

## ***PERSONALITY OF MOTHER CARMEN***

Accompanied by Mother Carmen herself, let us retrace her journey and dwell *on some traits*, expressions of her way of being and of situating herself in life, which identify her *personality*, as highlighted in her biography. They are like tiles in the precious mosaic of the living monument that Don Bosco built to Mary Help of Christians as a gesture of gratitude towards her. The Holy Spirit ensured that Mother Carmen's life, founded on Jesus, shone like a fire of love and was a luminous sign of the Father's love in the missionary Church towards the poorest girls and young women.

*The essential trait* that emerges throughout her biography and that indissolubly unites her multicolored personality *is her ability to give her life for love. It is God's passion and plan for her since her youth: to be fire, in and like Jesus, transforming energy, giving her life as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians with a heart passionate for the mission ad gentes.*

*What was MOTHER CARMEN like?*

Her outward appearance was that of a *decisive, happy person, passionate about living the radical choice of her life: to give it for love. To give herself totally to God, as a religious in a missionary congregation, that is, open to the ends of the earth, with the fundamental option of educating the poorest girls and young women, in a Church with a missionary face.*

*How did she live and express this passion?*

*In her youth, she presented herself as a woman who was searching, joyful, determined, and on her way to fulfilling God's plan for her life.* She chose to do so together with two friends with whom she was in accord and shared the same ideals. She also chose a *mediator* with whom to discern, discuss, and consolidate her decisions. Among them were the director of the National Pontifical Missionary Works, Fr. Ángel Sagarmínaga y Mendieta, and also the parish priest of Algeciras, Fr. Andrés Yun Encinas. They were wise guides and companions on her journey.

*She proved to be a person of courageous character.* At the same time, she had a free and serene attitude in her concrete knowledge of herself, in her humble acceptance of her own values and limitations. This transparent way of acting made her more understanding, free, and at the same time, closer, loved, and appreciated.

*She had a great facility for communication and dialogue, for empathetic relationships with the people she met, dealt with, and lived with, always in truth and righteousness.*

She was understanding, patient, and willing to live, together with others, the slow and sometimes tiring process of listening and dialogue in order to move forward in friendship and fraternity. *She had faith in the possibility that a new reality can emerge from different elements, created and enriched by everyone.* The biography also highlights her capacity for fidelity in relationships through *her accompaniment* of the people she met and who entrusted themselves to her action and help. She also lived this through her written *correspondence*, to which she dedicated herself assiduously, personalizing it as much as possible. The epistolary relationship she maintained with the Sisters and members of the General Council at the end of her service is also a sign of this characteristic of

hers. In addition, there are many Sisters in the Institute who keep her letters and confirm with joy and gratitude her fidelity, closeness, and affection.

*She also expressed a clear ability to empathize with the socio-cultural reality, both in community and in the provincial and interprovincial places where the Institute was present.*

Endowed with good physical health and personal maturity, she was able to overcome the most varied and risky journeys, contexts, and climates with a certain ease, adapting to cultural customs of all kinds.

She was so skilled in the art of integrating these aspects that, for me, it is difficult to distinguish where her ability to adapt with dignity and elegance ends and where her effort to live it often with simplicity and humor, begins.

*Her frankness, transparency, and freedom in sharing her love for her family, her hometown of Madrid, and her country, Spain, were surprising.* Since her youth she expressed this love as an active citizen, including through volunteer work as a nurse in the team at the San José hospital on the front lines of the Spanish Civil War in Burgos in 1938. She herself wrote, "with the sole purpose of serving God and country, in every wounded soldier who required urgent treatment, open to all without distinction."

Her strong sense of identity and belonging fostered in her an attitude of positive openness, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity, which she met particularly during her service as Provincial and General Councilor. In this way, she valued and integrated the riches she encountered and, in freedom and respect, repositioned herself within the limits of the reality she faced.

*What other significant traits did she display?*

*Another trait of her personality was her love for the Church ad gentes.*

*This missionary passion, characteristic of an authentic FMA, was reflected in every responsibility and activity she undertook during her life as a privileged expression of obedience, in any place and/or country, welcomed and lived as an open horizon and intense passion for the Kingdom.*

Mother Carmen visibly revealed her lively sense of Church also in her love for the Pope and in her collaborative relationship with bishops, parish priests, associations, and religious congregations.

*The root of her love for the Word of God is vigorous and firm.* Throughout her biography, from her youth until the end of her life, this is a trait of unique and singular dimension and depth due to its characteristics of acceptance, listening, and commitment to living the Word of God, discovered *in the Bible*. She encountered it mainly in the daily celebration *of the Eucharist*, and as an FMA also in fidelity *to the Constitutions*.

She expressed this reality in her frequent participation in the mysteries of faith, "which lead her to true Love," as she herself wrote, and in the power of prayer as intimacy with God, to the point of becoming nourishment for the heart and unconditional and joyful dedication to others.

*She reinforced the essential values of the Salesian charism with her passionate love for Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, and Mother Mazzarello<sup>1</sup>.* This love was lived and manifested with strength and conviction, with clarity and beauty, and with a conscious sense of belonging to the Institute.

A significant gesture of her profound love for the Institute can be found when, in serene and free discernment in the Spirit, at the XVIII General Chapter of 1984, she sensed that her resignation from the General Council could contribute to the revitalization of the Institute, and she lived it in all simplicity.

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<sup>1</sup> ... *The harmony, almost identification, between her life as an FMA and that of the Institute is one of her most striking characteristics.*" María Pilar Prieto, in the biography sent to the General Archives in Rome, written after her death in Madrid on August 30, 2001. In it she concludes: "We entrust to you the revitalization of our Province and our Institute, which you loved freely with the love of a spouse and of which we are now part in the communion of saints." Cf AGFMA

This renewed love was also expressed in her dedication as a missionary *ad gentes* in Africa. All this took place under the maternal gaze of Mary Help of Christians who, according to the words personified in her life, was for her *the only true superior*.

An expression of the family spirit, which the Sisters and communities experienced as something very characteristic of Mother Carmen, was her ability to inspire others with her simple presence. She had a special gift for communication, for creating an atmosphere of joy, for living every encounter with enthusiasm, so that she was always welcome, eagerly awaited, and appreciated. Added to this was her desire to live and share the family spirit in the community gatherings for recreation and celebration.

*Her sense of essentiality in her personal, community, and apostolic life was emphasized insistently by those who lived with her.* As an FMA, she took on the concrete option of poverty with an authentic attitude of the heart, making herself poor/rich like Jesus of Nazareth, *who made himself poor to enrich us with his poverty (2 Cor 8:9)*, mirroring Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

She took every task entrusted to her very seriously and responsibly. Her style of leadership and governance was firm and shared in pointing out the goal to be achieved.

Mother Carmen was also aware that she was living in a process of growth and maturation in *following Christ*, and therefore she sought to conform herself to Him.

#### *Nothing to object to in regard to her limitations?*

It is understandable that her radical choice of life and her commitment to vigilance in overcoming all pettiness and superficiality may, at times, have led

her to be demanding of her Sisters. On the other hand, she was understanding and maternal in accompanying them. They felt close to her and considered her a sure and maternal guide.

At this point, we ask ourselves one last question:

*Is this presentation of Mother Carmen's personality sufficient and complete?*

I confess that I feel somewhat inadequate in describing certain characteristics of the life of an FMA like Mother Carmen. *In reality, she was much more than what has been expressed!* So far, I have only highlighted a few traits of her rich and multifaceted personality, but I must acknowledge that each aspect is like a spark of fire, like a ray of light that reflects an even greater light.

*The true strength and beauty of this fire that Mother Carmen drew from the love of GOD*

**WAS THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*She, a docile instrument in his hands, has best exemplified the ardent desire of JESUS:*

**"I HAVE COME TO CAST FIRE ON THE EARTH, AND HOW I WISH IT WERE ALREADY LIT!"**

**THANK YOU!**