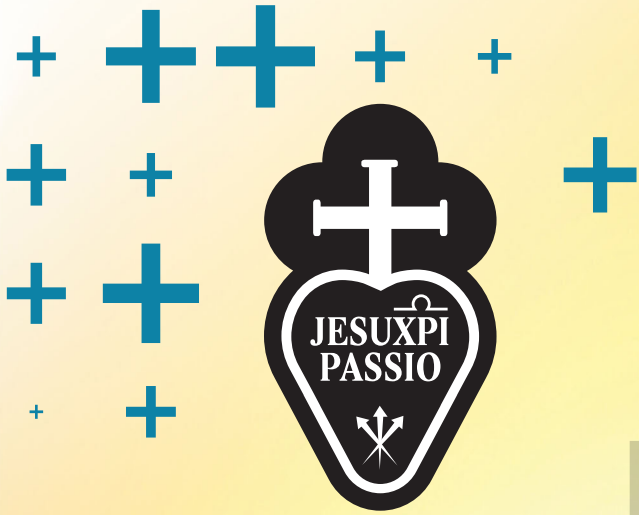


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**Maria  
Frescobaldi**  
Foundress of the  
Sisters of St. Paul  
of the Cross.

*Sr. Maria Dalessandro*

# Jubilaeum

Maria Maddalena Frescobaldi Capponi, wife and mother, was described by one of her friends as a Christian of great piety, charity, and dedication; a woman who “made great strides toward Christian perfection”, who sought and worked only for God and for his glory, and for her own and others’ sanctification, drawing many people away from sin.<sup>1</sup> She was inspired by the Holy Spirit to be the foundress of the Passionist Sisters of St. Paul of the Cross.

In fact, the journey of Maria Maddalena has been grafted into the charism of Passionist spirituality since 1817, the year in which the Superior General of the Passionists welcomed her and the young women who were removed from street life and transformed by love Crucified into Passionist an-

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Letter of Lucrezia Ricasoli to Lanteri, 1908.

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# Jubilaeum

## FORMATION AND CATECHESIS

cellaries [*Ancille*], i.e. “as spiritual daughters of the Congregation on earth and companions in heaven”. The choice of Passionist spirituality took place after a long journey marked by study of different spiritualities: Franciscan, Servite, and Christian Friendship.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent to experiences of deep sorrow that included the loss of here daughters, the French invasion [in Italy] and exile that she bore with unwavering faith in “*God who is rich in mercy*”, and the discovery of “*the grateful and painful memory of Christ’s Passion and the pain of Mary*” constituted a synthesis and a starting point. However, she interpreted the spirituality of the Passion, lived it, and transmitted it in a personal way, rereading it together with the community she founded.

First Maddalena imitating Jesus who “*conversed with the little ones, the ignorant and the misguided to lead them back to virtue for the Kingdom of Heaven*”<sup>3</sup> understood that she had to help young women overcome ignorance in their life and about God. Despite the mockery of her fellow citizens,

<sup>2</sup>The movement assumed aspects of spiritualities of that time: Jesuit, Liguorian, Carmelite, Salesian and the members were formed in total fidelity to the Church and her magisterium including the giving of one’s life. Cfr. C. Bona, *Le Amicizie*.

<sup>3</sup> Constitutions 1830, 12.

she implemented an educational path of healing that can be called “*Passio-therapy*”. The Crucified One, the love of the Father who offered Him, the Son who offered himself, his blood that was shed, his open wounds, the unspeakable love of Mercy that gives new life to the abandoned of every society throughout history-- all this conquered the hearts of the young women she welcomed, offering them new interior freedom. Some were quick to express their gratitude for the great mercy that they received, and they desired to respond with the offering of their lives to God for those who continued to live in sin. Maddalena, attentive to the Spirit, grasped its depth. These women, renewed by the Passion of Christ and Mary, transformed into “*new dough*”, are the stones discarded by society who became the cornerstones of the building that would become the Congregation of the Passionist Sisters;<sup>4</sup> from former prostitutes to spouses of the Crucified Word. When she presented her request to the Passionist General, she spoke of the foundation as a group of women who had been inspired with a special devotion to the Passion of Christ and Mary. Consequently, the first aspects that characterize the spirituality of *Memoria Passionis* are communion of life and contemplative and grateful love for the mystery of salvation. A few years later,

<sup>4</sup> In Florence they were called ‘fogne’.





# Jubilaeum

FORMATION AND CATECHESIS



that *“leads every person, by word and example, to the loving heart of the Lord.”* In that special community the charism of the Congregation existed both in its expression of mission and its spirituality. Maddalena pointed to *the Crucified Lord and the Mother of Sorrows as the Head and Mother of the community.* Later, she admitted that she felt amazed and grateful to see the fervor of the life of those women, once subjugated by the street, were now spouses of the Word and *“companions of the Lamb”* in taking away the sin of the world. In fact, she recognized that the community had a special calling-- *“This is the house of God and the Gate of Heaven. The House of God where God and his Most Holy Mother dwell”* thus indicating their mission as mediators between heaven and earth. They accomplished this mediation by their lives that were characterized by the spirit of solitude, of incessant prayer for humanity, of poverty, of obedience according to the spirit of the then Ven. Paul of the Cross that they reread in an unpublished format.

Maddalena shared, as a Passionist laywoman, this new Passionist dynamism, the new sprouting of the seed initiated by St. Paul of the Cross.

other young women, freed from the negative influence of their companions, asked to share life with the Sisters and a sort of communion was formed characterized by the diversity of their personal stories, yet strong and united enough to a context and a way of healing wounds. Maddalena understood that fraternal love, nourished by the presence of the Crucified and Risen Christ, was one of the means of healing, gratitude, mercy, and mutual forgiveness. Under the guidance of Maddalena, relational dynamics, that are never easy, helped them to move more and more from within themselves, and to turn to the world with the offering of their presence that was open to reparation and intercession for all those who, being unmindful of redeeming love, continued to live in the ignorance of sin.

Prudently, Maddalena did not direct them to a penitential life, but to live day by day striving to do the will of God in their fraternal relationships and their work. She, a wife, and mother, knew the value of everyday life, of small things, of everyday difficulties. She knew the value of the new opportunities that are present every day in mutual help

