

**Blessed Marie-Anne Blondin (1809-1890):  
A Life Centred on the Cross  
Feast Day: April 18**



**Her Life**

Esther Blondin (later, Mother Marie-Anne) was born on a farm in Terrebonne, Quebec, April 18, 1809. Her parents were committed to conveying their Christian faith to their children, and raised Mother Marie-Anne with a faith centred on the Eucharist, on surrender to the will of Providence, and on love for the poor. But she could neither read nor write when, at the age of 22, she began to work as a domestic helper at the convent of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame in her village. A year later, she enrolled as a boarding student in order to learn to read and write. Later, she was accepted as a novice by the Congregation, but she had to leave the novitiate because of health difficulties.

In 1833, she became a teacher in Vaudreuil, Quebec. There, she discovered one of the reasons for the widespread illiteracy in the society around her. A Church regulation that forbade classes of both boys and girls in co-educational schools meant that many priests, who could not afford to run two parish schools, dispensed with schools altogether. In the spring of 1848, believing that she was being prompted by the Holy Spirit, Esther proposed to her Bishop, the Most Reverend Ignace Bourget, a plan that she had been nurturing for some time. She wanted “to found a religious congregation for the instruction and education of poor children, in mixed schools.” Bishop Bourget found the proposal “outrageous, subversive toward established order and contrary to healthy moral principles”. However, the civil government was in favour of such schools, so the Bishop authorized a modest trial. Thus the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Anne was founded in Vaudreuil, on September 8, 1850.

In 1853, the Congregation’s motherhouse moved to Saint-Jacques-de-l’Achigan in the Lanaudière region of Quebec. The community’s chaplain, Father Louis-Adolphe Maréchal, frequently interfered in its internal life. In August 1854, after a year of conflict between him and Mother Marie-Anne, Bishop Bourget, who wanted to protect the rights of the community, asked her to resign and not present herself for re-election as superior. Mother Marie-Anne obeyed, for she considered that the will of God was manifested through the episcopal authority.

She was named director of a new convent in Sainte Geneviève, but there Mother Marie-Anne became the target of harassment by the Congregation’s new authorities. In 1858, she was once again removed from office. She was brought back to the motherhouse, where she did humble work right up to the time of her death. One superior even went so far as to seize her personal correspondence with Bishop Bourget. Through it all, she kept silence. Assigned to work in the laundry, her sole consolation was to inspire the novices with her exemplary patience, humility, and charity.

After long years of exclusion, Mother Marie-Anne died at the motherhouse in Lachine, on January 2, 1890. She was declared Venerable on May 14, 1991, and beatified by Pope (now Saint) John Paul II on April 19, 2001.

## **Her Spirituality**

The life path of Mother Marie-Anne seems to have consisted of a long way of the cross. She showed herself to be an authentic disciple, one who accepted the invitation to follow Christ to Calvary. She offered her personal way of the cross as a prayer for the life of her community. When she was forced to resign from her position as superior, she let go without trying to hold on to it. She freely accepted being stripped of even her legitimate rights. And she obeyed, “blessing the maternal conduct of Divine Providence which drew her along a way of tribulations and crosses.”

Mother Marie-Anne frequently renewed her sacrifice by “giving herself to the spirit of the Cross,” which explains the profound humility that characterized her throughout her life. When the Congregation celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding without so much as recognizing her as the founder, she did not make a fuss. She took refuge in silence and humility; what remained important for her was not acknowledgment of her contribution in founding the community, but its survival. She must have meditated often on the Gospel passage about the seed sown in the earth that has to ripen to bear fruit. For one day a novice asked her why she, the founder, was now engaged in such obscure work. Her spontaneous reply was, “The more deeply a tree buries its roots in the soil, the better its chances of maturing and bearing fruit.”

Although she was forbidden from letting anyone address her as “Mother”, Mother Marie-Anne never abandoned her role as a spiritual mother. This moral force, which allowed her to remain serene in the face of outrage, was drawn from her trust in God. She relied on him, “always keeping on her lips and in her heart the words of the Psalmist: ‘I have hoped in you, Lord, I will never be confounded.’” Although she was a victim of injustice, she never sought justice for herself. She placed her case in God’s hands, “fully realizing that he would be able to distinguish the real from the false and reward each one according to their works.”

She was faithful to the spirit of the Beatitudes and was always a woman of great mercy. When she was director of the convent at Sainte Geneviève, she had asked Bishop Bourget for authorization to invite Father Maréchal to give a retreat to the students, reasoning that “there is more happiness in forgiving than in seeking revenge.” Her habit of forgiveness was evident again when, on her deathbed, she asked her superior to “ask Father Maréchal to come for the edification of the Sisters.”

The life of Mother Marie-Anne was a long quest for conformity with the will of God. She “kept so strongly attached to God’s will in order not to lose her peace of heart, such a precious thing that she preferred to lose everything in order to keep it.” She remained in communion with this will in a loving “Fiat!” (“Let it be done!”), expressed especially within the difficult circumstances of her life. It was not surprising, then, that her parting words to her daughters as a spiritual testament were, “May the Eucharist and abandonment to the will of God be your heaven on earth.”

**For further information:**

English

[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sureau\\_esther\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sureau_esther_11E.html)

<http://www.ssacong.org/eng/histoire/fondatrice/index.htm>

French

[http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/sureau\\_esther\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/sureau_esther_11E.html)

<http://www.ssacong.org/fra/histoire/fondatrice/index.htm>

**Image:**

**Mother Marie-Anne Blondin, portrait by Sister M.-Hélène-de-la-Croix, 1953  
Archive of the Sisters of Saint Anne**