

Seeing the Stranger as a Friend

Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys

Feast days are usually the anniversaries of the death of a saint. St. Marguerite Bourgeoys is no different. She died January 12, 1700 and the Canadian church has been marking January 12 as her feast day since her canonization by Saint John Paul II in 1982. The year 2020 offers a special opportunity to highlight this Canadian saint's life. She was born April 17, 1620 - 400 years ago this spring. Happy 400th birthday St. Marguerite Bourgeoys! Many locations including schools and parishes named in her honour across our country are celebrating this Canadian saint with prayers and Masses, processions and presentations, artistic reflections of plays, music and literature. Follow online for celebrations near you. For the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame* of Montreal, St. Marguerite Bourgeoys is their foundress, although Marguerite reserves that title for Our Lady.

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys chose to come to New France in 1653 to respond to the educational needs of the colony. What may have been delay as initially there were no students for schooling, Marguerite saw as an opportunity. She immersed herself in the life of the new colony. St. Marguerite brought from France a particular understanding of education that recognized the concrete situations of life, the joys and the struggles, with an eye to the gospel and the fullness of life it offered.

In those important first five years in Ville-Marie, she entered into the lives of French families. As the colony established peace with the Indigenous people, she came to know their trust too. St. Marguerite used a simple stable to house the sisters and as a school for both European and Indigenous students. It is said that St. Marguerite discovered children learned better when they were able to jump the fence and go home at night.

Making “la tire Ste-Catherine,” a kind of pull-taffy, was enticing to attract students as well as keep them quiet!

The sisters farmed to provide for themselves and others in the young colony. St. Marguerite was instrumental in the construction of The Sailor’s Chapel as well as re-installing the cross on the mountain. She understood food for body and soul.

As a Sister in “the Congregation” as we were then known, I have often prayed with St. Marguerite, both of her early years in France and in the colony of New France. We have historical accounts of her commitments in Ville-Marie, some in her own words and other sources too. My focus had been her early years and her passing. Recently, I have been re-connecting with her as a woman of my age. Like me, St. Marguerite would have been concerned about land, country, Church, and more

importantly, all the people of God. The call she felt that led her to leave her home for a world an ocean away, the faith she knew in Our Lady’s assurance of “Go, I will not abandon you,” her courage to meet leaders of Church and state – this is the woman I am praying with this year. Let us pray to see delay as opportunity, challenge as invitation and stranger as friend. With Our Lady and St. Marguerite, may we go to the periphery in the spirit of Visitation and Pentecost.

O dearest mother and foundress, we seek not comfort or wealth. We only ask that in your name God may be greatly loved and oh so faithfully served.

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, pray for us!

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Please visit these web pages for celebrations and information about St. Marguerite Bourgeoys: www.cnd-m.org and www.MargueriteBourgeoys400.org