

**SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHER  
MARY BERNADETTE  
PRASAD KISPOTTA,  
SERVANT OF GOD**



**2 June 1878 - 16 April 1961  
FOUNDER**

**THE CONGREGATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ST. ANNE RANCHI**



"How these Mothers had left their dear parents, brothers and sisters as well as their friends and relations, their own country out of love of Jesus and had come to the godforsaken forest area among the poor and lowly people and how they laboured day and night with great affection to help the souls to reach heaven! If these Mothers sacrificed and did so much for them, then why should we not be ready to follow their beautiful example and work for the good of our own country and people?"

English Memoirs pp. 2-3





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**THE CONGREGATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ST. ANNE RANCHI**

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# FOREWORD

The 12<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne Ranchi was celebrated in two phases due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Its first phase took place from 3 to 7 September 2020, the main purpose of which was the election of the Superior General and four General Councillors, while the second phase occurred from 4 to 12 January 2021 which is also called the Business Chapter 2021. Its main purpose was to discuss on the compiled Postulates (Concerns) of the entire Congregation sent from all four Provinces. One of the Postulates was to write the book on spirituality of Mother Mary Bernadette Prasad Kispotta, Servant of God. Hence, the General Council entrusted the task of writing this book to Dr. Sr. Mariam Anupa Kujur, DSA, Postulator and the Internal Team for the cause of Beatification of Mother Bernadette. In the beginning Late Fr. Linus Kujur, SJ was named as the guide for writing the book but due to his premature death, Rev. Fr. Sudhir Kumar Kujur, SJ was appointed as the new guide later. Thus, the book writing was accomplished under his guidance.

I express my joy and gratitude to God for all His graces and blessings specially bestowed through Mother Bernadette our Founder. I extend my sincere thanks and hearty congratulations to Sr. Mariam Anupa Kujur, DSA and the Internal Team members for completing the given task faithfully and successfully. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Rev. Fr. Sudhir Kumar Kujur, SJ too for his loving guidance in writing the book of spirituality of Mother Bernadette.

I hope this inspirational book will help and inspire all Sisters and formees of the DSA Congregation to know Jesus more intimately, love Him more ardently and follow Him more closely after the example of Mother Mary Bernadette, Servant of God. May our Founder lead and guide us on the way of holiness. May her spirituality be the source of inspiration to deepen our relationship with God in our day-to-day life.

With best wishes,

146<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Founder  
Mother Mary Bernadette Kispotta,  
Servant of God

Sr. Lily Grace Topno, DSA  
Superior General

2 June 2024  
Ranchi



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“How to praise the Almighty and the infinite merciful God for His surprising and bountiful love” (English Memoirs p. 52)?

First and foremost, I thank the compassionate Lord for enabling us to bring forth this book of spirituality of Mother Mary Bernadette Prasad Kispotta, Servant of God and our Founder. It is the Spirit of the Lord that inspired our Sisters to write a Postulate regarding this book. It demonstrates their genuine desire to follow Christ with more enthusiasm and to grow more profoundly in their spirituality following the ideals of the Founder.

I whole heartedly thank Rev. Sr. Lily Grace Topno, DSA, Superior General and all General Councillors for entrusting to me and the Internal Team for the Cause of Beatification the holy task of putting the spirituality of Mother Bernadette in black and white. While doing so, I have experienced very personally the active presence of the Holy Spirit along with the affectionate accompaniment of Mother Bernadette. Though it is difficult to put in words her inexpressible God experience, yet it has been my sincere effort to comprehend the unfathomable aspects of her spirituality through prayerful readings of her Memoirs and reflections. Additionally, the Superior General and the General Councillors have contributed a lot by their constant encouragements, valuable suggestions and needful corrections of the draft. I am grateful to them all.

I take this opportunity to extend my gratefulness to Rev. Fr. Sudhir Kumar Kujur, SJ for his generosity and loving

guidance in writing this book. His attentive readings of the given materials and careful corrections have strengthened me to prepare this book systematically. I deeply appreciate his availability and dedication to the completion of the given task.

I express my sincere thanks to all members of the Internal Team too for their prayerful supports and encouragements. I also thank all the DSA Sisters for their prayers and good wishes. I am sure, this simple but precious gift of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Chapter will be the source of inspiration always to each one of us to grow in our religious life. May the Good Lord bless us all and Mother Bernadette accompany us in our spiritual journey.

With best wishes,

Sr. Mariam Anupa Kujur, DSA  
Postulator





# PREFACE

Human being is made of not only the body but also spirit and is inevitably influenced by various dimensions such as social, cultural, political etc. Hence, for the integrated development of a person only the physical needs are not sufficient rather spiritual needs too are equally significant. In fact, without the spiritual satisfaction human being remains incomplete as St. Augustine of Hippo says, “Our hearts were made for You, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you.” Similarly, Buddha also affirms, “Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life.” God created mankind in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), meaning that human race is granted particular nature associated to God. Consequently, along with the human weaknesses, a person has divine qualities as well. Therefore, he/she constantly seeks to be holy despite his/her sinfulness. God Himself commanded, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

The concept of spirituality originated within Christianity. The word translates a Latin noun *spiritualitas*, associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual). These derive from the Greek noun *pneuma* (spirit) and the adjective *pneumatikos*. The Christian life is discipleship or living a Christ-like life following Christ. Christian spirituality is therefore not reducible to devotional practices or to abstract theory. It implies a complete way of life guided by the Spirit. The call to discipleship implies sharing in the work of Jesus to bring about God’s Kingdom. Matthew lists the work of the

disciple as proclaiming the Good News, curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out demons (Mt. 10:7–8). This process of sharing in Jesus’ work and life is also bound up with the notion of selfless service to others (Mk. 9:35) or even of giving up one’s life out of love (Jn. 15:12–13). However, it is too narrow to understand the call to proclaim the Kingdom simply as a verbal communication of information about God or of moral teachings. Proclaiming the way of Jesus was understood from the beginning as living after the manner of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians extend Jesus’ mission by being a “living message,” through the kind of people they are and how they act in the world (2 Cor. 3:3). In other words, mission is the inseparable aspect of Christian spirituality.

Christianity is mission-focused. That is, a key part of the Christian life is to share in God’s own mission to make a better world by proclaiming God’s work of creativity, active goodness, reconciliation, healing and love, directed towards enabling humanity to arrive at its ultimate destiny. This outward-looking approach seeks to respond to the needs of others. This expands the notion of “mission” beyond purely religious preoccupations to embrace broader social transformation. The message of Jesus Christ demands that disciples attend to the needs of the poor and marginalized and enable their voices to be heard.

Spirituality is a core element that every man strives to attain in his lifespan to give a true meaning to his existence in this materialistic world. For some, spirituality is something that could connect them to the omniscient power in the universe,

i.e. God. For them, God is the ultimate solution to all their problems. While for others, the concept of spirituality finds its existence in meditation, yoga, long walks or a quiet reflection of something. But one needs to understand the very concept of spirituality. It is not something confined just to religiosity or meditation or some long walks. It is an umbrella term that contains in it several other notions of life. With the advancement of time, the definition of spirituality has been changed. Spirituality is somehow like the essence of that very phenomenon that compels a man to search for the truth of his life, to give a meaning to his life, to find the purpose of his existence, to find answers about the infinite and most importantly to give meaning to the relationship that connects him to something that is much greater and superior to him. It is something that harmonizes our relationship with other beings and with the universe too. It is also something that develops in us the perspective to see everyone with the same level of compassion. Spirituality expects one to see all, hear all but act according to one's own self. That is what Mother Mary Bernadette Prasad Kispotta, Servant of God did in her life.

As the “*Spiritual Exercises*” of St. Ignatius of Loyola characterizes the Ignatian spirituality so also the “*Memoirs*” of Mother Bernadette expresses her spirituality. This book is a humble effort to illustrate the fundamental characteristics of Mother Bernadette's spirituality based on the *Memoirs*, her autobiography. It is divided into four chapters and the categorized characteristic features of Mother Bernadette are elaborated in each chapter. Hopefully, this book on the

spirituality of Mother Bernadette will serve the readers, specially the Daughters of St. Anne to better understand her spirituality and help deepen their spirituality becoming intimate followers of Christ like their beloved Founder.

Internal Team

For the Cause of Beatification





# INTRODUCTION

Christian spirituality owes its existence and expansion in the soil of Chotanagpur with the arrival of the Belgian Jesuit missionaries in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fr. Constant Lievens, S.J. Servant of God came to Ranchi on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1885. Later many more Belgian Jesuit missionaries followed his footsteps and dedicated themselves to the work of evangelization. Religious Sisters, both Loreto (IBVM) from Ireland and Ursuline from Tildonk (OSU), joined hands with the missionaries in the work of evangelization as well as education in Chotanagpur. They opened schools both for boys and girls keeping some students as boarders. Besides learning the catechism and studying in the school, the students were involved in various activities which helped them develop their talents and personality. Mother Mary Bernadette, like other girls, got the opportunity to stay with the Loreto Mothers in their hostel as a student. She came to the Loreto Convent in Ranchi at the age of twelve in 1890. Thereafter, she heard the call of God, and the tiny seed of religious vocation grew constantly in her fertile heart.

**DSA Spirituality:** On the pattern of Ignatian spirituality, the DSA spirituality is also Christ-centred, biblical and liturgical.<sup>1</sup> Following these characteristics, like all those who profess the evangelical counsels, the DSA Sisters before all else seek and love God.<sup>2</sup> Through reading and meditating the Word of God, they learn the all surpassing knowledge of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, they actively and devoutly participate in

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1 Cf. The Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne Ranchi, *Constitutions* (Const.) no. 33.

2 Cf. *ibid.*; PC 5a.

3 Cf. *ibid.*; Phil. 3:8; PC 6b.

the sacred liturgy every day, specially the Holy Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> The Divine Office or the Liturgical morning prayer (Lauds) and evening prayer (Vespers) are recited daily in common.<sup>5</sup> They do the examination of conscience before the liturgical midday prayer as well as before the night prayer. They are regular at daily examination of conscience for the sake of purity of heart.<sup>6</sup>

**Spirituality of Mother Bernadette:** The spirituality of Mother Bernadette was deepened by various types of inner and outer struggles. Before getting admission in the Loreto School, she was already studying in the Lutheran school under the care of a Lutheran Pastor. Consequently, her faith in the Lutheran Church was growing day by day while she was ignorant of the Catholic faith and the Catholic Priests. But having gradually recognized the real Church, she finally accepted the Catholic faith and was baptized in the Catholic Church on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1890.

During their stay with the Loreto Sisters, Mother Bernadette and her three companions namely, Mother Veronica, Mother Cecilia and Mother Mary were profoundly influenced by their exemplary life. All these four girls thought: “If these Mothers had left their dear parents, brothers and sisters as well as their friends and relations, their own country out of love of Jesus and had come to the godforsaken area among the poor and backward people and how they laboured day and night with great affection to help the souls to reach heaven, then why should we not be ready to follow their beautiful example and

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4 Cf. Const. no. 34; The Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi, *Directory* (Direct.) no. 44 (d)

5 Cf. Const., no. 35; Direct. no. 44 (b).

6 Cf. *ibid.*, no. 45; Direct. no. 44 (g).

work for the good of our own country and people?”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the first sparkle of God’s call was kindled in their hearts. In order to serve God and His people, they were determined to renounce everything including the marriage. The spirituality of Mother Bernadette includes her spiritual qualities as well as heroic virtues that she had received from God as unique gifts.



<sup>7</sup> B. KISPOTTA, *The Memoirs of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette DSA Founder of the Congregation (Memoirs)*, trans., Alex Ekka, Catholic Press Ranchi 2007, pp. 2-3. All the quotations are taken from the English version of the Memoirs.





# CHAPTER 1

## Salient Characteristics of the Spirituality of Mother Mary Bernadette

**1.1 Christocentric:** Christ Himself was the centre of Mother Bernadette's life. It was Jesus Himself who became her all in all. She was prompt to do anything for the sake of Jesus. Like St. Paul she regarded everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. She suffered the loss of all things and regarded them as rubbish in order to gain Christ.<sup>1</sup> She preferred Jesus as her divine bridegroom to the earthy bridegroom. She refused to get married in order to become the bride of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Prior to be christened in the Catholic faith as Mary Bernadette on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1890, she was baptized in the Lutheran Church as Christ Anandit Ruth on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1878, which is associated to the very name of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, according to her previous name, she was a faithful follower of Christ our Lord.

It is noteworthy that in the joint family of Mother Mary Bernadette, there were two more persons whose names were associated with Christ. First of all, Christkila was the wife of Prabhu Prasad, the second brother of Puran Prasad. She was the mother of Kripa who later became Mother Veronica. Hence, Christkila was addressed by Christ Anandit Ruth as *Bari Maa* (elder mother, i.e. wife of Prabhu Prasad). Obviously, there was an affectionate relationship between them. Secondly, the younger brother of Sushila (Mother

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1 Cf. Phil. 3: 8.

2 Cf. Memoirs, p. 37.

3 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 23.

Cecilia) was Christopher who was born of Puran Prasad and his second wife Margaret. Thus, Christopher was the step brother of Christ Anandit Ruth who loved her dearly. In this way, right from her childhood the family's religious atmosphere played a vital role in her life so as to recognize Christ Jesus and grow more in his love.

As the holy name of Jesus means Saviour, Mother Bernadette and her first companions had deep experience of Jesus as the one who saves. For instance, having known that the man with whom his parents had requested Veronica to marry became mad and died within one year, Mother Bernadette expressed, "We thanked God for saving Veronica from such a fateful life."<sup>4</sup> During crossing the river in full spate due to torrential rain, Mother Bernadette, Mother Cecilia and Mother Mary saw the helping hand of God and His protection through the boatman.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, while guarding the sick girl and the corpses alone at night, Mother Bernadette experienced God's saving power through the Guardian Angels as she writes, "Finally, she and the assisting girls thanked the Guardian Angels for protecting them from all harms."<sup>6</sup> All the more, after escaping from her dad she expressed her gratefulness to God in front of the Blessed Sacrament, "Immediately, I entered the Church and fell on my knees before the Blessed Sacrament, crying profusely and thanking the Lord Jesus immensely for all the protection I had received from Him."<sup>7</sup>

All the above mentioned events testify that the life of Mother Bernadette was Christ centred. In all circumstances she was spiritually united with Christ like the vine and its branches

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4 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

5 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

and did everything for his sake. Her thoughts, words and deeds were directed by the Spirit of Christ Himself. Hence, the words of St. Paul could be applied to her life too, “To me living is Christ and dying is gain.”<sup>8</sup> Her life was so full of Christ that again like St. Paul she could say, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”<sup>9</sup>

**1.2 Biblical:** The living Word of God was the source of Mother Bernadette’s strength. She was enlightened and inspired by the Word of God that guided her in every step of her life. Often she has quoted the biblical text either explicitly or implicitly in her Memoirs. For example, regarding the loving care of Rev. Fr. Alphonse Scharlaeken, S.J., she wrote, “He was indeed like a mother hen which protects her tiny chicks under her wings from all dangers. He protected us and took care of us till his death.”<sup>10</sup> In the same way she applied the scriptural text to Fr. Fredrick Peal, S.J. saying, “With him we were like small chicks under the wings of the mother hen.”<sup>11</sup> The very first inspiration of her vocation reminds us of the call of Abraham who had left his own country, kindred and his father’s house and went to the land where the Lord showed him.<sup>12</sup> Mother Bernadette has narrated that on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1899, on the day of their entrance in the Novitiate and investiture ceremony of the four pioneers of the DSA Congregation, Loreto Mother Teresa was exceedingly happy; she took Bernadette in her arms and spoke like the old Simeon, “O Lord, now let this humble handmaiden go in peace, for I have seen the fruit of your wonderful love. I see

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8 Phil. 1:21.

9 Gal. 2:20.

10 Memoirs, p. 54; Cf. Mt. 23:37-39.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 65; Cf. Mt. 23:37-39.

12 Cf. Gen. 12:1-9, Memoirs, p. 2-3.

that you have also called the girls of this lowly country to be your brides.”<sup>13</sup>

On the auspicious occasion of the First Profession, the Pioneer Mothers’ expression of gratitude was similar to that of Mother Mary’s *Magnificat*.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, on the day of the Silver Jubilee of the DSA Congregation, Mother Bernadette has expressed her thankfulness to all the Fathers, Mothers and benefactors in the following words: “Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me.”<sup>15</sup> She continues, “If He assured us to give to us the joys of heaven, when a cup of water was offered to anyone in his name, then the Lord Jesus would certainly reward them abundantly for all their works of love and mercy.”<sup>16</sup> At the death of Fr. Fredrick Peal, S.J., their *Guru* Father, she has quoted again the text from the Holy Scripture for him: “You certainly were an honest and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will reward you greatly. Come and share in your master’s happiness.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the various biblical texts quoted by Mother Bernadette in the Memoirs indicate that her spirituality was directed by the Word of God. Her heart was like the good soil of the ‘parable of the sower’ into which seed brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.<sup>18</sup>

The DSA Sisters pay special attention to the Word of God in their daily life and dedicate at least 30 minutes to meditation.<sup>19</sup> Their religious community life draws its nourishment from

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13 Cf. Lk. 2:29-32, Memoirs, p. 50.

14 Cf. Lk. 1:46-55, Memoirs, p. 52.

15 Mt. 10:43, Memoirs, p. 63.

16 Cf. Mk. 9:41, Memoirs, pp. 63-64.

17 Lk. 16:10, Cf. Memoirs, p. 66.

18 Cf. Mk. 4:8.

19 Cf. Const. no. 44.

the Gospel and the liturgy, specially the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> Every day they do spiritual reading as well as Scripture reading for fifteen minutes either in private or in common.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the Word of God becomes the light for their steps to brighten the path of religious life.

**1.3 Liturgical:** As the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, so also it was of Mother Bernadette. She had a profound devotion to the Eucharistic Lord. Kneeling down and praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of the Loreto Sisters after escaping from her furious father is the best example of her full trust in the Eucharistic Lord.<sup>22</sup> In her heart she was convinced that “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals.”<sup>23</sup> She owed the Eucharistic sacrifice and prayers of the Jesuit Fathers to the success in the trials of life as she says, “We affirmed strongly that only because of the special prayers, penance and Holy Masses of the loving Fathers, this priceless gift was bestowed on us.”<sup>24</sup> Mother Bernadette and her companions deepened their faith in the power of the Holy Eucharist through the instructions of the Jesuit Fathers; they always encouraged them to be strong in their Catholic faith. Even before the three girls reluctantly left for their home from the school at the command of their dad Puran Prasad, the instructing Father said to them, “Look here my dear girls, Fr. Rector has told all the Fathers about you and he has ordered us to offer Masses, prayers and mortifications for your sake so that you are victorious in this test.”<sup>25</sup>

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20 Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 53.

21 Cf. Direct. no. 44 (e).

22 Cf. Memoirs, p. 38.

23 Ps. 118:8.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Mother Bernadette used to go to the Catholic Church even prior to accepting the Catholic faith when she was at home during her holidays as she herself acknowledges, “During these days I came to the Catholic Church for Holy Mass.”<sup>26</sup> Auspiciously, it was during the Holy Eucharistic celebration that she was convinced about the Catholic faith while looking at the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Lourdes and thereafter the inner change took place in her life. In her own words, “So, the next time when I went for the Holy Mass, I watched the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes very intently and was immediately attracted to her.”<sup>27</sup>

So far as the mission of the Daughters of St. Anne is concerned, evangelization has been their principal apostolate which focused on sacraments and various liturgical activities as Mother Bernadette has affirmed in the Memoirs, “Under the care and guidance of the Jesuit Fathers, we conducted schools for girls and gave religious instruction to the adult women. We prepared them for Baptism, Confession, Holy Communion and for the Sacrament of Marriage.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there is a mention of the devotional Holy Mass and solemn benediction on some auspicious occasions like the Silver Jubilee of the Congregation on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1922 as well as the Silver Jubilee of their First Profession on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1926.<sup>29</sup> “There was Holy Mass in the Cathedral where we renewed our vows.”<sup>30</sup> The life of all the four pioneering Mothers was centred on the Holy Sacraments even till their

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

29 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 62, 65. Actually the completion of 25 years of the establishment of the DSA Congregation was on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1922 but for an indispensable reason it was celebrated on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1922. Similarly, the completion of 25 years of the First Profession of the four Pioneer Mothers was on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1926 but it was celebrated on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1926.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

death. Mother Bernadette has mentioned about it regarding Mother Veronica and Mother Mary, “When they were still conscious they made their Confession, received the last sacraments and the Holy Communion with great reverence and slept in the Lord Jesus, their heavenly bridegroom.”<sup>31</sup> One of the witnesses confirming the liturgical life of Mother Bernadette says, “She offered her prayers, made Confessions and received the Holy Communion frequently, as if these were the last acts of her life. After receiving the Holy Communion, she prayed so intensely as if she was encountering Jesus face to face.”<sup>32</sup>

At present the Daughters of St. Anne too give priority to the Holy Sacraments in their day to day life. “Our liturgical prayer comes in the first place, especially the Eucharistic celebration, completed throughout the day by the recitation of the Office in common.”<sup>33</sup> “We frequently approach the Sacrament of Penance, with the freedom left to us regarding the choice of confessor and spiritual direction.”<sup>34</sup>

**1.4 Marian Devotion:** As St. Ignatius of Loyola had a special devotion to Our Lady of Montserrat, so also Mother Bernadette had a remarkable devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes. In fact, it was the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, to which Bernadette was attracted and thence began her internal conversion and subsequent positive attitude towards Blessed Virgin Mary as well as to the Catholic Church.<sup>35</sup> Gradually, she changed her mind and accepted Catholicism as a true religion. Subsequently, she was baptized in the

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31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

33 Const. no. 43.

34 Const. no. 46.

35 Cf. Memoirs, p. 23.

Catholic Church changing her name from Christ Anandit Ruth to Mary Bernadette. Her first name is associated to the very name of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the second name to St. Bernadette Soubirous to whom Our Lady of Lourdes appeared several times. Seeing the ardent desire of the four girls to live the religious life, the Archbishop Paul Goethals, S.J. decided to start the Sodality for the girls i.e. the Legion of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.<sup>36</sup> He said, “If all four of you join the Legion of Mary and become the faithful daughters of the most pure and immaculate Virgin Mother, then and only then I will think of your religious life.”<sup>37</sup> As the Sodalists they grew in deeper devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary implementing her virtues in their practical lives as well.

Mary Bernadette was inspired by the life of Mother Mary. As the Blessed Virgin Mary treasured in her heart the Word of God so also Mary Bernadette pondered upon God’s Word which enlightened her path in her life journey. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, she was full of enthusiasm to render her selfless service to the needy ones. She was sensitive to the needs of others. She was ever ready to do the will of God as a humble handmaid. In all respects Mother Mary was her model to follow Christ Jesus.

The DSA Sisters cultivate the traditional Catholic devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Blessed Virgin Mary besides the devotion to St. Anne, their Patron and the Guardian Angels.<sup>38</sup> Every day they pray to Our Lady three “Hail Mary” for purity.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, they pray daily five decades of the

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36 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 40.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Cf. Const. no. 47.

39 Cf. Direct. no. 26, 30.



Rosary either in private or in common.<sup>40</sup> Thus, they unite themselves to Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary and imitate her footsteps as an ideal Daughter of St. Anne.

**1.5 Special Devotion to the Guardian Angels:** While staying in the Loreto Convent, once Mother Bernadette was given the turn to look after a seriously sick girl who was recuperating in the same room where two corpses also were kept. It so happened that the Loreto Mother who was supposed to accompany Bernadette at night went to her room and could not come back. Unfortunately, two jackals came over there and tried to enter the sick room. Poor Bernadette tried her best to chase them away but realizing the situation very difficult to handle all alone, placing a candle in the middle of the door, she rushed to call her companions from the hostel. But before going away from there, she entrusted the sick girl and the corpses to the Guardian Angels with a heart touching prayer, “Please help me you heavenly beings, for I do not have the courage to fulfill the task given to me. Look here holy beings, I offer them to your protection. So, please protect them from all dangers and harms.”<sup>41</sup> This fervent prayer with great faith indicates her great devotion to the Guardian Angels. She firmly believed that God helps the human beings through the Angels and protects them specially through the Guardian Angels.

The DSA Sisters continue the devotion by reciting the litany of the Guardian Angels together in the month of September along with the song. Additionally, they pray to the nine degrees of the Angels every day after the night prayer.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Cf. *ibid.*, no. 44 (f).

41 Memoirs, p. 28.

42 Prayer to the “nine degrees of the Angels” is one of the spiritual tradition of the DSA Sisters. During this prayer, to each degree of the Angels an ‘Our Father’ and three ‘Hail Mary’ is said

**1.6 Passion for the souls:** The very purpose of Mother Bernadette's decision to remain spinster was to dedicate herself fully to the work of helping the souls to reach heaven. She had a great passion for saving souls. She had recognized this in the mission of the Loreto Mothers who laboured day and night with great affection to help the souls to reach heaven.<sup>43</sup> Like St. Ignatius of Loyola, she had ardent desire to win the souls for the Kingdom of God; she desired to save her soul and the souls of others. In her reply to the old woman Salomi<sup>44</sup> she explicitly says, "Grandma, I don't want to wear any jewellery; for if I do, my heart and soul will become worldly and I will be lost forever."<sup>45</sup> It implies that she considered the worldly things a hindrance to the salvation of souls. Hence, she thought it is better to keep herself away from the golden jewellery for the purity and integrity of her soul. She preferred to lose her life for the sake of Jesus who said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world but lose his soul?"<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Jesus himself was her most precious ornament with which she had adorned herself spiritually. Compared to such divine jewellery, the golden jewellery was nothing at all.

During their stay as students in the Convent with the Loreto Mothers, the four pioneering Mothers had many opportunities to participate in the acts of charity. One such occasion was to

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one by one.

43 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2.

44 Salomi was an old woman who had found Bernadette hidden behind the bush and sobbing because she did not want to wear the golden jewels prepared for her. Subsequently she told the parents of Bernadette about her whereabouts and suggested them not to force her in this regard.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

46 Mk. 8:35-36.

serve the victims of famine and cholera epidemics in the year 1895 and 1896, as it is described by the Founder:

These poor people were dying everywhere – in towns, villages, fields, plains, roads and drains. Those days there were very few Fathers. And yet they went about saving souls and people as much as they could... Only four girls (my three sisters and I) stayed behind of our own will to work with the Sisters. We used to go around the villages and hamlets visiting families everyday with the provisions of medicine, rice, clothes and mats, which the coolies carried for them. On these rounds we distributed medicines, rice, dal, clothes and mats to the needy and comforted them, besides explaining to them the basics of religion. To the dying we gave baptism without delay.<sup>47</sup>

In the above mentioned event they not only gave the temporal materials to the cholera victims but also the spiritual means in order to help their souls to reach heaven, specially by giving them Baptism. The Loreto Mothers and the four girls had involved themselves in the noble work of helping the souls so much that they had no time even to say their prayers and have meals.<sup>48</sup> The passion for souls had engaged them in such a way that like Jesus and his disciples they had no leisure even to eat.<sup>49</sup> In such a situation the Word of God became their bread to strengthen them to carry on their mission as Jesus himself has said, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Jesus Himself had become the bread of life for

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47 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

48 Cf., *ibid.*

49 Cf. Mk. 6:31.

50 Mt. 4:4.

them as he has said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, like Jesus her Master, Mother Bernadette too could say, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.”<sup>52</sup>

**1.7 Detachment from the Worldly Things:** Besides the golden jewelry episode, another example of detachment is cited in the Memoirs. Seeing her determination to remain unmarried, when Bernadette’s father demanded her clothes through the Loreto Mothers, she put all the good clothes carefully folding them in the box along with a thanksgiving letter. She kept only the torn clothes for herself.<sup>53</sup> In accordance with the Ignatian indifference, she detached herself from all the things that could hinder her from uniting to God. She had well understood the following words of Jesus, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”<sup>54</sup>

She was convinced that if she strived first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all other things would be given to her as well.<sup>55</sup> All the more, she had recognized the Kingdom of heaven as a treasure hidden in the field and renounced all other treasures in order to gain the heavenly one.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, she gave up her everything when she found God and His Kingdom as the most precious pearl.<sup>57</sup> Like St. Francis of Assisi, she surrendered all her clothes except the torn ones, to

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51 Jn. 6:35.

52 *Ibid.*, 4:34.

53 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 39.

54 Mt. 6:24.

55 Cf., Mt. 6:33.

56 Cf., *ibid.* 13:44.

57 Cf., *ibid.* 13:45-46.

her earthly father with full trust in her heavenly Father who takes care of all His children lovingly providing for them all their needs. Of course, these consoling words of Jesus strengthened her spiritually, “There is no one who has left house or brothers or mother or father or children or field for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children and fields with persecution – and in the age to come eternal life.”<sup>58</sup>

**1.8 Seeking God’s Will in Everything:** Mother Bernadette’s life was an internal journey of seeking the will of God. At times it was not easy to know exactly the will of God yet she continued her spiritual quest in every circumstance. And having been assured of God’s will, she was prompt to accept it with a humble heart. She was ready even to suffer and face the challenges courageously. For instance, she had to face various difficulties due to her decision to remain virgin for God’s sake. On the one hand, Puran Prasad, her own father threatened to kill her if she continued to be firm in her decision, on the other hand the Archbishop Paul Goethals, S.J., in order to facilitate the missionary work, ordered the Loreto Mothers to send away from the school all the girls who refused to get married. Nevertheless, she was ready to do the will of God like the Blessed Virgin Mary, the daughter of St. Anne who said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”<sup>59</sup>

In the Memoirs of Mother Bernadette there are several passages articulated by her that evidently indicate her spirit of seeking the will of God above all, even in the painful

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58 Mk. 10:29-30.

59 Lk. 1:38.

moments. For instance, after knowing the order of the Archbishop regarding their dismissal from the Loreto School, all the Loreto Mothers were extremely sorry to send them away. The four girls too were very sad, yet they accepted it as God's will as Mother Bernadette writes, "God in His infinite wisdom allowed all this to happen."<sup>60</sup> She had tremendous capacity to see the hand of God even in the unpleasant events of life. Another example is that of a terrible famine and cholera epidemics in 1895 and 1896, which caused a lot of death and suffering. But in such a pathetic situation also she says that all happened as God ordained.<sup>61</sup>

In the year 1896, when Mother Bernadette along with Mother Cecilia and Mother Veronica had gone to her native village, Sargaon, to bid final goodbye to her family members, there was a painful moment of separation. She describes that despite feasting, all the family members and relatives were very sad at their farewell. They cried, yet knowing God's holy will they bade them farewell.<sup>62</sup> When Mother Mary Teresa IBVM was transferred and was about to depart from Ranchi to Kolkata, then again the four Pioneers of the DSA Congregation were very sad because she was like an affectionate mother who took care of them so lovingly. But they accepted her transfer as God's will.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding the Silver Jubilee of the First Profession Mother Bernadette states that there was a plan to celebrate it on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1926. Everything was planned well and ready for the occasion, but the Omniscient God had willed it otherwise.<sup>64</sup>

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60      *Memoirs*, p. 9.

61      Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

62      Cf. *ibid.*, p. 44.

63      Cf. *Memoirs*, p. 52.

64      Cf. *ibid.*, p. 64.

In fact, due to the sudden death of Fr. Alphonse Scharlaeken, S.J., the spiritual mentor, the Jubilee Celebration was postponed and later it was celebrated on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1926. In this event too Mother Bernadette sees the will of God. Similarly, she sees God's will in the transfer of Fr. Fredrick Peal, S.J. from Ranchi to Hazaribagh. She writes, "He was transferred to St. Stanislaus College, Sitagarha in Hazaribagh on 28<sup>th</sup> December by his Superiors in accordance with the will of God."<sup>65</sup>

**1.9 Better Service with the Love of Jesus:** The charism of the DSA Congregation is, "Better Service with the Love of Jesus". It is derived from the charism of Mother Bernadette herself who had received the specific grace (charism) of the Holy Spirit to serve the people of God with the love of Jesus. Right from the beginning she was service-minded. The very first inspiration exhibits her ardent desire to serve God's people selflessly like the Loreto Mothers.<sup>66</sup>

As St. Ignatius of Loyola did everything for the "Greater Glory of God", so also Mother Bernadette committed herself to 'better service with the love of Jesus'. It means that in all her works she put more efforts in order to produce more fruits. Mother Bernadette and her companions decided to give better service remaining unmarried so that they could dedicate more time to the service of others rather than being involved in the family affairs. Again like St. Ignatius of Loyola, with the spirit of '*magis*' (the more), Mother Bernadette aimed at the maximum in her life and mission. All the more, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother Bernadette always chose what was better and conducive whenever there

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65 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

66 *Cf. ibid.*, p. 2.

were other options. For example, between the Lutheran and the Catholic Church, she chose the latter as the true religion. Between the European and indigenous dress, she chose the latter in order to adjust with the people in all circumstances. Between Jesus, the heavenly bridegroom and the earthly Lutheran bridegroom, she chose the first one to love above all else. Between the Divine and human refuge, she opted for the Divine one in the form of the Blessed Sacrament after escaping from her father's anger.

In imitation of Jesus who said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”<sup>67</sup> Mother Bernadette too dedicated her entire life to the service of God and humanity. Therefore, Mother Bernadette and her companions began to watch more carefully the life style and works of the Loreto Mothers. “To satisfy their desire in serving others, the four girls did whatever work was given to them- teaching the children and looking after them when they were sick. Thus, they helped the Sisters earnestly and diligently.”<sup>68</sup>

Another inspiring example of Mother Bernadette's service mindedness was the three letters which she wrote to her father Puran Prasad after being sent away from the school. She pleaded to him in the following words, “Oh dear daddy, out of mercy for us kindly talk to the Fathers and settle the matter favourably for us, so that we could always remain virgins in the service of God. We are ignorant and unworthy to become Sisters, but we can certainly serve them.”<sup>69</sup> Afterward, being inducted as the Sodalists they began to live with Loreto

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67 Mt. 20:28.

68 *Memoirs*, p. 3.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 9.



Sisters happily who entrusted them with various tasks as it is mentioned in the Memoirs:

They engaged us in different types of work like being in charge of the girls day and night, sweeping and cleaning the church, decorating the altar, arranging the mass vestments etc. Similarly, we washed the soiled linen of the church and ironed them, did stitching and sewing besides nursing the sick and the young, and kept vigil at the service of the orphans. Other works were teaching in the school, giving religious instruction to girls and women, looking after the storerooms, the kitchen and the flowers and vegetables in the garden. We also did marketing from time to time.<sup>70</sup>

Mother Bernadette has expressed her ardent desire to serve God and His people very often but she tells it more explicitly when she makes understand Mr. Jonas Tigga who had proposed to marry her. She says to him lovingly: “My dear brother Jonas, please know that I am going to serve the Lord Jesus. Therefore, it is my humble request to you that you do not put any hurdle on my way...Now please know that this is our last meeting and so accept my final loving greetings.”<sup>71</sup>

Having seen the dedicated service of Bernadette and her companions during their stay with the Loreto Mothers and specially serving the cholera and famine victims in 1895-1896, the Missionary Fathers and Loreto Mothers themselves went to the Archbishop Paul Goethals, S.J. on their own as

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70 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

witnesses and pleaded for these girls to be inducted to the religious life without delay:

Earlier we had held view that living unmarried was against the custom or tradition of the country... Knowing the strong resolve of these girls to remain virgins, now we understand what they want. It is certainly God's will. He wants that the girls of this undeveloped country should commit themselves totally to love and serve Him and work for the salvation of souls. So, Most Reverend Archbishop, please examine this matter and see what can be done.<sup>72</sup>

The DSA Sisters strive for *magis* in their various apostolates with the sense of responsibility. According to the demand of time they prepare themselves in a way as to render better service to the people of today. They endeavor to become more efficient instruments of God to produce more fruitful results in their mission. They perform everything with the spirit of service.

**1.10 Ablaze with the Love of Jesus:** This is the motto of the DSA Congregation, which is again derived from the distinctive quality of Mother Bernadette. As she recognizes the burning fire for Jesus in the hearts of the Loreto Mothers so also she was ablaze with the love of Jesus. She writes about them that knowing the great desire of the Archbishop, the Loreto Sisters took up the religious enterprise filled with God's love and generosity.<sup>73</sup> She continues to describe their tremendous courage to tackle the challenges of the long tiresome way.

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72 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

73 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1.

The Loreto Mothers had to face immense hardships to make the hazardous journey; but filled with the love of Jesus, they were ready to do anything. In the foundational inspiration too there is the phrase ‘out of love of Jesus’ as it is articulated:

How these Sisters had left their dear parents, brothers and sisters as well as their friends and relations, their own country out of love of Jesus and had come to the godforsaken *jungle*<sup>74</sup> area among the poor and lowly people and how they laboured day and night with great affection to help the souls to reach heaven. They said to themselves that if these Sisters sacrificed and did so much for them, then why should they not be ready to follow their beautiful example and work for the good of their own country and people?<sup>75</sup>

All the more, Mother Bernadette had realized the same love for Jesus in the Missionary Jesuits as she has described how happy the Missionary Fathers were to know about the coming of Christ Anandit Ruth (Bernadette) along with her sister Sushila (Cecilia) to deliver food for her dad during the summer vacation. Acknowledging their ‘love for Jesus’ she writes: “The Fathers were extremely delighted at this news, since they worked day and night with ardent love of Jesus to gather as many souls as possible.”<sup>76</sup> In her Memoirs the word “love” has appeared many times which indicates that Mother Bernadette herself was ablaze with the love of Jesus.

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74 The word ‘*jungle*’ (full of forest) is the adjective of Hindi word ‘*jungle*’ that means forest. Those days the land of *Chotanagpur* was full of dense forests in which many wild animals too were found in abundance and the roads were not yet developed as are developed today. Even the means of transportation were not available except ‘*Puspus*’ a kind of cart pulled and pushed by the labourers.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

One of the great missionaries whose exemplary life had influenced the spiritual life of Mother Bernadette was Fr. Constant Lievens, S.J., Servant of God. His motto was – “Fire must burn”. Undoubtedly, according to his motto he too was ablaze with the love of Jesus and there was a fire of Christ in his heart. Hence, implicitly or explicitly, like the Loreto Mothers he had become the source of inspiration for Mother Bernadette whose father Puran Prasad was his good friend. However, above all, Christ himself was the Supreme Light who had kindled the fire of love in her heart. Being ablaze with the love of Jesus, she too had become a tiny light ready to burn for Christ and spread his light all around as he said – “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”<sup>77</sup>

**1.11 Attitude of Gratitude:** Gratitude is an attitude of a simple and pure heart that is filled with love and thankfulness. Mother Bernadette’s heart was so full of gratitude to God and to all the benefactors that she expressed it profoundly in words even for their small help and benevolence. Above all, she was thankful to God Almighty for all His abundant graces and goodness. In her Memoirs she uses the verb “thank” several times. Her attitude of gratitude could be seen in two categories:

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77 Mt. 5:14-16.

### ***Gratitude towards God:***

- i) After being mad and dying of the boy with whom his family members wanted Veronica to get married, “We **thanked** God for saving Veronica from such a fateful life.”<sup>78</sup>
- ii) After escaping to safety, “Immediately I entered the church and fell on my knees before the Blessed Sacrament, crying profusely and **thanking** the Lord Jesus immensely for all the protection I had received from Him.”<sup>79</sup>
- iii) After the induction as Sodalist, “Finally our suffering came to an end. We **thanked** God immensely for the grace of this conquest.”<sup>80</sup>
- iv) After the Cholera pandemic when the Loreto school was reopened, “**Thanks** be to God abundantly. When the disease was eradicated, the school was reopened.”<sup>81</sup>
- v) On the day of the First Profession, “Consequently, it was bounding on our part to love, honour and **thank** Him with all our mind and heart.”<sup>82</sup>
- vi) After the preparation for the Silver Jubilee of the DSA Congregation, “So, the two of us still alive – Sr. Anna Cecilia and myself Sr. Anna Bernadette – made our three days retreat to commemorate the great event and **thank** the Lord, who in His great bounty and love poured his blessings and graces upon us 25 years ago.”<sup>83</sup>

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78    *Memoirs*, p. 24.

79    *Ibid.*, p. 38.

80    *Ibid.*, p. 40.

81    *Ibid.*, p. 45.

82    *Ibid.*, p. 52.

83    *Ibid.*, p. 62.

- vii) After the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the DSA Congregation, “This was how the young and the old **thanked** the Lord together for his bountiful graces with great love, reverence, praise and gratitude.”<sup>84</sup>
- viii) After the appointment of Fr. Fredrick Peal, S.J. as the new mentor and guide, “We **thanked** the Lord for this new appointee, who was so well known to us.”<sup>85</sup>

***Gratitude towards Benefactors and Others:***

- i) When Mother Bernadette pleads with the old woman Salomi, “Tell them that I **thank** them whole-heartedly for everything and will continue doing so always, but I refuse to get married and wear the ornaments.”<sup>86</sup>
- ii) When the Protestant Pastors sent a teacher to Bernadette with the instructions to come back to them, “I want to know about the Catholic faith. If it is the true faith, I will certainly accept it and will never turn back. And if not then I will come back to you. I **thank** you very much for your lovely education, care and concern.”<sup>87</sup>
- iii) After crossing the torrential river, thanking the boatman, “We **thanked** him heartily and sent him back to his house.”<sup>88</sup>
- iv) After receiving the blessing and holy pictures from the Father, “We wept out of gratitude and **thanked** the Father for his comforting advice and the beautiful pictures.”<sup>89</sup>

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84 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

- v) In the letter to her parents which Bernadette sent along with her clothes in the box, “Respected and dear parents, I **thank** you all from the bottom of my heart for your immense love, labour, toil and trouble that you took for my sake.”<sup>90</sup>
- vi) After the victory over the struggles of life thanking the Jesuit Fathers, “We **thanked** them whole heartedly a million times and we acknowledged that if assistance were not to come to us through so many Holy Masses, prayers and penances, we would certainly have been beaten in this test.”<sup>91</sup>
- vii) Thanking Mother Mary Teresa IBVM before her departure from Ranchi to Kolkata, “We **thanked** her for all her benevolence and promised to remember her all through our life.”<sup>92</sup>
- viii) Thanking Loreto Provincial Mother Gonzaga on the day of the First Profession, “On our great day, the most beloved Provincial Rev. M.M. Gonzaga IBVM redoubled our joys by her presence. **Thanks** to her a million times.”<sup>93</sup>
- ix) Regarding the Loreto Mothers, “We were ever **grateful** to them and remembered them always with profound love in our hearts.”<sup>94</sup>
- x) Regarding the Ursuline Sisters, “We **thank** all the Ursuline Sisters for their compassion, love and services. We **thank** them whole-heartedly, because they came

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90 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

93 *Ibid.*

94 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

to us, the people of Ranchi – Chotanagpur, to save our souls.”<sup>95</sup>

- xi) After the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the DSA Congregation, “We the humble and poor Sisters of St. Anne **thanked** all the Fathers, Sisters and all the young and the old present for the occasion, for they did everything possible to make the great event successful.”<sup>96</sup>
- xii) After the Silver Jubilee of the First Profession, “We **thanked** all the Fathers, the Sisters and the Seminarians from the bottom of our hearts for all their services and compliments.”<sup>97</sup>

**1.12 Anthropocentric:** In the very foundational inspiration, Mother Bernadette and her three companions show their concern towards their own people in particular and towards the entire humanity in general. In their own words- “How these Sisters had left their dear parents...then why should we not be ready to follow their beautiful example and work for the good of our own country and people?”<sup>98</sup> Their ardent desire to render selfless service to the people of God implies that they had well understood the presence of God in every human being who is created in God’s own image and likeness.<sup>99</sup> Even as the small girls while staying in the Loreto Convent, they had developed a profound love and respect towards the Loreto Mothers and Missionary Fathers. “They also learned religious decorum and began to love and respect the Sisters greatly.”<sup>100</sup> The subject of their selfless service was

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95 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

99 Cf. Gen. 1:27.

100 *Memoirs*, P. 2.



human being for which they were ready to learn everything possible. “To satisfy their desire in serving others, the four girls did whatever work was given to them – teaching the children and looking after them when they were sick. Thus, they helped the Sisters earnestly and diligently.”<sup>101</sup>

Mother Bernadette had reverence not only for the Loreto Mothers and Missionary Fathers but also for the younger ones including the sick and weak. Attending to the sick girl amidst of two corpses she exhibits her deep respect and value for the human life. Bernadette was in dilemma but she courageously uses all possible means to protect her as well as the corpses. She rationalized very wisely, “If she were to run away, then the sick girl might suffer much and might even die. Then if the jackals were to drag out the corpses and tear them to pieces, what a pitiful and despicable issue it would turn out to be.”<sup>102</sup>

The service and all the activities of Mother Bernadette and her three companions were people oriented. It was obvious in their service to the cholera and famine victims, which took place in 1895 and 1896. Their loving care and concern for them shows their true love for the neighbours as taught by Jesus Christ. Again in the case of Jonas Tigga, a young man who had expressed his desire to marry Mother Bernadette, she shows respect and understanding to his feelings. Therefore, she was not angry with him but responded to him with due respect and prudence.<sup>103</sup>

In opting for the Indigenous dress instead of the European style of dressing is another example of the fact that Mother

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101 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

103 *Cf., ibid.*, p. 43.

Bernadette was people oriented. The genuine intention of such choice was just to be able to remain in the midst of their own people in any situation as she writes – “We were against the European style of dressing and living, because of the intense poverty in our country. We insisted on this because if we faced any problem, like on a religious persecution, as it happened in other countries, then we would be able to live among our own people.”<sup>104</sup>

**1.13 Discernment:** This characteristic of Mother Bernadette’s spirituality is similar to the discernment of spirits found in Ignatian spirituality. The seed of discernment had already sprout in the fertile soil of their heart soon after starting to learn the catechism from the Loreto Mothers and Jesuit Fathers. “Within three years of this learning and encounter, four of the girls began to ponder seriously the work of the Sisters.”<sup>105</sup> As a consequence, they too decided to remain virgins forever for the sake of Jesus after the example of the Loreto Mothers. Thereafter, they grow more and more in the love of Jesus and their religious vocation. Finally, they become the brides of Christ forever.

Prior to accepting the Catholic faith, Mother Bernadette had gone through the process of discernment with regard to the true religion. She discovered the truth both of the Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church. Only after having been convinced about the Catholic Church, she agreed to accept it; and finally she received the Catholic Baptism on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1890, at the age of twelve. Later she had many other opportunities to discern, which she did always in the light of the Holy Spirit. For example, when the Loreto Mothers

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104 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

brought the four girls in front of the boys sent by the Fathers in order to know whether they would marry them and be happy with them, Mother Bernadette replied to the Loreto Superior prudently:

“Sister, you know very well that I do not want to get married. Therefore, I think it is improper to bring me before the boys for this purpose. You don’t know the customs of our community. Even the boys don’t know about it? It is true that I am a schoolgirl; but know that I am not an orphan. If I were one, then you would have had full authority over me in the school. So why do the boys come here to select girls for marriage? Shall we or any other girl consent to the boys looking at their faces and outward appearance?”<sup>106</sup>

Another example of Mother Bernadette’s discernment is regarding the golden jewelry; as she said to the old lady Salomi, “Grandma, I don’t want to wear any jewelry; for if I do, my heart and soul will become worldly and I will be lost forever.”<sup>107</sup> Again knowing the mind of her parents she told the old lady at the end, “I don’t want to go to them just now, for if I say anything to them, they would be displeased with me.”<sup>108</sup> During attending to the sick girl and the two corpses alone at night she got another opportunity to discern. Finding no other option, after having said the prayers to the Guardian Angels, she took the light from the table and putting it right in the middle of the door, ran to the Convent to call Sr. Mary IBVM. But having found her asleep due to the extreme fatigue, Mother Bernadette did not wake her up, but went fast towards the school and requested her friends to

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106 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

108 *Ibid.*

come along and help her.<sup>109</sup> In this event too her discernment is worth appreciating.

**1.14 Unshakable Determination (Bernadettine Determination):** Mother Bernadette's revolutionary decision of remaining virgin forever for the sake of Jesus caused a lot of challenges and difficulties but she remained firm in her determination. She kept trusting in the Lord in all circumstances. Besides her decision to remain unmarried in order to serve the Lord, she manifests many more examples of unshakable determination. Having recognized the Catholicism as the true religion, she exclaimed, "This certainly could be the true faith, for the Virgin Mary was given due respect... Now come what may, I will surely become a Catholic."<sup>110</sup> Later even the Loreto Mothers, Missionary Fathers and other people came to know about the determination of Mother Bernadette and her three companions. As a result, they themselves took initiative to communicate to the Archbishop Paul Goethals about the positive impression of the four girls and requested him to allow them to go ahead on the path of religious vocation.

One of the best examples of determination exhibited by Mother Bernadette is found in the event when she and her two companions, Cecilia and Mary, having received the permission, went to Sargaon to bring Veronica, their companion back to the Loreto school. In her own words, "We reached a rivulet from where water gushed out into the river. Our escort knew our determination, so he helped us to cross the rivulet."<sup>111</sup> In this same event after crossing the

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109 Cf. *ibid*, p. 28.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

rivulet there was yet a torrential river to be crossed by them but they did not lose their courage. With greater enthusiasm and hope they called out the boatman loudly, and he too was obliged to come and take them across the river seeing their determination.

Similar type of determination could also be seen in their life during their religious formation. Having known their determination, Archbishop Paul Goethals spoke to them through Sister Mary Teresa IBVM that if they had the fervent desire to live the convent life, then they could wait for eight more years. Despite a long period of waiting, they were not discouraged, but on hearing the words of His Grace, they were filled with boundless joy and waited for the favourable day with great patience. Mother Bernadette writes, “From that day we began to count the days, weeks, months and years. We counted how so many days had gone by out of the total eight years and how our courage had not diminished. We began to live with the Sisters so very happily.”<sup>112</sup>

Having known that the four girls were strong in their holy desires of serving God and His people, the Archbishop Paul Goethals began to deliberate not to cut their hair as part of the Congregation’s dress code and to conduct their lives according to the third Order of St. Francis of Assisi. But regarding their attire, they made a humble request to the Archbishop through the Superior Mother Mary Teresa Bonner and the Provincial Rev. M. Mary Gonzaga that their Congregation’s dress and the life style should not be European, but according to the custom of their country. Hence, with determination they said to His Grace, “We hear that you will not cut our hair. But we don’t like this. It is our strong desire that we belong to God

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

totally. It is true that women's hair is ornamental, but we are ready to sacrifice our hair gladly. So, please know that even if you decide not to cut our hair, we will do it ourselves.”<sup>113</sup> Such an extraordinary determination of Mother Bernadette could be called the “Bernadettine determination”.

**1.15 Love for the Cross:** Being ablaze with the love of Jesus, Mother Bernadette had a profound love for the Cross. As Jesus has said – “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”<sup>114</sup> Undoubtedly, in the life of Mother Bernadette many crosses came and she accepted them all with great love and gratitude as coming from God's hand. Right from her infancy, she experienced those crosses in various forms such as the death of her mother Paulina when Bernadette was just two years old, her struggles in search of the true religion, excommunication and ostracism of her family by the Lutheran Pastor on account of accepting the Catholic faith, Archbishop's edict to send the girls who were determined not to get married away from the school, threats of her dad to kill her with the sword for refusing to get married, scolding of her family and relatives due to her determination to remain unmarried for the sake of Jesus, continuous ordeal at home, forcing for mixed marriage, hardships of long period of formation, sudden death of the DSA Sisters, her painful sickness of tuberculosis and other difficulties and challenges of life.

As a small baby, Christ Anandit Ruth (Mother Bernadette) might have not felt the loss of her own mother because her step mother Margaret, the second wife of Puran Prasad and

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113 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

114 Mt. 16:24.

her *Bari Maa* i.e. wife of Prabhu Prasad took care of her so lovingly. But as she grew up gradually, Christ Anandit Ruth felt loneliness specially when her step mothers paid more attention to their own children. Later, she and her three companions experienced the cross of life more concretely after being sent away from the Loreto school according to the edict of Archbishop Paul Goethals, S.J. She describes her painful experience in the following words, “The Sisters called us and explained to us the Archbishop’s edict. Then they blessed us lovingly and sent us away from the school. Now what could poor me do? I felt aghast and wept uncontrollably. Tears ran down my cheeks incessantly as I sobbed and went back home.”<sup>115</sup> She continues:

At home in Sargaon the situation was no different. Every day the parents, brothers, sisters, kinsmen and women as well as friends felt the heart rending incident. It looked as if the whole earth was engulfed in utter darkness for us. We were in such despair and dejection that there was no interest left in work, food and drink. From such a miserable state of mind, we wrote three letters pleading to our dad.<sup>116</sup>

Notwithstanding, Mother Bernadette remained always optimistic and never got disappointed. She kept trusting in the Lord in all circumstances and accepted everything with positive attitude as God’s will. She said, “Where in the world could be found all happiness and peace? Where there was pain and struggle, there was peace and victory. Therefore, God in His infinite wisdom allowed all this to happen.”<sup>117</sup>

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115    *Memoirs*, p. 9.

116    *Ibid.*

117    *Ibid.*

The words of St. Paul apply to them too, “As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God.”<sup>118</sup>

Mother Bernadette’s love for the cross could be seen again in an event when some missionary Fathers had come to visit her dad Puran Prasad at home and they had left some religious articles. When they had already gone from there, Mother Bernadette, who had hidden herself in a corner, came out from the house and selected the crucifix for her as she writes, “The Fathers had left with my dad a small crucifix, a rosary, one scapular and some holy pictures for me. But I took nothing for myself from these gifts except the little crucifix.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, she preferred the cross to all other beautiful gifts. Symbolically it indicates that she had particular love for the cross and obviously for the Lord Jesus who died on the cross for the love of all. Hence, she could say like St. Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ.”<sup>120</sup>

Another event that exhibits Mother Bernadette’s love for the cross is that of the day when she along with her younger sister Sushila (Mother Cecilia) had gone to deliver food to her dad who used to go to the Fathers in order to talk with them about the court matters. She has mentioned it in the following way:

When both of us came to the Fathers, they spoke to us tenderly and taught us how to make the sign of the cross. Another girl Sushila made the sign of the

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118 2 Cor. 6:4-7.

119 Memoirs, p. 20.

120 Gal. 2:19.



cross quite properly. But I did not know how to do it. I was much ashamed about it and yet tried to make it quietly in the air. The Fathers smiled at my efforts and said that I would learn gradually and make the sign of the cross quite properly like my younger sister.<sup>121</sup>

After escaping from her dad's furious reaction for not being ready to get married, Mother Bernadette ran to the Blessed Sacrament for safety. Later the other two sisters also reached the Loreto Convent safe and sound. Thus, seeing one another safe they were extremely happy and began to share their joys narrating how they were strengthened by the Lord to face such critical situation. Describing about her way of praying in the closed room, Mother Bernadette told, "Some straw was lying in the room. I took a few halms and made little crosses of them. I thought of Jesus carrying his cross for us. I asked him for help to carry mine."<sup>122</sup> This event too affirms her deep love for the cross.

The painful event of separating Mary Bernadette and her two sisters in order to compel them to get married was similar to the event of the three young men – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were thrown into a fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylon for refusing to bow to the King's image.<sup>123</sup> Like those three young men, the three young girls- Bernadette, Cecilia and Veronica too were tested by the Lord as gold in the fire. Nonetheless, all of them proved themselves as the true children of God by overcoming all the crosses of life with surprising courage.

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121    Memoirs, p. 20.

122    Anupa Kujur and A. Van Exem, *A Gift of Service* (Ranchi, 1997), 94.

123    Dan. 3:8-25.

One of the witnesses who knew Mother Bernadette, described her love for the cross in the following words:

During the last days of her life, she was kept at Soso to recover from her illness. She was physically very weak and became seriously ill. Consequently, she was brought to the Mother House at St. Anne's Convent, Purulia Road. She had an unbearable pain. But she never uttered a word of complaint. She never went against the plan of God. She offered every bit of pain to Jesus. She used to say; "comparing to the suffering of Jesus, my suffering is very little."<sup>124</sup>

**1.16 Passionate love for Christ:** One of the unique characteristics of Mother Bernadette's spirituality was that she had passionate love for Christ. In her Memoirs, besides the word 'mad' often she has mentioned its synonyms like stupid, fool, idiot and lunatic used by different persons to address her. But she did not bother about such humiliating words spoken by others for her because she was ready to face all kinds of insults for the sake of Christ who Himself was insulted by people for our sake. Moreover, she was convinced that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world."<sup>125</sup> All the more, she knew that even Jesus was misunderstood by some of the people who said of him- "He has gone out of his mind."<sup>126</sup>

One of those who called Mother Bernadette mad or stupid was none other than her own dad; he was displeased due

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124 *Ibid.* p. 69.

125 1 Cor. 1:27-28.

126 Mk. 3:21.

to her determination to remain unmarried for Jesus' sake. Being unable to change her mind he shouted at her, "My dear daughter, ...You are so damn stupid."<sup>127</sup> Other family members of Mother Bernadette too used similar type of words for her. When she refused to wear the golden ornaments some of her people said, "What else can she be, if not mad and an idiot?"<sup>128</sup> When the people came to know about the secret thoughts of the girls, they began to make comment- "What nonsense, the girls don't want to get married?"<sup>129</sup> Again seeing the strong resolve of Mother Bernadette and her sisters not to get married, people scolded them saying – "You are damn stupid."<sup>130</sup>

Having known that Bernadette had already left going to the Lutheran Church, the Protestant pastor sent a teacher in order to make her understand: "Go and make her understand properly. Why does she behave like a lunatic?"<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, the beatitudes must have strengthened her to remain steadfast in the love of Jesus, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."<sup>132</sup> Hence, whatsoever words were used for her, Mother Bernadette did not react negatively but accepted everything with profound forbearance for the love of Jesus; and it was that very love which sustained her profound spiritual life to remain firm in the midst of all kinds of insult. It is rightly said, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."<sup>133</sup>

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127    *Memoirs*, p. 9.

128    *Ibid.* p. 12.

129    *Ibid.* p. 3.

130    *Ibid.* p. 33.

131    *Ibid.* p. 23.

132    Mt. 5:11.

133    1 Cor. 13:7.

**1.17 Total Dependence on God:** Mother Bernadette had childlike simplicity and total dependence on God the heavenly Father. She had deep faith in God and she left all her near and dear ones in order to do the divine will. She renounced all good things with profound trust in the Lord who said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.”<sup>134</sup> In all situations of life she trusted in the Lord and remained always in his love, like the vine and its branches. Even after being sent away from the Loreto school, she went on writing three letters requesting her dad to talk and settle the matter with the Loreto Mothers. Although her dad did not reply any of the letters, yet she was never disappointed because of her hope.

Mother Bernadette’s total dependence on God on various occasions and events could be gleaned from her Memoirs. While crossing the torrential river, Mother Bernadette and her two companions went to Sargaon with full dependence on God and finally they reach their destination safe and sound. During guarding the corpses and the sick girl at night too she did her challenging work with full trust and dependence on God and the Guardian Angel. Kneeling down and praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament after escaping from her dad is the best example of her total dependence on God. Similarly, in all kinds of events she became victorious being fully dependent on Him and like St. Paul she could say with conviction – “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”<sup>135</sup> Mother Bernadette was fully dependent on God even for material things and she experienced His love and care through the Loreto and Ursuline Mothers,

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134 Mt. 6:25.

135 Phil. 4:13.

Jesuit Missionaries and other benefactors. Hence, she could sing with grateful heart– “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”<sup>136</sup>

**1.18 Rooted in the Tribal Culture:** Mother Bernadette was one of the Tribal girls of Chotanagpur. She belonged to an Oraon family which was well educated and civilized. Her family members were knowledgeable and respectable persons in the tribal society. Mother Bernadette herself was aware of the tribal culture and customs. When the Loreto Mothers presented some young boys for selection as their future marriage partners before Mother Bernadette and her companions, she replied to them confidently, “All this is to be known by the parents and the kinsmen and women first and then the negotiations may start. And it is up to them to see whether the negotiations work or not.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, she wanted the things to be done according to the rules and regulations of the Tribal society. Moreover, her wise choice of the Tribal dress as the religious habit is a solid witness of her keen interest in the Tribal costumes. In addition to these, Mother Bernadette and her companions along with other girls of the boarding school enjoyed tribal singing and dancing. “There was a lot of singing and outside Lent the girls enjoyed dancing in the evening.”<sup>138</sup>

Even after becoming religious Sisters, as the Daughters of St. Anne, they continued certain practices of singing and dancing with the permission of the Ursuline Mothers under whom they worked. The annals of the Ursulines describe the curriculum of the hostel girls and the Daughters of St. Anne. The course

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136 Ps. 23:1.

137 Memoirs, p. 8.

138 Anupa Kujur and A. Van Exem, *A Gift of Service* (Ranchi, 1997), 59.

of the school consisted of religious instruction, manual work in kitchen and garden, care of flowers, sewing and music i.e. singing and dancing.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, “the Daughters of St. Anne made the Christmas jubilation singing and dancing all the night. And so did some Ursulines at least in 1903. Dance was a part of each feast, each time the day was lengthened by the nocturnal dancing of the Daughters and the children.”<sup>140</sup>

**1.19 Complete Dedication to God:** The entire life of Mother Bernadette was that of complete dedication. She dedicated her all and everything to the service of God and His people. The prayer offered by her on the day when she and her three companions became the Postulants is the best example of her total surrender to God: “Dear Jesus, do accept my small offering. You have given yourself for me, may I be able to give myself to you. I offer you my body, to keep it pure. I offer you my soul to keep it free from sins. I offer you my heart, to love you always. I offer you all my breath, even unto death. In life and death, I give myself to you so that I may remain yours forever.”<sup>141</sup> This prayer of offering includes her body, soul, heart, breath, life and death. Not only in words but also in the real life she dedicated her everything to God joyfully and gratefully with an undivided heart.

The offering prayer of Mother Bernadette is similar to the prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola, “Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for

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139 Cf. *ibid.*, 141-142.

140 *Ibid.*, 143.

141 *Memoirs*, p. 48.

this is sufficient for me”. Her prayer exhibits the elements of Ignatian spirituality. All the more, the Eucharistic prayer of Jesus Himself is the source of her inspiration to dedicate herself to God wholly. During the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, Jesus offers his body and blood in the form of bread and wine.<sup>142</sup> In the same way, Mother Bernadette also offered her body, soul, heart, mind and all that she had, to the service of God and His people forever. Thus, in life and death, she remained God’s forever.

**1.20 Team Spirit:** Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; he accomplished the mission of the Father being filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, the team spirit was an integral part of his Apostolate. Hence, he formed a particular team of twelve Apostles. In the same way, right from the beginning, Mother Bernadette cultivated a team spirit. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John were the first disciples of Jesus.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, the foundational inspiration of remaining unmarried to serve God and His people was received by Mother Bernadette and her three companions. “Four of the girls began to ponder seriously the work of the Sisters.”<sup>144</sup> Later, these four pioneer Mothers became the four pillars of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi. They remained always united with one another in all circumstances of life. In joys and sorrows, in success and failures, in sadness and gladness they were of one heart and soul like the first group of believers.<sup>145</sup> In order to prevent the obstacles in the missionary work, the three girls including Mother Bernadette were sent away from the Loreto school.

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142 Cf. Mt. 26:26-30.

143 Cf. Mk. 1:16-20.

144 Memoirs, p. 2.

145 Cf. Acts 4:32-37.

However, having realized their genuine vocation, later they were called back to the school. As soon as they came to know about this good news, they were delighted and they went to Sargaon to call Veronica. They bravely faced all the challenges that came on their way home.

In spite of their refusal to get married, their parents had already arranged for the marriage of all three sisters i.e. Bernadette, Cecilia and Veronica. But again they overcame boldly that great ordeal. During the epidemic of cholera and famine, the four girls with their free decision remain in the Loreto Convent in order to assist the Loreto Sisters and Missionary Fathers to serve the suffering victims. With the permission of the Loreto Mothers three of them had gone to Brambay to attend the marriage ceremony of Jonas and Luisa. The girls of the Convent school help Bernadette together to chase away the jackals at night. While staying with the Loreto Mothers, they studied and learnt together, they sang and danced together; they prayed and worked together. After Bernadette sent away all the good clothes back to her parents, she was given all the needful things by the girls of the Convent generously in order to help her. Thus, in every step of life the four pioneer Mothers walked together and maintained their team spirit walking with the Lord.





## CHAPTER 2

# Evangelical Counsels and Mother Mary Bernadette

**2.1 Chastity:** The evangelical counsel of chastity is a specific gift of God which is embraced “for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Mother Mary Bernadette had received this gift from God, hence she determined to remain virgin forever. “An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord both in body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world, how she can please her husband.”<sup>2</sup> Mother Mary Bernadette too wanted to be free from the worldly affairs in order to dedicate her entire life completely to the Lord. She embraced the evangelical chastity as “the most suitable means by which religious dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate.”<sup>3</sup>

Mother Bernadette’s refusal to wear the golden jewellery indicates her holy wish to remain away from the worldly attractions as she says innocently, “I don’t want to wear any jewellery; for if I do, my heart and soul will become worldly and I will be lost forever.”<sup>4</sup> To the boy with whom her parents had arranged her marriage, Mother Bernadette boldly replies, “For heaven’s sake, don’t even imagine that I love some other boy. However, if you think so, it would be a serious mistake. I tell you very clearly that I don’t ever want to marry

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1 Mt. 19:12.

2 1 Cor. 7:35.

3 *PC* 12.

4 *Memoirs*, p. 11.

anyone.”<sup>5</sup> Thus she wanted to love Jesus with her undivided heart. Likewise, Mother Bernadette tells Jonas, who wanted to marry her that she wants to love and serve the Lord Jesus, therefore he should not become hindrance to her.<sup>6</sup>

The firm decision of Mother Bernadette and her companions to remain virgin was difficult for others to understand and accept in the beginning but later many Jesuit Fathers, Loreto Sisters and others began to understand their genuine vocation. Hence they pleaded to the Archbishop saying, “Earlier we had held the view that living unmarried was against the custom or tradition of the country ... but now after observing their behaviour, listening to their talk and specially seeing their works, we firmly believe that the girls’ intentions are just right.”<sup>7</sup> Mother Bernadette’s prayer of self-offering explicitly shows her ardent desire of being chaste. She says, “Dear Jesus, ...I offer you my body to keep it pure. I offer you my soul to keep it free from sins.”<sup>8</sup> She says to the Archbishop as well, “It is our strong desire that we belong to God totally.”<sup>9</sup>

**2.2 Poverty:** Mother Bernadette belonged to a rich family yet she loved the poverty for the sake of Jesus. Her sincere desire of not wearing the golden ornaments is one of the instances that demonstrates her simplicity and evangelical poverty.<sup>10</sup> She practised the voluntary poverty in imitation of Christ who became poor when he was rich so that by his poverty she might become rich.<sup>11</sup> At the demand of her parents, Mother Bernadette sent all her good clothes, except the torn ones,

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5 *Ibid.* p. 37.

6 Cf. *ibid.* p. 43.

7 *Ibid.* p. 45.

8 *Ibid.* p. 48.

9 *Ibid.* p. 49.

10 Cf. *Memoirs*, p. 11.

11 Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Mt. 8:20.

back to them with a heart-touching letter of thanksgiving. She had full trust in the providence of the heavenly Father who fulfills all needs of His loving children.<sup>12</sup> In the religious dress too the evangelical poverty could be seen which was not European but according to the Indian custom and culture.<sup>13</sup> Mother Bernadette humbly acknowledges that the Daughters of St. Anne were very poor and helpless, which was not hidden from anyone.<sup>14</sup> All the more, at the end of her Memoirs, Mother Bernadette mentions the Mass vestments, sacred vessels and many other needful things left by Fr. Peal, S.J. for the poor Daughters of St. Anne.<sup>15</sup> In their day-to-day life also they witnessed the evangelical poverty as well as the life of beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>16</sup>

**2.3 Obedience:** Mary Bernadette was an obedient and disciplined girl. She always respected her parents and obeyed them lovingly. Even when her father Puran Prasad went to the Loreto school in order to call Bernadette, Cecilia and Veronica for their marriage ceremony, they obeyed him and went home with him.<sup>17</sup> Another instance of her prompt obedience is sending the clothes to her parents at their demand with a loving letter in which she wrote, “Your obedient daughter, Christ Anandit Ruth Mary Bernadette.”<sup>18</sup> Later, Mother Bernadette and her companions learnt to obey the Loreto Mothers as well while staying in their convent. She writes,

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12 Cf. Mt. 6:25; PC 13.

13 Cf. Memoirs, p. 48.

14 Cf. *ibid.* p. 59.

15 Cf. *ibid.* p. 67.

16 Mt. 5:3.

17 Cf. Memoirs, pp. 30-31.

18 *Ibid.* p. 39.

“We were determined to stay on in the convent, obeying the Sisters and doing everything they asked us to do.”<sup>19</sup>

Listening to the response of Mother Bernadette regarding marriage, when Jonas Tigga asks her to suggest any girl as his life partner, she says that she did not go anywhere without the permission of her parents. Only once she had gone for a marriage celebration to Brambay with the permission of the Sisters.<sup>20</sup> Her response indicates her obedience to her parents as well as to the Loreto Sisters in whose convent she and her companions stayed having said goodbye to their parents. Even after becoming the religious Sisters, they remained ever obedient to the Church authorities, Loreto Sisters and Ursuline Sisters as well. “Trained for total obedience and service, the St. Anne Sisters put in charge of the infants’ nursing, devoted themselves to their utmost care.”<sup>21</sup> However, above all, they were obedient to God and did His will in everything in imitation of Christ who learnt obedience in the school of suffering.<sup>22</sup>



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19 *Ibid.* p. 43.

20 *Cf. ibid.* p. 44.

21 *Ibid.* p. 58.

22 *Cf. Heb.* 5:8.

## CHAPTER 3

# Theological Virtues and Mother Mary Bernadette

**3.1 Faith:** “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”<sup>1</sup> In the beginning Mother Bernadette grew in the Catholic faith slowly but steadily because she had been already baptized in the Lutheran Church, prior to the arrival of the Catholicity in this part of Chotanagpur. However, later as she accepted and was christened in the Catholic Church, her faith became very strong like the house built on the rock (Mt. 7:24-27). Even in the midst of trials and temptations, she remained firm in her faith in God, as she affirms, “We were confident that with the grace of God we would do our best to be victorious in the impending trails.”<sup>2</sup>

Taking refuge in the Loreto Mother’s chapel and kneeling down in front of the Blessed Sacrament expresses her profound faith in God.<sup>3</sup> She was fully convinced that everything happens according to God’s will and plan. “We tell honestly that all that happened concerning us was only God’s doing.”<sup>4</sup> She accepts both joyful and sorrowful event as God’s will. She owes God for every success and victory of life as she writes, “Through God’s infinite compassion and benevolence each one of us was raised to great heights of sanctity.”<sup>5</sup> The role of the spiritual mentors was very significant in strengthening their faith. So, appreciating the

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1 Heb. 11:1.

2 Memoirs, p. 32.

3 Cf. *ibid.* p. 38.

4 *Ibid.* p. 45.

5 *Ibid.* p. 52.

sacrificial works of Fr. Peal, S.J., Mother Bernadette says, “He did his best to instill deep faith, hope and charity in us through his countless instructions on the life of the Lord Jesus, the Immaculate Mother Mary and the biographies of saints.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Mother Bernadette’s faith became unshakable. Consequently, she could strengthen the faith of other brothers and sisters.

**3.2 Hope:** Hope is one of the three theological virtues that comes from God. It helps a person to remain optimist in spite of the difficulties and challenges of life. It was hope that strengthened Mother Mary Bernadette and her companions to move forward towards their goal. As a consequence, they remained firm in their decision despite various trials and unfavourable circumstances. Like St. Paul, Mother Bernadette could say, “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”<sup>7</sup> Even after being sent away from the school on account of their determination to remain virgin, they never lost their hope in the Lord, as Mother Bernadette writes, “Where there was pain and struggle, there was peace and victory.”<sup>8</sup> In this heart rendering incident too, with great hope they wrote three letters to Puran Prasad, their dad in order to plead for them and settle the matter by allowing them to continue to study in the Loreto school.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, their hope was proved to be fruitful as they were called back to the school at the command of Archbishop Paul Goethals, S.J.

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6 *Ibid.* p. 66.

7 Phil. 1:20.

8 *Memoirs*, p. 9.

9 Cf. *ibid.*

After sending back her good clothes to her parents, Mother Bernadette remained free from worry, hoping in the Lord who provides for all required things as a Good Shepherd. On hearing the words of the Archbishop regarding joining the Legion of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, she and her companions were extremely happy, and filled with hope and joy, they began to count the days, weeks, months and years. She writes, “We counted how so many days had gone by out of the total eight years and how our courage had not diminished.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, they always kept burning the light of their hope in the Lord.

**3.3 Love:** Jesus Christ summed up the ten commandments of the Old Testament in a new commandment, as he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>11</sup> Obeying this new commandment, Mother Mary Bernadette dedicated her entire life for the sake of God’s love and the love of others. In the foundational inspiration she was motivated to surrender herself to the love and service of God and His people.<sup>12</sup> This love was not limited to her desire but was concretely actualized in her selfless service. One of its ample examples was Mother Bernadette’s and her companions’ loving service rendered to the cholera and famine victims along with the Loreto Mothers and missionary Fathers.<sup>13</sup>

Another best example could be seen in her offering prayer on the day of becoming the Postulant. “Dear Jesus ... I offer

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10 *Ibid.* p. 41.

11 Mt. 22:37-39.

12 Cf. *Memoirs*, pp. 2-3.

13 Cf. *ibid.* p. 42.

you my heart to love you always. I offer you all my breath, even unto death. In life and death I give myself to you so that I may remain yours forever.”<sup>14</sup> One of the witnesses says about Mother Bernadette, “She inspires everyone who follows Jesus. She knew Him intimately, loved Him ardently and followed Him closely.”<sup>15</sup>




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14 *Ibid.* p. 48.

15 *Ibid.* p. 69.



## CHAPTER 4

# Cardinal Virtues and Mother Mary Bernadette

**4.1 Prudence:** The cardinal virtues are four virtues of mind and character both in Classical Philosophy and Christian Theology. They are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Prudence is the ability to discern the appropriate action to be taken in a given situation at an appropriate time, with consideration of potential consequences. This virtue was present in Mother Bernadette right from her childhood. That is why she takes enough time in discerning the true religion by herself. To her teacher she replies very prudently, “I want to know about the Catholic faith. If it is the true faith, I will certainly accept it and will never turn back. And if not then I will come back to you. I thank you very much for your lovely education, care and concern.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, with regard to the missionary Jesuits, she acknowledges, “I had seen them with my own eyes and heard them with my own ears and found that they are very respectable, tender, soft spoken and friendly people. I wanted to observe and examine on other areas too till I was satisfied with my findings.”<sup>2</sup> Thus she does not believe simply what the people say but rationally discerns the truth.

In the episode of the golden jewelry too, Mother Bernadette replies prudently to Salomi the old lady, “I don’t want to go to them (her parents) right now, for if I say anything to them, they would be displeased with me.”<sup>3</sup> Still another example of

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1     *Ibid.* p. 23.

2     *Ibid.* p. 20.

3     *Ibid.* p. 11.

her prudence is seen in the event of guarding the two corpses and a sick girl alone at night. Very prudently she took the light from the table and putting it right in the middle of the door, Bernadette ran to the Convent to call Sr. Mary.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the jackals could not harm the corpses and the sick girl in her absence. On insisting of the would be groom for shaking hand with him, Mother Bernadette responds prudently refusing his request, “Such handshakes are common. But this one is different.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, she possessed wisdom of knowing when to speak out and when to keep quite.

**4.2 Justice:** Justice is considered as fairness or righteousness. Puran Prasad, the dad of Mother Bernadette, was a holder of the power of an attorney in the court of Ranchi, hence he was well versed in legal system. He also was associated with Fr. Constant Lievens, S.J., and from time to time they used to discuss on certain issues in order to work for justice. In a particular way, they endeavoured to free the poor people from the clutches of the unjust landlords. Mother Bernadette had observed the activities of her father and obviously she was influenced by his works of justice directly or indirectly. As a consequence, she was also bold to raise her voice against injustice. She had felt the pain of the suffering people of Chotanagpur and therefore, being inspired by the Loreto Mothers she decided to dedicate her life to the service of the people. She was a revolutionary lady, who knew how to fight for right. Finally, overcoming all the obstacles of life, she succeeded to fulfill her dream and worked for justice through various ministries.

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4 Cf. *ibid.* p. 28.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

**4.3 Fortitude:** It is also termed courage, forbearance, strength, endurance and the ability to confront fear and uncertainty. Mother Bernadette was a courageous woman, and so she had guts to do what was right. Various kinds of challenges, uncertainties and difficulties came in her life journey but she faced them all with tremendous courage. In guarding the two corpses and the sick girl alone at midnight proves her boldness.<sup>6</sup> When people made the false allegation about Mother Bernadette and her companions, they gave a courageous answer, “This is a blatant lie. We have neither talked to any boys nor written any letter to them... May we know who the guys are, who want to marry us? Bring them here. We want to see the handsome faces of these cheats, and ask them as when, where and how did the negotiations take place.”<sup>7</sup>

Mother Bernadette had a lot of endurance. Even after listening to the scolding and threats of her people, she was unmoved in her determination of remaining unmarried for the sake of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> To the boy who wanted to marry her, she responded firmly, “I will never shake hands with you. Know that I will never be yours. So don’t trouble me.”<sup>9</sup> In the time of trouble and fatigue too, she remained calm and bore everything with great patience. In the Convent, she and her companions were given so many responsibilities but they carried them out lovingly, as Mother Bernadette writes,

It was not always easy to do all these works perfectly. We suffered due to people’s complaints and woes as well as our own nervousness and sadness. But with

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6 Cf. *Memoirs*, p. 27.

7 *Ibid.* P. 30.

8 Cf. *ibid.* p. 33.

9 *Ibid.* p. 37.

the grace of God and with the support of our confessor Rev. Fr. Sapart, Rev. Fr. Heghenbeek and especially Rev. Fr. Desmet we got strength and comfort.<sup>10</sup>

Perseverance was seen in their daily life and works. Even in the last days of her life Mother Bernadette bore all her pains and sufferings very patiently. She had an unbearable pain but she never uttered a word of complaint. She used to say, “Comparing to the suffering of Jesus, my suffering is very little.”<sup>11</sup>

**4.4 Temperance:** It is also known as restraint, the practice of self-control, abstention, discretion and moderation. Like other cardinal virtues, the virtue of temperance too could be seen in the life of Mother Bernadette. Through her refusal to wear the golden ornaments she wanted to keep herself away from the worldly interests. She renounced the joys and pleasures of family life in order to love God and serve the entire humanity. She did not go anywhere without the permission of her parents.<sup>12</sup> All these aspects of her character show her self-control and temperance.



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10 *Ibid.* p. 42.

11 *Ibid.* p. 69.

12 Cf. *ibid.* p. 44.



**“Dear Jesus, do accept my small offering. You have given yourself for me, may I be able to give myself to you. I offer you my body, to keep it pure. I offer you my soul to keep it free from sins. I offer you my heart, to love you always. I offer you all my breath, even unto death. In life and death, I give myself to you so that I may remain yours forever.”**

**English Memoirs, p. 48**



