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**Venerable
Mother Mary
Joseph of Jesus CP
Elizabeth Prout**
**Foundress of the Sisters
of the Cross and Passion**

Sr. Dominic Savio Hamer

Jubilaem

Elizabeth Prout was born in Shrewsbury, England on 2 September 1820 and baptised a fortnight later at her mother's behest in St Julian's Anglican church, where the vicar was noted for his care for the poor. By 1841 the family had moved to Stone, Staffordshire near Aston Hall, where Blessed Dominic Barberi arrived in 1842. Elizabeth was one of the many people who became Catholics after listening to his sermons. Next she encountered Venerable Father Ignatius Spencer, assisting him in the Baptism of a baby in the Stone workhouse. Then she met Father Gaudentius Rossi and on his recommendation entered the convent of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Northampton.

In fact, by God's grace, it was a Passionist road she was taking, which began when she became ill and had to leave the convent. Her mother nursed her back to health but was quick to show her displeasure when Elizabeth continued to be a Catholic. Elizabeth therefore went to Manchester to earn her living by teaching in St Chad's school but expected

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FORMATION AND CATECHESIS



Lord's Passion; the Rosary hanging from a leather girdle round the waist; and over the heart the Cross, the Heart and the Nails of the Passionist Sign, only the letters 'JMJ' (Jesus, Mary and Joseph) differing from the 'IXP' of the Passionist Sign of St Paul of the Cross. After Pope Pius IX on 13 June 1863 gave Papal Approbation to the Rule as revised by her and Ignatius, Bishop Turner on 17 August 1863 canonically established her Congregation. In his presence and that of Venerable Ignatius on 23 October 1863 Elizabeth Prout, Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus, was unanimously elected as first Mother General of her Congregation.

Her apostolate, imbued with her Passionist spirituality, had been tremendous. She had safeguarded Catholic spirituality and education for the poor and the lower middle class in schools in Manchester, Levenshulme and Ashton-Under-Lyne in the Diocese of Salford and in Sutton, Parr, Blackbrook and Peasley Cross in the Archdiocese of Liverpool. She had also initiated the opening of a Home for Catholic mill girls. For her Sisters she had maintained a strong contemplative ethos, including the daily recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady. She had made consecrated religious life with choir observance available to working-class women.

to leave soon for a convent in Belgium. As she received word to go, however, Father Gaudentius and Father Robert Croskell, parish priest of St Chad's, asked her to co-operate with them in founding a new religious order for women who could not pay the dowry required by the established orders. Elizabeth agreed, abandoning herself to the Will of God, which involved, as time would tell, the difficulties of training Father Gaudentius Rossi's mainly unsuitable candidates, of teaching in one poverty-stricken school after another and of wrestling with her own delicate health. But she was serving Christ amongst the poor; she was founding a religious order for the poor; and it was a Passionist venture.

Spiritually she had a great friend and mentor in Venerable Ignatius and a faithful supporter in William Turner, first Bishop of Salford. After Gaudentius was sent to North America in 1855, Ignatius took his place with the Sisters and, on the recommendation of the Holy See, was able to work with Elizabeth, Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus as she then was, in transforming his Rule into a truly Passionist Rule. She and her Sisters were already wearing recognisably Passionist dress: the veil and religious habit black as a sign of the 'Memory' of Our

Elizabeth Prout died as Father Ignatius gave her a Final Absolution on 11 January 1864. In the following June he brought the Passionist Father General to see her Sisters in Sutton. Immediately recognising their Passionist spirituality, he suggested that their Congregation should be aggregated to the Passionist Congregation. This had to be approved by the Passionist General Chapter, of course, and by the Holy See. For a time warfare in Italy delayed it but on 9 November 1874 the Sisters were given the full Passionist Sign, with 'IXP' replacing 'JMJ' and on 15 November 1874 Venerable Elizabeth Prout's Sisters became *the Sisters of the Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.