

**Venerable Mary Jane Wilson
(India/England/Portugal) 1840-1916**

*Worked as a nurse and taught catechism to children.
Founded the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Victory
Cared for children and the sick and
worked with victims of the smallpox epidemic of 1907.¹*



Mary Jane Wilson (Sister Mary of St. Francis) was born on October 3, 1840, in Hurryhur, Mysore, Karnataka, India, to English parents who practice the Anglican religion. She was orphaned as a child and raised by an aunt in England.

Mary Jane worked as a nurse and also taught catechism to children. One difficulty she had with the Anglican religion and what drew her to Catholicism was the belief in the true presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. This quandary was overcome through the intervention of Our Lady of Victories on April 30, 1873. The following year on May 11, 1874, she received Catholic Baptism in Boulongne-Sur Mer, France, at the age of 33.

On May 26, 1881, she moved to the Madeira Island, the largest and most populous of the Portuguese Madeira Archipelago, working as a nurse for an English patient. She settled in Funchal where she catechized children, cared for the sick and established several charitable works: orphanage, dispensary, pharmacy and Colegio de S. Jorge.

After three years, on January 15, 1884, with Amelia Amaro de Sa, she founded the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Victory, taking the name Sister Maria de St Francis. The congregation restored the Hospital da Vila de Santa Cruz where the sisters worked. As they did so, their congregation also flourished and expanded to various parts of Madeira Island. They opened schools, promoted literacy and culture, evangelized and helped the poor.

When an epidemic of smallpox ravaged the southern region of Madeira in 1907, the sisters fearlessly helped the sick. King D. Carlos awarded her the “*Torre e Espada*.” In 1910, when Portuguese Republican Party overthrew the centuries-old Portuguese monarchy on 5 October 1910, the congregation was extinguished and Sister Maria de St. Francis was arrested and expelled to England. After a year of exile, she returned and while in hiding she gathered together the sisters bringing new life to the congregation she had founded. The congregation received diocesan approval of the statutes on May 8, 1916. On October 18, 1916, as she was laying the foundation for the pre-seminary (novitiate), she died at the age of 76, in Camara de Lobos, Funchal Madeira, Portugal from natural causes.

The foundation she established has foundations also in mainland Portugal, and the Azores, Mozambique, England, Italy, Germany, Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, Angola, India, DR Congo, Timor and Tanzania. An Association of “Friends of Sister Wilson” was founded for the lay faithful. The charity that Sister Maria de St. Francis exhibited earned her the title, “Good Mother.”²

Sister Maria de St. Francis (Mary Jane Wilson) was declared venerable via the promulgation of the decree of heroic virtue on October 9, 2013. Website: www.cifnsv.com³

*Along your path, seek to live from this great truth:
“God is our Father, our best and dearest Friend...”
As we pay attention, life appears full of opportunities
to perform acts of love.*

References:

- 1) "Venerable Mary Jane Wilson". CatholicSaints.Info. 3 March 2020. Web. 8 December 2021.
<<https://catholicsaints.info/venerable-mary-jane-wilson/>>
- 2) Mary Jane Wilson. Accessed 4 June 2022.
https://web.archive.org/web/2018111211352/http://www.cifnsv.com/2009/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=34&lang=pt
- 3) Hagiography Circle: An Online Resource on Contemporary Hagiography. 1916. Mary Jane Wilson (Maria of St. Francis). Accessed 21 April 2022. <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/year/1916.htm#Wilson>

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 / 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