agony, also accompanied her with the prayer of the Divine Mercy.



Fully “contemplative” in Heaven



“Through the mystery of faith in the communion of the saints, the contemplatives will be disposed to and will offer themselves to God so that the other members of the Church may grow in holiness.” (Monastic Rule, N. 10).

With regards to this, I would like to publish two testimonies that speak of the special vocation that our sister discovered during her illness and which she will continue living in Heaven.

One of the testimonies is from Mother Mariam al-Bishara, who was her superior in the Monastery of Pontinia until 2014: “Another important aspect of the life of our dearth Corpus Domini was her love for the cause of families. She was very afflicted to see how they were more and more attacked and shaken up especially those cases which were closest to her which led her to offer herself for this intention. The last time that I was able to speak with her on the telephone, February 8th of this year, she told me that she offered her suffering for families and that if God called her to His Presence, from heaven she would continue

to do the same especially for some families which she asked me about.”

The second one is from Mother Maria Siempre Virgen, who began to be her superior a months before they discovered her illness. “Not long before she died, she told me that at last she understood what God wanted from her. That He no longer wanted her to be occupied with things of this world but to be an intercessor. And

that she wanted to dedicate herself to pray and offer everything that she had to go through for others, that is why she wanted us to ask her for prayers. 'Even when I am in Heaven'-she told me- 'ask me for many things. I want to obtain many graces.' I took advantage and entrusted the house of monastic formation. In addition, the last time that I saw her, I asked her to have it as her first intention and that Jesus was choosing her as victim for this new impetus of the monastic branch so that it could bear fruit and for the difficulties that our Religious Family was undergoing. In this way, she offered herself.

By the grace of God and of His Most Holy Mother, our dear sister, Corpus Domini was able to fulfill until her last breath the resolution that she made upon returning to her beloved Monastery: "*I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God while I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him; I will rejoice in the LORD*" (Ps. 104:33).

She was a faithful daughter of our Institute and for this we should give thanks to God. May our Lord grant the Servidoras the grace to follow her example especially in her profound love of Jesus Christ, living and truly present in the Eucharist and an intense desire to obtain the definitive union with Him in heaven which allowed her to supernaturally offer her crosses with which God wanted to bless and embellish her.

For everything that we have lived together with her and for the graces that God in His mercy has granted her and that He only knows, blessed be the Name of the Lord!

We ask that Masses and prayers be offered in suffrage for her soul and for the fortitude and resignation of her parents and siblings as well as for the sisters of her religious community.

In Christ and Mary Most Holy,
23 March 2017



M. Corredentora Rodriguez
M. Maria Corredentora Rodriguez
General Superior