

Day 235 – Tuesday, November 10, 2020

Time for another Canadian Saint

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys

Facts

[Feast day](#): January 12

Canonized: Pope John Paul II

Marguerite Bourgeoys, C.N.D. (17 April 1620–12 January 1700), was a French nun and founder of the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal in the colony of New France, now part of Québec, Canada. Born in Troyes, she traveled to Fort Ville-Marie (now Montreal) by 1653, where she developed the convent and educated young girls, the poor, and children of First Nations until shortly before her death in early 1700. She is also significant for developing one of the first uncloistered religious communities in the Catholic Church. Declared "venerable" by the pope in 1878, she was canonized in 1982 and declared a saint by the Catholic Church, the first female saint of Canada.

Marguerite had survived many threats in the twenty-six years she had been in wilderness of Canada. She had lived through [Iroquois](#) attacks, a fire that destroyed her small village, plagues on the ships that she took back and forth to France, but nothing threatened her dreams and hopes more than what her own [bishop](#) said to her in 1679. He told her that she had to join her Congregation of Notre Dame with its teaching sisters to a cloistered religious order of Ursulines. This was not the first [time](#) she'd heard this command. Whether from a misplaced desire to protect her Sisters or from discomfort in dealing with an active religious order of women, [bishops](#) had long wanted to fit her into the usual mold of cloistered orders.

But Marguerite had overcome many challenges to get to this day and was not deterred. In her own native France, she had belonged to a [sodality](#) of women who cared for the sick. The stories of hardships and dangers in Montreal that made other people shiver had awakened a call from [God](#) in her to serve the Native Americans and settlers who endured this adversity. She met with the governor of what was then called Ville Marie and convinced him she was the [person](#) he was looking for to help start a school for the [children](#) of Montreal.

When she arrived in Ville Marie, as it was called then, she found that few [children](#) survived to school age. She helped the remarkable Jeanne Mance, who ran the hospital, to change this tragedy. When she finally had [children](#) to teach, she had to set up school in a stable. So she was not ready to surrender to the bishop. There was too much at stake. She reminded him that the Ursulines because they were cloistered could not go out and teach, as her Sisters had done. The poor and uneducated would not and could not travel to a Quebec [cloister](#) over miles of frontier at the risk of their lives.

But her Sisters were more than willing to live in huts in order to fulfill their call from God. She had set up [schools](#) all over the territory, not just for children. When the king, in well-meaning ignorance, had sent untrained orphans over to be colonists she had set up a school for the women to teach them how to survive and thrive in Canada. How could they do the work for [God](#) that they had done so well in a cloister? The [bishop](#) replied, "I cannot doubt, Mother Bourgeoys, that you [will](#) succeed in moving [heaven](#) and earth as you have moved me!" The Congregation remained an active teaching order, one of the very first of its kind for women. Their rule had to go through one more attempt at turning them into a [cloister](#) but Marguerite lived to see the triumph when their Rule was made official in 1698. She was canonized in 1982 by Pope [John](#) Paul II.

“Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, champagne in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming “WOO HOO what a ride!” (Hunter S. Thompson)

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein