

CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF PITY

BY

A MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION

DURING the years between the two great wars it became apparent to two Catholic laywomen, one a doctor's daughter, the other a hospital nurse, that there was a great need for various forms of charitable activity in the countryside. They saw too, how a single-handed parish priest can be overworked and in need of help to enable him to carry on his apostolic work. They felt God was calling them to this end, so they gave up those things which go to make up the social life in the world, and while still living at home, consecrated themselves to God to be used as he willed in his service. They became tertiaries, and followed a rule of life. For some years it was very uphill work; they experienced great suffering and many difficulties until they were almost at breaking point, but they put their trust in God who, they believed, had called them to be his instruments in this work. In due course others with the same ideals joined them.

After a number of years of prayer and work, through the generosity and with the consent of his Lordship Bishop King of Portsmouth, they came to reside at Kiln Green, near Twyford in Berkshire, where a beautiful property was bought as the Mother House. The convent stands on the slope of a hill, and the grounds cover eleven acres of meadows, orchards and lawns, while all around are large properties, the whole district being scheduled for agricultural purposes. This ensures complete privacy and makes for a contemplative spirit. The Convent is also the Novitiate House. His Lordship has taken throughout the keenest interest in the work, and given much help and encouragement, and after the period for the canonical training they received the Bishop's approval as a Diocesan Congregation, and made simple vows. The Constitutions were drawn up and sent to Rome, and after a further period of training the Sisters had the happiness of receiving the approval of the Sacred Congregation of Religious as a Diocesan Congregation.

The Sisters undertake any type of work required of them, provided that it is compatible with their vocation, such as church cleaning and mending etc., teaching catechism, instructing converts, clubs, hostels, care of the aged, visiting the sick and poor in their homes, hospitals, institutions and prisons—irrespective of creed—in short they become the general handmaids of the parish.

The life is a mixed one, active and contemplative. As active good works tend to become routine, and can indeed be done without any supernatural motive, every care is taken to form the religious of the congregation in an interior union with God, and to make his love the motive for each action. External works become a prayer only when there is a prayerful habit formed in the soul of the worker. Equally, in dealing with people, the Sisters seek to serve our Lord present in the least of its members. The Sisters offer themselves and their work in reparation, also for the Priesthood, and for the Conversion of England, and in their lives endeavour to do all things for Jesus only.

The wide range of good works undertaken by the Congregation allows of the exercise of varied personal gifts and accomplishments. Every effort is made to preserve the true individuality of each member, though all share the common life, and must be willing to undertake whatever duty may be assigned to them. As numbers grow so will the types of work widen. Those who join now have the great interest of taking part in the development of a new Congregation under the direction of those called by God to found it. Here is an opportunity for brave souls and for great selflessness. Already the Congregation has been wonderfully blest.

The motto of the Congregation is *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso et in Ipso* in reliance on the merciful love of God, and to be used by him according to his holy will.

The Patrons of the Congregation are our Lady of Pity and St Teresa of Lisieux. Its spirit is the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood.

The time of Postulantship is six months, with a two-year novitiate in preparation for simple vows; the making final vows three years later. Four vows are made: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and the care of the poor, sick and ignorant.

The members of the Congregation must strive to possess a spirit of great charity, of self-sacrifice, humility, and confidence in God, with a deep love for him, by endeavouring to refuse him nothing. There are no lay sisters; all assist in the common routine of the Convent, and having given all, they become one of the same family in Jesus Christ and his Mother, having obeyed his command, 'Come, follow me'.

The Sisters must possess a cheerful disposition, which is a very necessary factor for the religious life. They must be prepared to make their work a prayer, and prayer their life.

The Sisters ask no remuneration for their work, everything being done for the love of God. They rely on the goodness of God, the charity of their friends, and whatever they can earn with their

handwork and produce. The Rules are few, and are modern and elastic to meet the need of the present day.

The interior life, which is so very necessary for the active life, is guided and helped by the Rule and the following practices: Daily Dialogue Mass and Holy Communion, meditation on the Following of Christ, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, daily Rosary for the peace of the world, Vespers and Compline of the Little Office of our Lady, singing of the *Salve Regina*, and the daily prayers for the Conversion of England. Instruction on Christian Doctrine is given weekly by a priest.

Mother Margaret Mary and Mother Mary Dolores were helped and guided by Father A. W. Valentin in the making of their Foundation. He did not spare himself to this end.

Five years ago, when the Sisters came to Berkshire, they opened a Mass Centre to fill the need of the surrounding Catholics, as there was no church between Reading and Maidenhead on the Bath Road, and the attendance of eleven at the first Mass has grown in four years to over a hundred. This has necessitated the Sisters building an external chapel, the first portion being already nearly completed. Many gifts have already been bestowed.

The Congregation needs more subjects to carry out its increasing work, as the Sisters are in demand in other parishes. The daily prayer of the Community is that many little souls may be forthcoming, souls ready to follow the words of the Gospel: 'And looking up, they saw no-one but only Jesus', souls who are willing to give their all to him who said, 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto these my brethren you have done it unto me'—words which sum up the Foundresses' ideals.

Whether dealing with the rich or the poor, learned or unlearned, sick in body or in soul, the Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Pity must look beneath the human person and see there 'Jesus only'; to rejoice with those that rejoice, to comfort those who weep, to be all things to all men, and in their humble way with God's help to live their lives 'by him and with him and in him'.

The address of the Congregation's Mother-House, and Novitiate is St John's Convent, Kiln Green, Twyford, near Maidenhead, Berks.