



St Mary Mazzarello - Foundress

A need she could address ...

Mary Mazzarello had no intention of starting a religious congregation.

Young and single by choice, she wanted to do something worthwhile with her life. She became aware of a specific need in her village which she could address. There were a number of girls who were at a loose end, once their meagre schooling was over, and household chores were finished.

With the co-operation of her closest friend, Petronilla, she established sewing classes where the girls could learn something useful for their future life. But that was not all. She also recognised that the girls needed something constructive to fill their leisure time and so she organised a club for them where, as in Don Bosco's oratory, 'holiness consisted in being always cheerful' – games, fun, catechism, outings, were the order of the day on Sundays and holidays.



'I entrust them to you'

An experience which she never forgot confirmed her in her mission for the young. One day, when walking in the village she seemed to see a large white building with lots of girls enjoying games in the playground with Sisters playing with them. At the same time she heard a voice saying to her 'I entrust them to you'. She tried unsuccessfully to put it out of her mind but the image remained. What could it mean?

Slowly a few other like-minded young women joined her and there grew up a small community in all but name. They lived, prayed and worked together - but nuns? No, that was far from their minds - until Don Bosco appeared on the scene.

He was thinking of founding a congregation of women to look after girls and young women in a similar way to that adopted by the Salesians for boys. He had looked at some congregations but none just fitted his ideal. Then he met Mary and her companions - here was the answer. A ready-made community living the Salesian dream.

Mary felt a deep spiritual affinity with Don Bosco and in 1872 agreed to be the cornerstone of his new congregation, bringing several of her companions with her.

The 'Spirit of Mornese'

By divine providence, the nascent community was settled in the large white building Mary had previously seen in vision. It had been built by the villagers for the education of their boys and they were not happy to see it handed over to these new Sisters. Now, amidst adversity and misunderstanding, it became the cradle of the new congregation which was destined to carry the name of the village, Mornese, to the farthest corners of the world.

It fell to Mary as co-foundress to translate the Salesian way into a simple life for women religious, creating the spirit of simplicity, joyfulness, poverty and family-like relationships which came to be known from the place where it all began as the 'Spirit of Mornese'.



*Don Bosco meets St Mary Mazzarello and her companions.
Painting near the chapel entrance at Mary's Collegio in Mornese,
the 'large white building' of her vision, and the first Mother House of
the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.*