



*The Strength to
Witness of Holiness is
a Monumental Message
of Hope*



In July of this year, the Sisters of Blessed Alphonse Marie, worldwide, celebrate the **153rd anniversary of the Birth for heaven of their Foundress, Alphonse Marie Eppinger, as well as the parish priest, Father John David Reichard, co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior, from Alsace, in France.**

These two greats worked together on personal holiness and the work of the Congregation, and almost at the same time, they received the final invitation to the house of the heavenly Father. We all agree that *those who know the history and its personalities, they go perfectly and confidently into the future.* Let us go back in our thoughts to our “cradle” in Niederbronn, where 153 years ago our beloved Foundress, Alphonse Marie, and Father John David Reichard, confessor, spiritual director, and co-founder of our Congregation, spent their last days of their earthly lives, and after walking together and working on common work, both received their reward in heaven.

So, let us draw from the springs of the past that we may walk confidently toward the future...

The Last Year of their Rich Lives

The year of 1867 for the Foundress and the Superior General, Alphonse Marie, was hard. It began with bringing negative answers from the Bishops of Vienna, Sopron, and Würzburg about keeping the unity of the Congregation. Although the Foundress did everything for the salvation of the communities and the Sisters, whom she personally had sent on mission to these places to help people in their needs of body and spirit, these communities separated themselves from the original Congregation. It hurt her very much. However, the life in the Congregation had to continue in the given reality: with the loss of the Sisters and the communities in Germany, Austria, and Hungary. At the end, it was hard for all of them, the Sisters in separation as well as the Sisters in the original Congregation, but not only for them. It was hard to bear for the co-founder Father Reichard, but it was hardest to bear for Mother Alphonse Marie. It was for her a great suffering, yet she was strong enough, and without hesitation she continued to fulfill her tasks. In zeal for God’s work, the separation did not rob her of courage. In one of her letters, in February 1867, we can see the spiritual process of her internal purification, completed by painful detachment to which she was forced by the separation of the communities and the Sisters. This fact taught her to avoid similar situations in the future. She continued in correspondence with bishops and priests, who asked for the Sisters for their dioceses and parishes. She continued to establish new communities and sent the Sisters on mission, so the “good work” would spread...

The Last Witnesses of Life

Mother Alphonse Marie silently expressed thanks to gracious God for everything that had happened. He allowed the work to suffer weakening and separation, as gold is refined in fire. On the

other hand, He still brought to this work honors and awards. Sister Bonaventure, the faithful and brave Superior of the community of Darmstadt, in Germany, informed the Foundress about the official award, which the communities received for noble and sacrificial service during the war. It still is valid, "Be afraid of vainglory as a fire!" So, she answered to Sister Bonaventure, "*As for the award, dear Sister Bonaventure and Sisters, look for God's glory and the glory of the Holy Church, for the salvation of souls and your improvement. Be aware of that which comes from outside. Say with the author of The Following of Christ, 'Today they are with me and tomorrow they will be against me.' I want to look above all for God and to please Him, to see always my poverty, so I will not be proud, by which I would displease God, because only to Him belongs all glory.*" "Be pleasing to God" was the constant concern of still young Elizabeth. She was busy for hours with only this thought: How can I behave that I would please God?

The first months of 1867, Mother Alphonse Marie tried to contact the Sisters in Sopron, yet she was not able to answer the invitations of the Sisters who called her to visit them. Unfortunately, her health condition no longer allowed her to do it. In May, Mother Alphonse Marie felt worse. Therefore, as was her custom, she wrote a letter to Bishop Räss saying that she would leave Niederbronn and stay in Singlingen to get some rest. Really just a little... Even co-founder Reichard felt worse from day to day, so he also was staying in the community of Singlingen. There, he edited records about the Congregation designated to be sent to Rome, and with a shaky hand he wrote the letters in which he informed about the activities of the Congregation and the Foundress.

The Last Days in Niederbronn

How were the days really, in July 1867 in Niederbronn? Undoubtedly, sudden turn of events and the intensity of experienced moments no longer allowed the faithful Sister Adele, the secretary to the Foundress, to continue with writing the precious diary, in which we would like to find the story about the last days of Mother Alphonse Marie. The amount of rest at the homestead in Singlingen only lasted a very short time. On June 1st, she was already back, in Niederbronn. In addition, she became bedridden. A brain fever tormented her and there was no hope to recover. Her strength was consumed in hard and strenuous work for development and prosperity of the Congregation, which she bore over eighteen years. She could no longer struggle with the disease which seized and never left her. The Sisters sent a message to Father Reichard about the health condition of the Foundress. He returned back to Niederbronn without hesitation.

Mysterious Predictions

An eyewitness to the meetings of these two precious souls talks about the mysterious predictions. Mother Alphonse Marie briefly announced to her spiritual director, Father Reichard, that he will come to eternity before her. He was used to this style of speech, for he recorded her visions and ecstasies for many years. Yet, we ask, "What did come to his mind at that moment?" In spirit, he went back to Elizabeth's childhood when she dictated her strong spiritual experience and perhaps prophesy. It was a day of her First Holy Communion when she prayed in the baptismal innocence, "*Jesus, leave me this priest forever. Let him live as long as I will. Jesus, You will listen to my petition.*" God granted her prayer. Father Reichard accompanied her for her entire earthly life as her confessor, co-founder, and spiritual director. He led her along a steep spiritual path for forty years and thirty-nine years he ministered her the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Whatever it was, the mysterious prediction of young Elizabeth, later Mother Alphonse Marie, was fulfilled. On July 24, 1867, Father John David Reichard suffered a stroke and died suddenly at the age of 71. Two days later, he was buried at the cemetery of the Congregation in Niederbronn, which he himself consecrated for the Sisters, in 1854.

Sister Adele recorded, "*Sisters gathered together in large numbers to give the last respect and thanks to their spiritual father, who willingly accepted the invitation to leave to the house of the*

Heavenly Father. There was no time for mourning. After they run to their dying mother and Foundress. Soon after, she also accepted the Lord's invitation and followed her spiritual director. No human tongue can describe pain of mourning Sisters during these eight days of departures to the eternity of their "father and mother". They remained double orphans. The Lord, whose intentions are always full of His merciful love, decided to unite in one glorious victory both souls, who surrendered to God's will, suffered for Him and faithfully cooperated on the same work. "

It came on the day of July 31, 1867, which was the last one. In the afternoon, Mother Alphonse Marie's pilgrimage on this earth silently ended and she surrendered her noble soul to her Divine Spouse, whom she loved very much and glorified by her fruitful life for fifty-three years. On the Feastday of her patron, St. Alphonsus Liguori, more than three hundred Sisters accompanied dear mother to her temporary rest at the cemetery. These two, almost simultaneously deaths of Father Reichard and Mother Alphonse Marie have become extremely symbolic. Neither one was given the last word to say to the orphaned Sisters and Brothers of the Congregation, who gathered around their death beds. They neither say words of consolation nor of farewell. They did not pass any last delegation or recommendation... because there was a valid spiritual testament and recommendation, which Mother Alphonse Marie during her life often repeated, *"Have courage! God is with you..."* "Yes, He is with us until today.

God's Work

Saying in human words, this "double loss" fell on the Sisters unexpectedly, as if from behind, and it pursed their lips and blurred their sight. However, the activity of God's Providence is visible. These two noble and privileged souls, who were united in the same desires and efforts, the same selfless devotion, and the same deep and steadfast confidence to God, accomplished at the same time the work, blessed by God, which faced so many trials. Those who lived near them and often were witnesses to their heavy and hard work said that they fulfill God's will all of their lives, and faithfully walked under God's sight. The work, founded by, today already Blessed Alphonse Marie, with the help of Father John David Reichard, is really God's work, because it has lasted to this day, and continues as every one of God's works. So, the work founded by them did not stand on people, but on God. He will always find those who will faithfully continue this work.

Let us go back to Niederbronn, again. On August 3, 1867, Sister Mary Joseph, a novice master, turned to Bishop Räss entrusting him her inner suffering and confusion, caused by double sorrow, which fell on Niederbronn. With a painful heart, she wrote, *"Gracious God just asked us already the second sacrifice. He took from us our mother, the best mother, which we loved and to whom we were tied. How great is my pain! The one, who was so precious to me and whom I tenderly loved, is here no longer. She went to heaven to receive the reward for her great virtues. She was a saint, really a great saint. During the eighteen years I spent close to her, I was encouraged by her virtues, her kindness, fidelity toward us, and the zeal for the work, which our Lord entrusted to her."*

Conviction about the Holiness of Mother Alphonse Marie

The sorrow over the loss of mother and father did not affect only the Sisters. The cry of pain, especially over the loss of loving mother, was also expressed by a layman, who experienced in Niederbronn decisive moments of his life and became a witness of many miracles. His name was Mr. Louis de Ciskey, who shared sorrow of the entire community in Niederbronn. He wrote to Sister Adelinde, saying, *"I keep my eyes on medal, which gave me our holy mother, daily, and pray for her and your dear religious community. Our beloved mother needs no longer our prayers, because she is a saint. So, we should ask God right now to allow her to be venerated by the Church, as He granted it to her in heaven. In this case, I would like to remind you, of which you are certainly convinced of yourself, at least as much as I am convinced, that is important to gather together with a great care everything which will keep a precious memory on the virtues of our dear Mother and the exceptional graces given her by God."*

SANTA SUBITO!

“Santo Subito!” This exclamation was sounded immediately after the death of today already St. John Paul II. Exclamation, *Santa Subito*, was sounded also after the death of Blessed Alphonse Marie. It not only came from the mouth of Sister Mary Joseph, who called her a great saint, but also from a layman, Mr. Louis de Cissey. Referring to the relationships which he established during his visits in Niederbronn, he expressed his desires and feelings that he experienced at that time, to the Diocese Bishop of Strasburg, Andrew Räss, saying, *“I dare to say that my poor petition is united with all petitions, which surely have to come to you in this time. That is, to start preparing right now all the documents and materials, and make steps, which will someday serve for the beatification of the holy Foundress of the Niederbronn Congregation. For whole life of this holy Foundress was amazingly united with God and His graces. She always and fully responded to them. You were a spiritual director of Mother Alphonse Marie as well as a real inspirer of the foundation of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer. This immense work, on which mightily showed God’s grace and blessing, will be forever one of the glorious deeds of your episcopate and its pride. Nothing will glorify it more than the veneration of Mother Alphonse Marie as a saint.”* Surely, Mr. Louis de Cissey did not have an idea how important will be his bold words, spoken before ecclesiastical authority. Thus he became the first “actor” of the process of the beatification of Mother Alphonse Marie right after her death, on the first days of August 1867, when he clearly formulated a bold desire after the beatification of Mother Alphonse Marie Eppinger.

The fulfillment of this desire became true on September 9, 2018, which was 151 years after her death. Why?

Because the strength of witness of holiness of Blessed Alphonse Marie is today a powerful message of hope for her Sisters and Associates, worldwide, who shall bring it to everyone, who suffer in any way.

Blessed Alphonse Marie, pray for us.

Sr. Katarína Krištofová,
Postulator of the Process for the Canonization

The nature of the seven gifts has been debated by theologians since the mid-second century, but the standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

- **Wisdom** is both the knowledge of and judgment about “divine things” and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth (I/I.1.6; I/II.69.3; II/II.8.6; II/II.45.1–5).
- **Understanding** is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation—in effect, the ability to “see” God (I/I.12.5; I/II.69.2; II/II.8.1–3).
- **Counsel** allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation (II/II.52.1).
- **Fortitude** denotes a firmness of mind in doing good and in avoiding evil, particularly when it is difficult or dangerous to do so, and the confidence to overcome all obstacles, even deadly ones, by virtue of the assurance of everlasting life (I/II.61.3; II/II.123.2; II/II.139.1).
- **Knowledge** is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as to never wander from the straight path of justice (II/II.9.3).
- **Piety** is, principally, revering God with filial affection, paying worship and duty to God, paying due duty to all men on account of their relationship to God, and honoring the saints and not contradicting Scripture. The Latin word *pietas* denotes the reverence that we give to our father and to our country; since God is the Father of all, the worship of God is also called piety (I/II.68.4; II/II.121.1).
- **Fear of God** is, in this context, “filial” or chaste fear whereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from him—as opposed to “servile” fear, whereby we fear punishment (I/II.67.4; II/II.19.9).

These gifts, according to Aquinas, are “habits,” “instincts,” or “dispositions” provided by God as supernatural helps to man in the process of his “perfection.” They enable man to transcend the limitations of human reason and human nature and participate in the very life of God, as Christ promised (John 14:23). Aquinas insisted that they are necessary for man’s salvation, which he cannot achieve on his own. They serve to “perfect” the four cardinal or moral virtues

(prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). The virtue of charity is the key that unlocks the potential power of the seven gifts, which can (and will) lie dormant in the soul after baptism unless so acted upon.