

**St. Nazaria Ignacia March y Mesa  
(Spain/Mexico/Argentina/Bolivia) 1889-1943**

*Religious Sister, Institute of Sisters of the Abandoned Elders.  
Served as a nurse, cook, housekeeper and occasional beggar to support the poor  
and neglected for twelve years in the Institute's hospice in Oruro, Bolivia.  
Founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Pontifical Crusade.  
Mother Nazaria and sisters cared for and brought sacraments  
to soldiers on both sides during the war between Bolivia and Paraguay*



**Nazaria March y Mesa** was born on January 10, 1889, in Madrid, Spain, to Jose Alejandro March y Reus and Nazaria Mesa Ramos in Arcos de Santa Maria. She was the fourth of eighteen children and had a twin sister Ignacia and ten brothers who survived infancy. She was baptized on April 11, 1889, in the Parish Church of San Giuseppe. Nazaria made her First Holy Communion at the age of nine, on 21 November 1898 and made a personal vow of consecration to God. She actually heard our Lord call, ***“You, Nazaria, follow me.”*** To which she responded, *“I will follow you Lord, as closely as possible to a human creature.”*<sup>2</sup>

Unlike many children who are drawn to religious life at an early age, her family was indifferent to the faith, and grew so tired of her devotions that they once “grounded” her from going to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On August 15, 1890, at the age of 11, she consecrated her virginity to the Lord. She was confirmed at the age of 13, on March 15, 1902, the feast of Blessed Marcelo Spínola y Maestre. By that time, her family had grown used to her piety and allowed her to join the Franciscan Third Order and more actively practice her faith. She succeeded in getting several of them to return to the Church.

Nazaria tried to enter the Institute of the Sisters of the Cross in Seville, Spain. However, Mother Angelita and Father Tarin had a premonition that she would go to America and return from there with her companions.<sup>2</sup>

In late 1904, business failures led the family to move to Mexico. On the trip, Nazaria met sisters in the Instituto de Hermanitas de los Ancianos Desamparados (Institute of Sisters of the Abandoned Elders), and was so inspired by their charism that on 7 December 1908, at age 19, she followed a calling to religious life and entered the Institute in Mexico City, Mexico. After her postulancy, she was sent to Palencia, Spain, to complete the novitiate. There she made her first profession on October 15, 1911, taking the name Sister Nazaria de Sainte-Thérèse (Sister Nazaria Ignacia of St. Theresa of Jesus).

A year later she was sent to Bolivia with nine sisters to the Oruro Foundation. She made her perpetual vows on 1 January 1915. Her diaries of the time show a deep devotion to her calling, but struggles with her vows of obedience to her superiors. She was assigned to the institute's hospice in Oruro, Bolivia, where she worked as a nurse, cook, housekeeper, and occasional beggar to support the poor and neglected for twelve years.

The region around Oruro was not entirely Christian. Many Protestant groups were establishing missions, and the few priests in the area were often lax or lived scandalous lives. Beginning in 1920 Sister Nazaira began to feel a call to found a new congregation devoted to missionary work, evangelization and religious education. On 18 January 1925, the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Sister Nazaria made a special vow of obedience to the Pope, and on Pentecost that year she made a vow to work for the union and extension of the Holy Catholic Church. On 16 June 1925, with six other sisters, she founded the Pontifical Crusade, later renamed the Congregation of the Missionary Crusaders of the Church, and began service as their superior. The mission of the Congregation was to catechize children and adults, support the work of priests, conduct missions, and to print and distribute short religious tracts. In addition to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the sisters took two others: the first of love and obedience to the Pope, and the second of working with all their strength for the union and extension of the Kingdom of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

With the blessing of the Nuncio and the Bolivian hierarchy, Sister Nazaria began the foundation of a missionary institute with only 40 cents in her pocket. Monsignor Felipe Cortesi, while in Bolivia, worked to help Mother Nazaira to found the Congregation. On February 12, 1927, the diocesan religious congregation of the Sisters of the Pontifical Crusade was canonically erected. This was the first legitimate congregation formed in the Bolivian Church according to the Bishop of Oruro. It was to serve all men but especially the poorest and most needy.

When Monsignor Felipe Cortesi was assigned to be the apostolic nuncio of Argentina in 1930, he asked Mother Nazaria to open a "Missionary Crusader" house in Buenos Aires. She established "social canteens," and worked tirelessly for the promotion of women and for the education of children.

The Congregation received an early test under fire during the war between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932-1935). Mother Nazaira and the sisters cared for and brought the sacraments to soldiers on both sides, and helped establish homes for war orphans. In 1934, she founded the first magazine in Bolivia for women in religious life, *Al Adalid de Cristo Rey*, and the first female trade union, Sociedad de Obrera Católicas.

In early 1934, Monsignor Cortesi asked the Vatican Congregation of Religious to approve the rules for the Crusaders that Nazaira had written, based on Ignatian spirituality. Later that year, Mother Nazaria traveled to Rome with an Argentinian pilgrimage group to work for the approval of her Rule. She made pilgrimages to several sites, and had a private audience with Pope Pius XI during which Nazaria said that she was willing to die for the Church; the Pope told her that she must, instead, live and work for the Church.

Leaving Italy for her native Spain, Mother Nazaira founded a retreat center for spiritual exercises in Madrid under the flag of Uruguay; the sisters there survived the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) as Franco did not wish to risk the international incident killing them would cause. With the help of the Bolivian government, Mother Nazaria was able to leave the persecutions in Spain and return to the Americas. She summoned a general chapter of the Congregation in 1937 to strengthen the unity and zeal of her sisters. She labored for the spiritual formation of new sisters and set an example by her pious, simple life. To the superiors of the Congregation houses she always recommended a maternal approach to the sisters in their care, to remember their role as Mother of the house.

When the Spanish Civil War ended, Nazaira returned to Spain to check on the sisters she had left behind, then returned to the Americas for the final time. The Congregation spread throughout South America and began to work in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Cameroon. Though Nazaira did not live to see it, the Congregation received Vatican recognition on June 9, 1947 by Pope Pius XII.

Mother Nazaira died on July 6, 1943, in the Rivadavia Hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina from complications from pneumonia and tuberculosis. She was buried in Chacorita cemetery in Buenos Aires on July 8, 1943. Her relics were moved to the Congregation house at Buenos Aires on June 14, 1957. Relics were enshrined in the crypt of the mother house of the Congregation in Oruro, Bolivia, in 1972.

She was declared venerable (decree of heroic virtues) on September 1, 1988, beatified on September 27, 1992, and canonized on October 14, 2018<sup>3</sup> by Pope St. John Paul II at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy. She is considered the patron of Missionary Crusaders of the Church. (Memorial - July 6).<sup>1</sup>

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#### References:

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- 2) Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Nazaria Ignazia di Santa Teresa di Gesu (1889-1943). Accessed 31 May 2022. <http://www.causesanti.va/it/santi-e-beati/nazaria-ignazia-di-santa-teresa-di-gesu.html>
- 3) Hagiography Circle. Nazaria Ignacia March Mesa. Accessed 31 May 2022.  
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Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses ([www.ciciams.org](http://www.ciciams.org) / [www.nacn-usa.org](http://www.nacn-usa.org)): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at [www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka)