



Journeying With Mary Ward

Journeying With Mary Ward

Phase Four 1631- 1645

The third journey to Rome

After Mary Ward's imprisonment in the Anger Convent, she was informed by an unknown source that she was to go to Rome. This journey to Rome was imposed on her by the "Tribunal of Faith". The conditions imposed on her by the Holy Office were the following. The journey had to be at her own expense, in the company of a deputy chosen by Dean Golla. The time of the journey was stipulated too, as her arrival in Rome had been determined. Also her Institute in Munich had to produce bail, the amount of which had to be decided by Nuncio Carafa. Mary wrote a petition to the Pope asking for some mitigation of the conditions imposed on her journey to Rome. The demands from the Holy Office were lifted – apart from the bail.

In spite of her ill health, it was also her personal wish to undertake this journey. She hoped that by talking to the Pope, she would be able to clarify her desperate plight. After ten years of fruitless negotiation and appeal to the Pope and Cardinals, being ordered to Rome as a prisoner of the Inquisition caused great suffering to Mary Ward. Mary set out on this journey in the late autumn of 1631. She had to break journey at Bologna for two months waiting for a letter testifying that the traveler came from countries uncontaminated by the plague. For fear of the epidemic entrance to the Papal States was prohibited. These two months of waiting must have been a severe trial for Mary Ward and her companions, not knowing whether they would obtain permission to proceed further. Mary Ward may have been weak in body; but spiritually, it seemed, she was indefatigable and unbroken. At last in March 1632 Mary and her companions reached Rome.

The Papal Audience

Soon after her arrival in Rome, Mary had an audience with Pope Urban VIII. Mary knelt at the Pope's feet and said, "Holy Father, I neither am, nor ever have been a heretic". Words spoken by such a woman must have moved the Pope's heart; he interrupted her saying, "we believe it, we believe it, we need no other proof, we and the Cardinals. All are satisfied and edified at your proceedings and we know that you have carried on your Institute well, until we decide otherwise; you then showed perfect obedience and thereby edified us." As a matter of fact this Pope was subject to sudden emotional outburst leading him to waver considerably in his decision.

In her Audience with the pope she requested for three favours. That he remove from her and her companions the stigma of heresy; that he order the release of Winifred Wigmore who was still imprisoned in Liege; that there were still members who wish to live under her direction and under the protection of the Holy See, he gave them permission to come to Rome where once more the authorities could keep them under close surveillance.

The Holy Father acceded on all counts. Mary Ward was acquitted of the charge of heresy on a date unknown. She and her companions were cleared by the Inquisition of all suspicion and heresy. A letter issued from the Holy Office in 1633 attempted to re-habilitate Mary Ward and her companions. A copy of this document in the Nymphenburg archives runs as follows, "There are in this city, at the present time the lady Dona Maria Della Guardia (Mary Ward) with some other of her English companions, who with acts of humility and of fitting reverence towards the Holy See, have most readily obeyed what our Lord commanded, concerning the suppression of the Institute, to the entire satisfaction of their Eminences, my Lords, to whom it had appeared good that I should make your Excellency acquainted with this result. To the end that you should hear from evil

disposed persons to the contrary, you may attest to them the truth and affirm that in this Holy Tribunal, the English Ladies who have lived under the Institute of Mary Ward are not found, nor have ever been found guilty of any failure which regards the holy and orthodox Catholic Faith".

Moderate Success

Mary Ward asked the Pope's permission to buy a house in Rome. The permission was not given quickly, but a house was certainly obtained with the Pope's knowledge and approval which situated near the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. It is also recorded that Urban VIII ordered bread and wine to be sent to Mary Ward from the supplies of the papal larder from April 1633 to November 1637. Nevertheless, Mary had to live under the eyes of the inquisition and was not allowed to leave Rome without permission. But Mary and her companions were allowed to live together in Rome and continue the work of Christian Education. This Roman house was home to the surviving members after the suppression.

The journey to San Casciano

Mary's health was deteriorating slowly but she faced ill health and suffering with her customary calm. In June 1633 in order to alleviate the pains of the stone, she went to drink the waters of Anticoli. But her state of health did not improve; yet her sheer energy kept her going. She wanted to go and drink the waters of San Casciano. For this she had to obtain permission from the Pope. This permission was granted to her with much hesitation and at the baths of San Casciano, Mary and her companions became aware of being watched by the inquisitors. Mary had never been afraid of the truth, but she felt deeply being spied upon in this way.

Last years in Rome

Her visit to the baths of San Casciano had no lasting effect; but Mary did not lose courage. On returning from the baths, Mary was again received in audience by the Pope. She asked the Pope, "What more can poor Mary do to prove her fidelity and loyalty towards your Holiness and towards the Catholic Church, but must her life, her good name, and her liberty also be left in the hands of men, but too easily suborned and corrupted?" To this the Pope responded, "It shall be no more, none shall be able to wrong you." In any case, Mary Ward so sorely tried, was deeply hurt by the whole procedure, while still retaining her unswerving fidelity to the Church. "In spite of her bad health, through sheer courage and fortitude she managed to overcome every obstacle. However hopeless events might appear, she never dwelt on the negative side. No adverse circumstances could diminish her trust in God. Longing as she did 'to refer all to God', she knew that ultimately every thing would turn out for the best.

The strong tide of events in Rome calmed down after 1643, but bitter suffering still lay ahead. The years of waiting and suffering of uncertainty and ill health all part of her time in Rome had not been in vain. She now decided that she must go back to Flanders and then to England once more. As she could neither stand, nor walk, she asked the permission for her two companions Mary Poyntz and Winfred Wigmore to have an audience with the Pope on her behalf to bid him farewell and to receive his blessing on the journey. On this occasion Pope Urban paid her a remarkable tribute. "It is true, he said, humanly speaking, the journey must needs kill her, without hope of escape but she is a great servant of God. He will guide her to do what is best and we know not what He will do by her. We will give orders to all our Nuncios on the way to receive her and have her stay and rest when and as long as she will. For we do esteem her, not only as a woman of great prudence and of extraordinary courage and powers of mind but what is much more we consider her a great and holy servant of

God. You, who go with her, obey and serve her for as long as you do this, you will do well". It is evident that whatever Pope Urban thought of her plans for a religious Institute, his regard for her was high.

On the Way from Rome to England

On September 10th 1637, Mary left Rome for England with Mary Poyntz, Anne Turner and Winifred Wigmore, with valid passes on explicit permission of the Pope. No doubt, this return to her native land was not only due to home sickness, but also due to her deep desire for the conversion of England. The journey was long and difficult and because of Mary's ill health (fever and kidney trouble) they remained in Paris until 20th May 1638 and were at Liege at the end of May.

While still in Liege Mary asked the Pope to give her letters of introduction to Queen Henrietta Maria with whom she intended to seek an audience concerning her future plans. In September 1638 she received this letter of recommendation from Cardinal Francesco Barberini, Pope Urban VIII's nephew. From this carefully worded recommendation it is more likely the Pope and his nephew knew of Mary Ward's plan for her Institute in England and supported them.

In December 1638 Mary again set out for England but managed the journey only as far as Antwerp to visit her sister Frances, the Carmelite. This was the final meeting between both of them. Again Mary was forced by illness to delay, lying ill for several weeks in a wretched lodging. It was in the month of May 1639 Mary was at last able to start again for England. She took a different route on this occasion and traveled via Saint Omer to Calais. Here she was back in her native land after an absence of twenty years.

Three years in England

In England she was received with varying emotions. Some people were suspicious, some felt wonder, her true friends rejoiced and praised God for His merciful fidelity to Mary Ward. She was now an aging delicate woman of 54, matured by many disappointments and personal attacks, self abnegation, a wholehearted commitment to the Institute and above all by prayer and union with God. Queen Henrietta Maria does not seem to have helped Mary Ward, although she received the letter of recommendation favourably. Mary Wanted to establish a school in London but the impending Civil War and the wide religious differences would have made the establishment of a Catholic school for girls impossible at that time.

In February 1640, Mary wrote herself to Pope Urban VIII saying that she planned to return to Rome in the spring of 1641. In June 1640 Queen Henrietta Maria herself begged the Pope not to withdraw his favour from the English ladies. From this time onwards we have no further references to contacts between Mary Ward and the Roman Curia. But she continued to hope for approbation of her Institute eventually. She says, "What is not done in one year can be done in another. We must wait for God Almighty's time and leisure, for we must follow, not go before Him".

Any form of activity became practically impossible for Mary, hence her decision to move to the north with five of her companions. Even during her last years, Mary was compelled to move from place to place overshadowed by the Civil War. In 1642 because of the war between the king, Charles I, and the Parliament, the Sisters were forced to travel north into Yorkshire. She and her companions visited the quiet spots where she had spent her childhood: Newby, Ripley Castle, the home of the Ingleby family where memories of her father and Mary herself were still fresh. At Hutton Rudby they were able to rent an old house. This village was about 54 km north of York and Mary reached this little spot on September 14th 1642.

For greater security at the beginning of 1643, the group moved to Heworth, a village just outside York. Her stay at Heworth was not as disturbed as it had been in Hutton Rudby. Mass was daily offered in Mary's room, for she was concealing two priests in her house. But soon war broke out and the battle came nearer York. So she had to move yet again, this time they took refuge within the walls of the York City. On July 11th 1644 the city of York surrendered. The siege of York which was taken by Oliver Cromwell was experienced by the members of the Institute who were living inside its protective walls. Eventually they were able to return to Heworth, where four hundred soldiers had been quartered. When they returned to Heworth they found that the house had been plundered and was without doors and windows. In the garden several dead soldiers had been hastily buried, the trees had been felled for timber and the boundary walls destroyed. Only the room that had been the Chapel and Mary's own room were left untouched. During the siege one of her companions said to her. 'What will become of us?' "Well, I warrant you, I am assured that God will help me and mine wherever we are," was her forthright answer.

Around Christmas 1644 a priest came to Heworth and stayed with them so that they could celebrate mass at Christmas. Mary was gradually becoming weaker and weaker and yet sat up for the midnight mass and also attended two Masses in the morning. Although Mary's health was extremely poor, she was not then anointed because the priest was unaware of her extreme illness. Three days later, on 29th December 1644 on the feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, towards evening Mary felt herself seized by a deathly cold and pain. "This is some thing more than ordinary, I will go and offer myself to our dear Lord in the Chapel." She knelt in prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament for half an hour before going to bed which she never left again.

As Mary was anxious to hear news of her sisters from London, Munich and Rome, Winifred Wigmore undertook to go to London for letters and news. The long journey of 205 miles was made by the 60 year old Winifred and her maid servant, both carefully disguised. Mary Poyntz was often worried lest anything should happen to Winifred and her Companion because of the Civil War and the troubled state of the country. But Mary Ward comforted her saying, 'do not fear, she will come back safe'. Mary seemed to know where they were, for she would say to Mary Poyntz, "Now she is there and finally on such a day she will be at home to burry me". Sure enough on Mary's last birthday 23rd January 1645 Winifred was back again at the bedside of Mary Ward with fresh news from London.

Death of Mary Ward

On 29th December 1644 Mary had become bed-ridden and by 15th January 1645 she was in agony. On New Years day 1645, a priest heard her confession and gave her Holy Communion. Later in the day she begged him to give her the Sacrament of the anointing of the sick, but he refused her thinking that she was not ill enough. She did not press the matter, though she knew that this would be her last chance.

Mary's health failed rapidly from 15th January. She communicated to her companions her wish that Barbara Babthorpe should be the vicarress over them when she was no longer with them, until they themselves should choose who was to govern them in her place. Two days after her birthday, on 25th January 1645, raising herself up cheerfully she sought to sweeten their grief with comforting words. She begged them to trust God, then all would be well for He was a good Master. The day before she died, seeing their grief Mary said to her companions, "Oh fie, fie! What, still look sad! Come let us rather sing and praise God joyfully for all His infinite loving kindness. Then she started off a hymn of praise and thanksgiving which she had sung

with them many times before. They all joined in, trying to hold back their tears that kept filling their eyes.

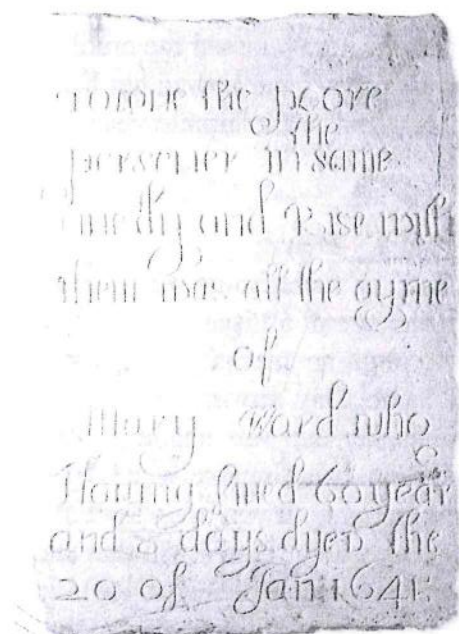
On the morning of January 30th 1645 five of her companions, Mary Poyntz, Winifred Wigmore, Frances Bedingfield, Catherine Dawson and Catherine Smith were gathered at her death bed. Being assured that they were all there, Mary expressed her dying wishes to the little community, emphasizing and dwelling particularly on the word. "Affectionate". "I command unto you the practice of your vocation, that it be constant, efficacious and affectionate!" Mary seemed to want to tell them more but she was already so weak that she could hardly speak. She assured them: "God will assist you and help you; it is no matter the who, but the what; and when God shall enable me to be in place I will serve you". She then blessed and embraced each one very lovingly and then fell silent. Then she gently kissed the crucifix in her hand saying softly, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," and bowed her head without a sound and passed from this world to the infinite peace of God.

Mary Poyntz Speaks of Mary Ward's Death

"On 30th January, 1645 at 11 o' clock or thereabouts our dearest mother departed this toilsome life at the age of 60 years and 8 days. Truly, that I live to write to you is through no strength of my own. She began to lose strength on All Saints Day, towards Christmas complained of great pain, she grew feebler and was unable to find relief or rest and seemed to long for that sweet repose which I am sure through God's mercy, she is now enjoying. It was out of love for ours, whom she loved above everything except God's will that she was willing to do everything both by prayer and medicines to prolong life. I do not think my pen could begin to express the least part of that love which truly all the pens in the world can never do".

Grave and Burial

From Monday to Wednesday her body was laid out as was the custom. The swelling diminished twentyfour hours after her death. The veins in her temples, hands, arms and feet were a lovely blue as if they had been painted. Her lips were slightly red as during her life time. Except for the coldness there was no sign of death. Her coffin could not be lined for several reasons. But it was of good wood. At the time it was difficult for Catholics to find a burial ground in a cemetery. However Mary's companions were able to obtain one in the cemetery of Osbaldwick, next to the church of St. Thomas. A large local stone from Tadcaster unhewn on the back was laid on the grave. The unskilled hand of a villager had chiseled the inscription:



**"To love the poor,
Persevere in the same,
Live, die, and rise with
them**

**Was all the aim of
Mary ward
Who having lived 60
years and 8 days
Died on 30th of January
1645".**

Phase Four - Time Line

1631-1645

- 1631 On 13th January the Bull of Suppression came out and all houses were Disbanded, but Sisters could stay in the Paradeiser House in Munich. From there Mary was taken and imprisoned in the Anger convent as a 'heretic'. She was in prison from 7th February till 18th April. When freed by order of Pope Urban VIII, although she was very ill, Mary traveled again to Rome to plead her innocence.
- 1632 Mary was acquitted of heresy.
- 1632 -1637 Mary lived in a house near St.Mary Major's in Rome.
- 1637 Mary left Rome again to travel to England. It was a long journey because of the war (the 'Thirty Years War') in Europe.
- 1639 Mary arrived in London and worked with Catholics there. They were unable to open a school at that time.
- 1642 Because of the war between the King, Charles I, and the Parliament, the Sisters were forced to travel north into Yorkshire.
- 1644 The siege of the city of York forced them to move

inside the city. They later returned to the countryside at Heworth.

1645 On 30th January Mary Ward died peacefully surrounded by faithful Companions. She was buried in the small cemetery (Anglican) of the Church of Osbaldwick near Heworth. On her tombstone they chiseled the inscription:

*To love the poor,
Persevere in the same,
Live, die, and rise with them
Was all the aim of
Mary ward
Who having lived 60 years and 8 days
Died on 30th of January 1645".*

Conclusion

This wonderful woman died but only her body stayed on earth; her soul went up to heaven for our Lord had shown her not many years before that she was going to have a great reward for all she had done. He promised her that her Institute would be blessed and that it would "remain in the Church of God until the end of the world." All her life Mary, almost more than any other woman of her century, had been journeying, mostly on foot; more often that is than in those ill sprang coaches bumping along the bad roads. Her spiritual journey also stretched far and wide we can but marvel at the fortitude of this woman, whose heart was at all times ready to forgive; who found

the courage to remain utterly loyal to the Church, yet at the same time true to the mission she was convinced of having received from God. She was made of steel, one would feel, in meeting resistance and threats outside, as well as in facing discouragement and lukewarmness within. Within her was a **fire** for God and His Cause. It is this fire that made her what she was in her lifetime.



Mary Ward - bronze statue

Today her spirit is alive not only in some thousands of members in her Institute but also in centres of education, medicine, social services and hundreds of other good works as well as in myriads of women who are empowered to do 'great things'.

