



We'll meet in the Heart of Jesus

Holy Week in 2020 will remain in our memories for a long time, as we seek new ways to be with Jesus in his Passion, and to share the joy of his Resurrection with each other. The experience and the words of St Mary Mazzarello, who founded the Salesian Sisters with Don Bosco, can help us through these difficult times, and guide us this week.



Image by Marcello Cerrato via Qumran2.net

Jesus must be your whole strength

When she was in her early 20s, Mary experienced the tragedy of an epidemic, courageously nursing her relatives who were suffering from typhoid during a deadly outbreak that afflicted the whole area. She caught the disease herself, coming close to death, and it was in the aftermath of this experience that her way forward in life became clear to her.

Before her illness, working long hours in the family's fields, Mary couldn't get to Mass as often as she would have liked, and would gaze at the distant church from her window to feel part of the congregation and to spiritually engage with the Mass.

From childhood, Mary was known for her vitality and sense of joy, and as the first superior of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, her letters to her Sisters urge them to cheerfulness, kindness and courage.

To the Sisters in Uruguay, in 1879, she wrote:

Are you cheerful? Be that way always! Unite yourself closely to Jesus, work only to please Him, try to become more holy each day. In this way you will always be cheerful. ... Take courage, my good Sisters; Jesus must be your whole strength. With Jesus, burdens become light, fatigue becomes easy, thorns are turned into sweetness.

Giving advice that speaks strongly to us as we cope with our present crisis, Mary later wrote to the same group: 'Never take offence. Rather, as soon as you notice that someone needs some comfort, give it to her immediately; console and help one another!'

Rather like us this week, (though lacking the benefit of technology), in their first year at Nizza Monferrato, Mary and the Sisters with her were unable to physically access the liturgies of Holy Week, and although nostalgic for familiar spiritual activities at this most important time, they lived the way of the cross in their hearts:

We are having a very poor Holy Week here,' Mary wrote to the Rector of the House of Mornese, 'without ceremonies or anything. From time to time the Sisters exclaim: "Ah, Mornese! Ah, Mornese!" The Lord accepts the heart, right? Therefore we will console ourselves with that thought.

Salesians of Don Bosco GBR

Writing to a novice in 1878, Mary shows us the way to be together although we are apart: 'Although such a great distance separates us from one another, we form one heart to love our beloved Jesus and Mary Most Holy, and we can always meet [there] and pray for one another.'

St Mary Mazzarello has much to teach us now, and we ask her to support and guide us in our own Holy Week journey with Jesus, separated from each other, but far from alone.

Extracts from: *Letters of Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, FMA English-language Translation Group

Isaiah 42: 1-7

Here is my servant in whom my soul delights

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations.

He does not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He does not break the crushed reed or quench the wavering flame. Faithfully he brings true justice; he will neither waver nor be crushed until true justice is established on earth, for the islands are awaiting his law.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and spread them out, who gave shape to the earth and what comes from it, who gave breath to its people, and life to the creatures that move in it:

'I, the Lord, have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon.'

Prayer

This Holy Week, as we reflect on suffering of Jesus, we pray for the sick, for those who have died, for families and individuals afflicted by grief and worry, for our health and care workers, and for all those working to keep our society and its essential services going. We look to the hope Jesus gave us.

God of love,
My prayer is simple:
Your son, Jesus, suffered and died for me.
I know only
that I cannot have real strength
unless I rely on you.
I cannot feel protected
from my many weaknesses
until I turn to you
for forgiveness and your unalterable love.
Help me to share this
strength, protection and love with others.

From Creighton University, One Prayer a Day for Lent: Holy Week