

## Introduction

The chief means of communication during the expansion of the Institute and one that affords ample opportunity for insight into the mind of our foundress is letter writing. Of this, Mary Ward availed herself fully as she refuted accusations, did business with the Pope and clergy, and encouraged her scattered companions. [Till God Will]

This Mary Ward Week we are invited to listen to Mary Ward through her letters, which cover the years from 1615 to 1642: letters written as Superior General of an Institute, as foundress concerned with the growth of the new houses and as friend and companion. Magdalen O'Neill IBVM, a Mary Ward letter expert who established the Mary Ward Summer Schools, together with Patricia Harriss CJ, Carmel Swords IBVM and Agnesa Jenčíková CJ, made a careful selection of letters, those most relevant for the companions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to reflect on. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the contributors with the reflections.

Mary's letters are apt for our time, as the challenges faced, though different, yet help us to discern better, and the encouragement given to her companions promotes much growth and unity. Work pressure, the concerns of our Provinces and Regions, and the opportunities for more ministries, alongside the decline in numbers are crucial and challenging. Pioneer of active apostolic life for women, our dear Mother Mary Ward faced many adverse situations but never let them interfere with her care of and interest in individual members of her Institute. It is inspirational for us: to realise Mary's love for her Institute is to care for her members.

Mary Ward's love for her sisters and mission comes powerfully through the letters. In her letter to Winifred Wigmore she says "know that you have a special place in my heart and trust in my abiding love and care for you". Today, we are her "Win". She speaks with much affection and invites us to reflect with her during these eight days. May the woman for all seasons inspire us to find God in all.

Sr. Sudha Arul IBVM and Sr. Tomsy Madathumpadickal CJ

"My Win,

I have indeed diverse very good ones of yours; it comforts me very [*much*] to read those passages, and the manner of your proceedings with so true an united will to superiors, what you did concerning your happily deceased superior pleased me so much as not any one passage touching your managing of matters there or information hither I could have wished otherwise: your soli [*confidential detail*] about her I read, and your signifying those particulars to me was to very good purpose and much to my satisfaction: and better knowledge of the good estate of her happy soul, whom the enemy of all good had no power to hurt, and which I verily believe is now with God. That monstrable relation [*account suitable to be shown to other people*] of her death, the opinion of her had by externs etc. will do good to yourself and others. "

We are struck and moved by Mary's way of communicating with her companions, especially with her friend Winifred Wigmore. The simplicity and closeness with which friends and companions share their worries, their joys and sufferings, show us a close and profound relationship.

Reading this letter from Mary to Win, I am reminded of what we are reflecting on these days in society, in the Church and in our Institute: the culture of good treatment.

In recent years we have witnessed with pain the denunciations and visibility of abuses in the Church. From a deeper perspective, we are becoming aware that these abuses are emerging from deeper abuses that have been a breeding ground for unhealthy ways of relating in the Church and in our religious communities. We can even say that at times there has been, and may still be, mistreatment.

Faced with this reality which we perceive, and which has left wounds that we need to heal, we are faced with the need to build a culture of good treatment.

Everyday life, the ways in which we dialogue, discern and treat each other and the people with whom we share life and mission, can build cultures of bad treatment or good treatment. Language generates reality and is not innocent, so we need to review our ways of speaking, of communicating. Generative conversations, spiritual conversations can help us to build different realities.

When we contemplate Jesus in the Gospel, we see his way of approaching people, of placing himself on the periphery, of reaching out to those on the margins of the society of his time; the closeness and trust with which he converses with his disciples, his friends; the freedom with which Jesus approaches people and his way of building the Kingdom of God, seeking to include all people.



**Mary Ward, faithful disciple of obedience and fulfilment of God's will**

*"Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught."* Is. 50,4

We propose today for meditation a paragraph from Mary Ward's letter sent from Rome, on January 18, 1624, to Winifred Wigmore, in response to her wish to accompany Mary Ward on her new journey to Perugia, where she intended to found a new community. If Winifred Wigmore had previously accompanied Mary Ward to all the places she had founded, it seems that this time it is no longer possible.

**My dear Win,**

**Your entire resignation and full dependence upon the will of God and Superiors I far more esteem than if you had the grace of working miracles and wanted [*lacked*] this. Go forward as you now proceed, and rest assured God will do, what, and all, pleaseth him in you, and by you: and you cannot but be most dear to her whom you do believe never to have been wanting in her love and care of you, and for your placing in this or that place, and employment, leave as hitherto you religiously have done that care to me. Your business, is, to be ever ready, and indifferently to what may be appointed; and to do what is, or shall be allotted perfectly and well**

Let us imagine and see Winifred reading the response she received from Mary Ward. Perhaps, at first glance, she didn't entirely agree with her, but having an example of obedience and seeking God's will in the person of Mary Ward, she understood that the choice to obey, which is often not without suffering and can be at odds with a person's own will, is worth more in the life of one of her disciples. Mary Ward herself was a lifelong disciple of Christ, a model of obedience and the fulfilment of God's will. So Mary Ward's obedience to God's will was always based on the Word of Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church.

*"Although Jesus was the Son of God, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect he become the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."*

Heb 5:8-9

As disciples of Jesus Christ and followers of Mary Ward, we too are invited to be docile to the Holy Spirit, to listen to one another, to continue our journey of common discernment at the level of CJ and IBVM and to listen to the call of the Church through the person of Pope Francis; to go together, to become a synodal Church, a Church of listening, listening to the hopes, the crises of faith; to see the tragedy of wars, the poverty that our brothers and sisters in different regions of the planet are going through; and to be in solidarity with the efforts and the desires of mankind for peace and freedom.

So, in our relationships, in our ministries we are invited to be silent within ourselves so that we can hear, then listen to the needs, desires and aspirations of others so as to meet them, to fulfil God's unique dream for each of them, for each one of us, together. Easter is a way from me to you, to us. Listening too.

*Am I ready to accept the reality and surrender to God's Will as He asks of me?*

*Who am I, really, listening to, and what are my actions?*

Sr. Silvia Jitaru CJ



**An invitation to greater inclusiveness as one.**

*"They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women". Tt 2:3*

Mary Ward our Spiritual Mother while on earth trained her daughters to be like her in our manner of proceeding. The spiritual relevance of Mary Ward's letter to Frances Brooksby is a source of wisdom and inspiration for all her followers in this modern era. They shape our relationships, governance, structure and above all our dreams.

Today, we are invited to reflect upon Mary Ward's letter written on 13th October 1627 to Frances Brooksby then superior of the community in Cologne, Germany.

*Ihs*

**Reverend my dear Mother,**

My ill health and several business [*various duties*] makes me forbear to show you how your proceedings comfort me, particularly your pains in advancing [*developing*] the place where you are, and care of those under your charge, but beyond all this, and above what I can tell you do I love and esteem you, for the joy you express at the good going forward of other Colleges, and the entrance of diverse amongst ours of several nations etc.[*that people from different countries have entered our Institute*] ; happy are those my Mother who savours [*appreciate*] these things aright, a grace not given to all. I would have you love God much, and remember to thank him often for all benefits as well secret as known, and beg of his goodness increase of zeal, and still more ability to do his goodness greater service, who deserves far otherwise from ours than poor we have afforded: and what I here commend unto you, I will in my poor manner ask of God for you, and I trust you will not forget me. I will also commend to your especial care that Mother Anne Rushton and your two Catherines learn, or rather become perfect in casting a count, [*arithmetic*], writing an excellent Dutch [*German*] hand and that you would make them like yourself in working, but for works Mother Rushton is not apt, [*not a good worker*] the two Dutch [*Germans*] I hope are. I say nothing of my care of your College, if God send me life I will seek to do and not say. And so my dear Mother adieu for this time. Jesus ever keep you, and yours. Of all other businesses you will hear by Mother Provincial [*Barbara Babthorpe*].

**R.V. servo in Christo [Your Reverence's servant in Christ]  
 Marie Ward**

Frances Brooksby was one of an English Family of note. Though adorned with many virtues, in her early days she was greatly given to vanities of the world. In the very midst of her enjoyment, however, God called her in her thirtieth year and bestowed upon her the gift of vocation. Frances joined Mary Ward in the year 1617 at St. Omer. Later Mary Ward

entrusted her with many challenging roles in the Institute. The above letter is a proof of Mary Ward's virtue of inclusiveness: that she has written not only to her first companions but also to everyone who joined her company with the desire of serving the Master.

Mary Ward had to face many challenges at the time when this letter was drafted. Still she was interested in her sisters whom the good Lord had given to her care. Her concerns were the success of the Institute, education of the young sisters, taking care of the sick, greater appreciation of the inner spirit and Frances's apostolic zeal as the superior of the community. Frances's loving care towards her community is evident in this letter and her ability to lead colleagues of a different nationality is praised. Mary Ward saw the diverse recruits positively, promoting and encouraging genuine vocations above ethnic and parochial considerations.

Through this letter Mary Ward stresses the Ignatian 'Magis' and greater inclusiveness in mission. Our keen interest in her Institute is to be manifested beyond our own community/ province/ or Region. Greater inclusiveness happens when we unite, adapt, accept and involve everyone from diverse parts of the world as the whole body of the CJ/IBVM. With immense trust in the goodness of the Lord she wants us to take care of each other and make efforts to comfort the marginalized and the less fortunate.

Mary Ward saw the beauty of God's work in Frances' community - their dedicated service and being ever grateful for the same. Mary Ward's letter echoes the eternal hope, sincere encouragement, deep trust in the providence of God and goodness of our pioneering sisters. To become a religious congregation of gratitude and hope is a challenge - an unfulfilled task in these modern harrowing times. Yet we trust in the Lord and move ahead, as religious women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century joining the Synodal Church focusing on greater inclusiveness in our mission.

Let's Reflect:

*What is my response to inclusiveness in the areas of my mission?*

*In the light of the above letter what does Mary Ward expect of me today?*

*"So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col1:10).*

Sr. Merlin Puthumannil CJ



On February 13, 1631, Mary was accused of heresy and imprisoned in the Munich Anger Convent, where she remained for two months, with one companion, the lay-sister Anne Turner, who had nursing skills. Our role model of communication and listening, she expressed her trust in God in letters written with lemon juice on scraps of paper used to wrap food, though correspondence was prohibited. She encouraged her companions by saying, "God will reward you for your care and worth." I can't help but read with gratitude how precious this lemon juice letter is to us.

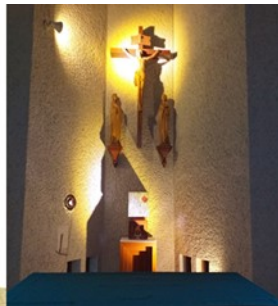
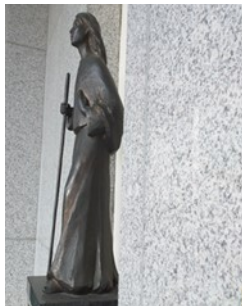
As I read it, the image of contemplation came to mind. Contemplation for the gospel is the work of reproducing Jesus' public life with his disciples here and now in me. I invite you to the work of recreating the spiritual journey of her passion by reading today the letter that she wrote from the Anger Convent 400 years ago.

*(From Source Texts Vol. III, Doc. 1144)*

**'I am in a Cloister I trow [believe], and closed up we are in one little pretty store on the first floor joining on the Grot where they bury, and the deceased Saints lie. Our habitation is the place of the despaired of the sick; we did as it seems displace one that is every moment a-dying; she hath been sick these three years, and hath spit up all her lungs; where sometimes we fry and sometimes we freeze, and there do all that we have to do. 2 little windows close walled up, our door chained, and double-locked, and never opened but [except] the only entrance of our 2 keepers and the Lady Abbess, who is our chief Guardian; we were conducted in by the 3 came with us, and 2 Franciscans, who spoke Italian, and the night, or rather hour we came, were placed beds near to our door, where night and day 4 nuns keep guard. Mass and sacraments are not feasts for us to frequent, and for all this the place or chamber we inhabit hath all in it could be wished; indeed I say true and marvel at it, but our Lord and Master is also our Father and gives no more than Lady like, and what is most easy to be borne.'**

Mary Ward's role model was Jesus. The two months spent at the Anger Convent overlap with the Season of Lent. The congregation had been suppressed and her writings confiscated – thus the death of her life's work. But what about me now? What about Mary's congregation now, 377 years after her death in York? Mary Ward always yearned for unity in her congregation so we can be sure that she would want one Institute, one Superior General. This is almost coming true. CJ and IBVM's Becoming One will fulfill Mary's longing.

Who were the countless women who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, survived the Church authorities' efforts to extinguish the fire of Mary's congregation? The word 'faith' comes to mind at this point. I see that the faith of her companions and their successors, who were convinced that God was always with Mary, led to the resurrection of the congregation today. Reading the lemon juice letter, I am convinced that Mary must have recalled Psalm 139 when she prayed. I can surmise that she might have thought that she was filled with joy, O



Lord, that you know everything. Church officials do not understand, but... she has firm belief in the establishment of an active congregation, not a cloistered order, in accord with the Institute's mission as God has granted it. I can imagine that Mary was comforted by meditating on Jesus who was crucified, sinless, as she prayed the passion. She accepted the persecution she suffered in

the Church as a reward for being a disciple of Jesus. She accepted it as an act of love in which she was crucified because of her affection for people at the time when the congregation was disbanded. She firmly believed that since God had helped establish the congregation, she would see that the congregation would bear fruit.

Mary Ward's time in the Anger Convent did not stand still. She was a part of God's creative work. Mary awaited the day when it will rain with her faith. Even in her moments of spiritual desolation, she does not lose her trust in God. It is clear that she is asking for patience and faith in God's time. So, what exactly is waiting? It doesn't mean sitting still.. In the Anger Convent, her waiting had the form of a continuously moving wheel; it is a waiting in a process in which much fruit is being born. Erich Fromm said in *The Revolution of Hope* that "resurrection means transformation of this reality in the direction of greater alive-ness." I am sure that every moment of Mary Ward's life was such a time of Kairos, a time of being awake to all things. In this way, she is an icon of resurrection.

The picture on the left is a statue of Mary Ward erected in front of the school cafeteria of St. Mary's Girls High School in Daejeon, and the picture on the right is a picture of the convent chapel in Daejeon. You can see Mary's silhouette in the picture on the right, which can be seen mysteriously when the cross lamp is turned on. The resurrected Mary Ward continues her pilgrimage, advancing forward with us today.

I hope IBVM and CJ will be one in the near future, becoming a huge tree, reaching to new and greater heights, thus giving even greater glory to God.

Sr. Hyacinta Chang CJ



Resilience, determination and friendship emerge from the letter composed by Mary Ward to ‘*My dearest*’ Mary Poyntz, at the close of 1632. Mary was in Rome, her Institute suppressed but freed from the accusation of heresy and living in common life with her remaining companions, under the tacit approval of church authorities. In the midst of the violent destruction of her work, she looked to the future, to possible opportunities and open doors.

The constancy of friendship opens Mary’s letter: ‘*we have too much to effect together in deeds ever to wast aine words; therefore to busines for the rest you know my hart to be all yf not more than you can wish and that for ever, ever.*’ Paper was expensive, security of communication not guaranteed, and reflective of Mary Ward’s pragmatic approach, she focused on ‘*busines*’ rather than effusive words of greeting or affection. The simplicity and directness of her approach is rendered more powerful by its brief nature. Friendship and loyalty are pillars which sustain us throughout our lives, often taken for granted but act as anchors of stability when most needed. Mary Poyntz (& others) provided this in abundance to Mary Ward, offering the scaffolding which supported her in the long years which followed the suppression of 1631. The spirit of female friendship, companionship and kinship is as important today as it was in 1632.

During the Mary Ward Summer School 2019, an image of Mary Ward as a resourceful, determined woman emerged, refusing to allow a set-back or challenge, no matter how daunting its nature, to overcome her. In the aftermath of the suppression, she appeared more fragile, cautious, tentative in her approach, trying to balance what were, at times, two competing needs; loyalty to her church and loyalty to what she understood to be God’s will for her. It was a delicate and demanding balancing act, and although our competing needs may be different, there is no doubt that at various times in our lives, we all find ourselves trying to meet two seemingly conflicting demands. At times it can feel overwhelming, to act for one is to feel as though we are failing the other, and it can be a heart-breaking situation to be in.

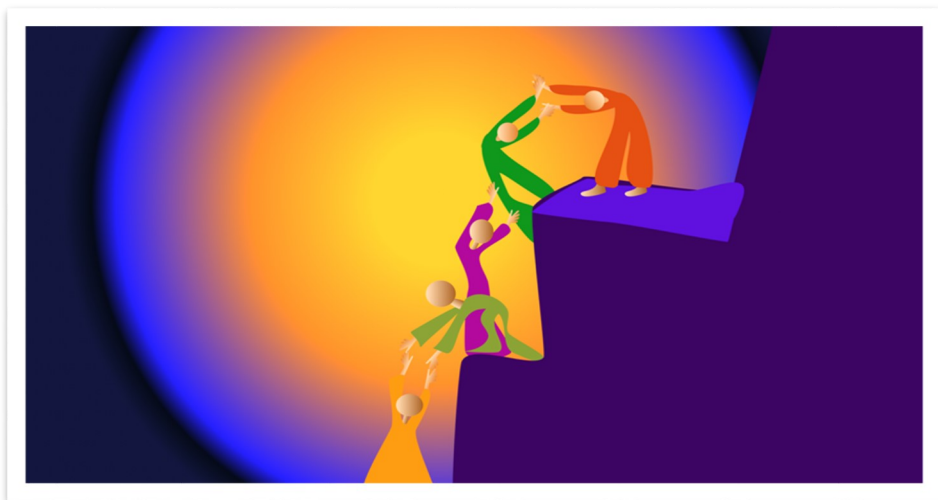
In December 1632, Mary was in such a position, her work and vision in disarray, but she was not undone. Writing in code, she asks Mary Poyntz, to remain in Munich, where war and disease raged, ‘*fain fain would Fillice [Mary Ward] have Neds [Mary Poyntz] hows [the Paradeiserhaus in Munich] still posed*’ to reconnect with the Elector of Bavaria and his wife, and alludes to her intention to seek permission for her remaining followers to remain living together as secular women, to ‘*live together whear they pleas*’. Writers have speculated that if Mary could secure permission for her remaining followers to live together and continue in their ministry in Rome, supported by a second such house in Munich, together they could provide a practical example of her renewed vision for the Institute. Hence, the importance of retaining ‘*Neds hows*’. In trying to serve both ‘masters’ Mary focused firstly on practical steps, retaining her faith that He would oversee all, but not relying solely on Him. She would take the initiative. Sometimes to see our way out of the

anguish and paralysis of trying to meet two conflicting demands, it is the practical first step which is required.

At times of turmoil and stress, the solid pillars of sisterly friendship and determined resourcefulness are what will provide the answers. With the support of others, we can grasp our courage and act.

*‘Not knowing when the dawn will come,  
I open every door’.*  
*(Emily Dickinson)*

Áine Mc Hugh, IBVM (Institute) & Irish Province Archivist,  
[archives@loreto.ie](mailto:archives@loreto.ie)



'...great instance was made by diverse spiritual, and learned men, that we would take upon us some Rule already confirmed; several rules were procured by our friends, both from Italy and France, and we earnestly urged to make choice of some of them; they seemed not that which God would have done, and the refusal of them caused much persecution, and the more, because I denied all, and could not say what in particular I desired or found myself called unto.

About this time in the year 1611 I fell sick in great extremity, being somewhat recovered (by a vow made to send in pilgrimage to our Blessed Lady of Sichem), being alone, in some extraordinary repose of mind, I heard distinctly, not by sound of voice but intellectually understood, these words, Take the Same of the Society, so understood, that we were to take the same both in matter and in manner, that only excepted which God by diversity of sex hath prohibited, these few words gave so great measure of light in the particular Institute, comfort and strength, and changed so the whole soul, as that impossible for me to doubt but that they came from him whose words are works.....

Concerning the name, I have twice in several [*different*] years understood in as particular a manner as these other things I have recounted, that the denomination of these must be Jesus. And thrice, I think more often, of the inconveniences would happen to both parts if ours should have any dependency of the Society...

Theme: Discernment: A journey into the unknown

I begin this reflection with: 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15:

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth”*

This scripture text invites us to be of right disposition at all times before God in all our dealings. This is what Mary Ward does amid doubts and uncertainty in pursuing her vocation/call.

When I read Mary Ward's letter Nuncio Albergati the question that comes to mind is *how one can borrow a leaf from Mary Ward's discernment approach in the face of opposition, difficulty or uncertainty today.*

In her letter to Albergati, MW is presented as discerning a way forward with regard to her vocation with such deep yet frustrating conviction:

*...came suddenly upon me such an alteration and disposition, as only the operation of an inexpressible power could cause, with a sight and certainty that I was not to remain there [in the monastery], and that I was to do some other thing – but what in particular I was not shown...*

\*Mary Ward did not allow herself to have quick-fix solutions to the challenges that she encountered. Instead, she moved step by step and in humility waited on God to show her the way which often appeared obscured. At times she was ridiculed and even confused herself but she lived one moment at a time until she was certain there was a confirmation that seemed to come from God.

This kind of state is not possible unless one is attuned to God; otherwise discouragement and despair may set in.

\*Mary Ward hardly reached a complete solution and often moved back and forth in her discernment process. In her letter to Nuncio Albergati, she relates how hard it was to decide on what rule to take even after a few were proposed as she noted 'It can be quite a daunting task to hold firm to one's own opinion when everyone else thinks otherwise.'

It is easier to shut down the voice of the spirit within us when we settle for the status quo. Mary Ward thus gives us a point to ponder on with regards to discerning the movements of the spirit at every moment where choices have to be made. Her approach to discernment takes 3 dimensions into consideration:

*Intellectual conviction      The acceptance of reason*  
*The will being completely possessed by the idea*

Reading her letter, Mary Ward appears to be confused and stubborn, at least looking at it humanly. Spiritually however Mary Ward herself did not know what it was that she wanted; this leaves the needed room in discernment. This, I see as requiring a lot of humility and freedom to accept the consequences of our actions.

Mary Ward, therefore, exposes us here to a way of discerning; that in the face of opposition, difficulty or uncertainty, one must discern with freedom and humility. Mary Ward, recalling her bad experiences with the Poor Clares and having lost all confidence in her ability to use her own common sense about the choice of a Rule, waited in agony until she had a definite sign from God to direct her. In her letter, we encounter hints of a struggle, right from the beginning, between her understanding of her call to a religious life of austerity and prayer, and her desire to do good for others, not just for herself.

Three themes emerge from this letter: Discernment takes a lot of time, it requires a purposed, quiet moment to reflect and it leaves room for doubt, hence consultation with a spiritual guide is very necessary.

I find myself reflecting on our current process towards **Merger**. If Mary Ward were present today, she would perhaps be responding to the call for merger with questioning and doubt, as some of us do, and wanting to hold on to what provides for security. Questions such as:

What of our established names with which we are known?

How do we tell others that our identity is no longer this or that?

Will people still respect or trust us?

Why now when some missions seem to be dying? Could this be a move in vain given diminishment and aging together with the fact that vocations are also dwindling in many parts of the world?

Could you be the hope God is banking on to bring to life this... '*some other thing*'?

Such questions and doubts, I believe, when we sit quietly and ponder on them, may be a great source of discerning God's will for us in this time and place. Mary Ward invites us to leave what we love so much and hold too tight to, including our comfort zones and the little cocoons we build that cripple and make us miss out the opportunities that would be more life giving for our Mary Ward Family. Jesus says to each of us; '*courage, it is I; do not be afraid.*'

Sr. Margaret Sewe IBVM

‘...now to my coming to you, having begun with his holiness and that he should stir in the matter, and I absent things would not so well, besides if that should be, [*if the Pope were to act quickly*] I should be forced of necessity to return presently [*immediately*] back to Rome, and so that charges lost [ *the money spent on the journey to Naples to see Win would be wasted*]; therefore till he be returned, (which will be some 8 days hence) and that I see what he will do in the business, I cannot determine certainly whether, or when to come towards you. ...

Soli: [*in confidence*] I think dear child the trouble and long loneliness you heard me speak of is not far from [*away*], which whensoever it is, happy success will follow; you are the first I have uttered this conceit [*idea*]so plainly to, pray for me and the work. It grieves me I cannot have you also with me to help to bear a part, but a part you will, and shall bear howsoever [*in whatever way it happens*].

**Background:** On 27<sup>th</sup> October 1624 Mary Ward handed over a memorial (Institutum II) to pope Urban VIII at her audience in Frascati, near Rome, and asked him for Confirmation of the Institute and its way of life, which she had already tested for 16 years with her companions. She writes in a letter to Winifred Wigmore that the Pope showed himself ‘agreeable and gracious’, which means that he met her in a friendly and favourable way.

Mary Ward asked the Pope to hand over the matter to only a few Cardinals for discussion. In accordance with this request he appointed just four Cardinals to investigate: Bandini, Mellini, Cobelluzio and Antonio Barberini.

It was well-known that Pope Urban VIII was very ready to hand over difficult matters to these cardinals, apparently as a sign of his esteem for them. Fundamentally, however, the results of the deliberations were not important to him. So there was little hope of success. Mary Ward knew that memoranda against her, full of lies, false accusations and deceptions, were being passed on to the Pope and the Cardinals with the aim of bringing about the suppression of the Institute. An important point is the fact that not one of her powerful, great and violent enemies had the courage to profess their dislike to her face or to show anything else but friendship. She enjoyed esteem from all the Cardinals, but particularly Cardinal Bandini who came to know her great, good and solid virtue which placed her so high in his esteem that he told a friend of his that he bore her such reverence that he would have knelt down at her feet and asked for her blessing if it were not for the fact that it would take from his dignity.

**Reflection:** In the letter, Mary Ward shared and expressed to Winifred Wigmore how she earnestly desired and humbly begged that the Institute might be confirmed by the Holy See, crowned with the laurel wreath of religious life, or at least with the name of a pious Institute and their labours and endeavours be honoured and recognized.

Mary Ward said that the Institute required confirmation so that the sisters and its members could work and move freely spreading and preaching the Kingdom of God through their

words and deeds. She told Winifred Wigmore that she told the Pope that she approached him specifically for the confirmation of the Institute, the Institute which God himself had confirmed in heaven from all eternity. Her confidence, faith and trust in God were so clear and single hearted that she kept the light of hope kindled for the confirmation of the Institute. She wrote to Winifred in the letter that she recommended the whole matter to God, for to God and His Holiness the Institute and its members belonged.

When Mary Ward had done her part she rested satisfied, and dealt with the Cardinals according to their position but not according to her personal opinion. The Cardinals could dispose of her as they wished, but Mary Ward pointed out that the Institute was not only lawful but also praiseworthy and necessary and that there was nothing in its rules nor in its practice, which had not been practised by holy women and approved by the Holy Church.



**Conclusion:** Mary Ward was fervently commending her Institute to God. It was made known to her that its prosperity, progress and security did not depend on wealth, dignity and the favour of princes but that all its members had free and open access to Him from whom proceed all strength, light and protection.

The period of trying to get confirmation of the Institute was very challenging and difficult. Mary Ward sent a petition for recognition of her Institute but was asked to adopt a moderate form of enclosure – and she rejected any kind of enclosure whatsoever. She did feel humiliated but found strength in prayer, above all in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the various churches of the city where the 40 hours of devotions were being held. She received a special grace of forgiveness of enemies. Henceforth, she cherished a tender affection for all who wronged her and was in the habit of calling them friends and lovers of her heavenly reward.

Badarilin Majhong

‘...She [*Sister Praxedes*] may likewise know, what I had from God touching this, if that be thought fit, or would further her: which was as follows (understood as it is writ without adding or altering one syllable) Take the same of the Society. Father General will never permit it. Go to him, these are the words, whose worth cannot be valued; nor the good they contain, too dearly bought: these gave sight where there was none; made me know what God would have done; gave strength to suffer what since hath happened: assurance of what is wished for, in time to come: and if ever I be worthy to do anything more about the Institute, hither I must come to draw: I could say a great deal of those words, but never all; but she will far better see what God intended by them: if she will but ask him what he meant by them: except he that can do all that he will, and all that he doth is well, give her some other ground to work upon. Twice doubting what kind of Subordination should be, I was sent home (I mean to your Institute) and bidden do, as there was done. Some other things I have some times perceived about Subordination which is not to purpose for her. Once I think I saw a General of yours, who said nothing, but his countenance promised all concurrence with us. This was I think to comfort, for some of yours at that very time would needs that [*insisted that*] the General of the Society both could, and would hinder such a thing as I did believe to be God's will in us. The first I could never believe to be in the power of man: for the second this sight gave confidence: the same I saw likewise in those words go to him, that when the time should come, neither would he have a will to hurt us, but the contrary.....’

As we end Mary Ward Week, 2023, as followers of Mary Ward, both men and women, the world has had multiple changes over the years. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women could be nurses, secretaries, or teachers. Times have certainly changed and now women can venture into many various vocations and careers.

The world of Mary Ward is radically different from what we have today. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century many people considered that women needed to be “protected”. The men that were gathered for the Council of Trent (1545-1563) appeared to be of this mindset. Women religious had to be governed by men who were superiors of monastic or mendicant communities. These women had to live in strict enclosure and their prayer was the strict praying of the Divine Office in common.

In 1611, Mary Ward had her “intellectual” vision, "Take the same of the Society. Father General will never permit it. Go to him." The *Society* was the gathering of men, neither monastic nor mendicant but apostolic. Though she had the Rules of St. Ignatius neither she nor Father General wanted the Jesuits to be her *School of Mary* superior. At this time also, in Liege, there were women, the Beguines, often lace makers, who ministered to many, tending to their spiritual and temporal needs. Women religious, at this time, were cloistered, mainly Benedictine, Carmelites, Dominicans or Poor Clares. There were also men and women who were struggling to establish religious communities of women that were not cloistered, the Daughters of Charity established by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac,

and the Ursulines founded by Angela Merici (though her rule was modified by Archbishop Charles Borromeo to have an ecclesiastical superior, soon to be followed by other bishops.) In a Mary Ward community of Liege in 1619, there was a young Sister Praxedes who was seen as a holy, dedicated religious who was divisive, saying she had a different vision from God, contrary to Mary Ward's vision. With humility, wanting to be faithful to God's will, Mary recorded her insights from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises to Fr. John Tomson (Gerard).

Mary Ward wanted her Institute to be free of enclosure, governed by women, wearing the dress of the time, and praying the Divine Office in private. In her letter, it was obvious that she did not want to be an instrument of blockage to how she envisioned the implementation of her vision. She was willing to follow what God was saying to Sister Praxedes if that seemed to be God's will. Through all of this, Sister Praxedes became ill and died during the night. The divisiveness was somewhat settled but it took a while for the vision of Mary Ward to take hold.

Mary Ward's letter to Fr. Tomson reflected her deep sense of prayer with humility. She was not willing to hold onto her vision if Sister Praxedes' vision was God's will.

#### **Personal reflection:**

*How willing am I to let go of what I see as God's will if someone is presenting something quite contrary?*

*With whom do I share my thoughts, humbly admitting I do not have a corner on what God wills?*

*Can I spend time in listening to God?*

Sr. Ellen Enright IBVM

