

BRINGING THE CARMELITE SAINTS ALIVE

ELEVENTH EDITION 2025



IN THIS MONTH OF FEBRUARY, WE WILL BE HIGHLIGHTING
VENERABLE MOTHER MARIA LUISA JOSEFA OF THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT
WHO ENTERED INTO EXTERNAL LIFE ON THE FEAST DAY OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

FEBRUARY 11, 1937



“THE BEST ROSE OF THE GARDEN”

On June 21, 1866, in Atotonilco el Alto, Jalisco, Mexico, Maria Luisa de la Pena was the first surviving of 14 children born to Don Epigmenio de la Pena and Maria Luisa Navarro, who as ranch owners, were among the wealthier residents of the town. The baby girl was delicate and of fragile health, but nonetheless she clung to life. Because of her frailty, she was quickly taken to the parish church to be baptized and was given the name "Maria Luisa" in honor of both St. Aloysius on whose feast day she was born, and her mother, who shared the same name and birthday.

From an early age, Maria Luisa felt drawn to the religious life; however, at the age of 15, in obedience to her parents' wishes, therein seeing God's will for her, she married Doctor Pascual Rojas, a prominent physician, twice her age. Their marriage took place on February 9, 1882. Their life together was happy – a mutual growing in love of God and neighbor. Once settled in their own home in Atotonilco, Maria Luisa spent much of her time caring for the poor and nursing the sick. So impressed he was by his wife's example, Pasqual did everything he could to assist her in her charity.

Their one sorrow was that God did not grant them children. However, the couple accepted God's will, remaining steadfast in their trust in Him, and together decided that the poor would be their children. They built a hospital, established solely on a charitable basis, to serve those less fortunate. The Little Hospital of the Sacred Heart was dedicated in January 1892. After 14 years of married life, Maria Luisa was left as a widow at age 29. On his deathbed, Pasqual told her he had no doubt what she would do after his death- she would serve God as a religious.

In 1904, eight years following the death of her husband, Doctor Rojas, Maria Luisa entered the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites of St. Teresa in Guadalajara immersing herself in the spirituality of Carmel. After only seven months in religious life, Maria Luisa was asked by the archbishop to return to her work at the hospital she and Dr. Rojas had established, which was sorely in need of her administrative skills. Again, she trusted in God's providence, returning to once again take up her former work at the hospital. During this time, in addition to managing the hospital, she also established a school and orphanage. As her work became more widely known, many others were attracted by her charism and were inspired to join in her work.

As the signs of persecution grew, the archbishop, concerned for their safety, asked Maria Luisa and the women who were serving with her to join an established active religious community. There were neither her plans nor her desires, but she obeyed, allowing herself to be guided by Divine Providence. Maria Luisa was in this community for three years when the Mexican government engaged in a virulent and violent religious persecution against the Catholic Church. The new constitution of Mexico was promulgated in 1917 whereby the church was laicized, religious vows were forbidden, and priests lost their citizenship. The archbishop again told Maria Luisa that her hospital and orphanage needed her. After making a prayerful retreat to discern what she should do, she returned to the hospital and orphanage again.

In time, the Archbishop suggested that Maria Luisa become the foundress of a new, active Carmelite religious congregation and the Carmelite Sisters of the Sacred Heart were established on February 2, 1921. From that point on she became Mother Luisita. In 1924, just three years after the establishment of the community, all seminaries were closed in Guadalajara. Eighteen months later, the Penal Code of Calles was enacted, which if those who preach doctrinal sermons or administer the sacraments would be imprisoned; all churches became nationalized property; private primary schools may be established only if subject to government regulation; convents had to be immediately dissolved and if their members

secretly came together, those members would be imprisoned for two years, six years for the superiors. Those were indeed very dark days.

The Sisters were split up, hiding in barns and secretly living with different families. Some of the Sisters were imprisoned for being Catholic and Mother feared for all their lives. In June 1927, Mother and her two companions Sisters left the terrible persecution of their homeland in disguise, embarking on a perilous journey to the United States and religious freedom. It was on June 24, 1927, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, that Mother Luisita and the two other Sisters arrived in Los Angeles and was welcomed by Archbishop Cantwell. Even during the darkest of times, Mother Luisita steadfastly continued to encourage the Sisters and the laity, "Remember, for greater things you were born." When she herself was near death and external circumstances were still very precarious, her trust in God's loving providence never wavered: "Let us bless our good God for everything. He loves us very much and He disposes everything for our own good."

Mother Luisita was a soul of deep prayer in a union with God that permeated her daily life and could be seen in her motherly love and kindness with each person. In addition, she would write to the sister: "My prayer for you is to be what God wants you to be – a saint! Is your soul taking little steps towards Heaven or is it flying there?" In the midst of so many trials during the religious persecution in Mexico, Mother Luisita had an increased awareness of God's presence. She sought refuge kneeling before the tabernacle where she shared everything with the hidden Jesus. When all the churches were closed during the years of religious persecution, her prayer was directed to Jesus truly present within her soul. She would tell others to "make a beautiful tabernacle within yourself. Do not lose your presence of God, contemplate that presence with gentleness within your own self." In the spirit of obedience, she continually started over or changed her plans due to the circumstances in which the sisters found themselves in. She was not overcome. Her habitual attitude of gratitude was anchored in humility, selflessness, and joy. She wrote, "When you place everything in His hands, He will do everything and very well...peace is an indispensable factor; if we have peace we will have life in our souls, lack of peace is harmful...A short period of prayers before the tabernacle alleviates our sorrows, after a short time with Our Lord they do not seem so big anymore."

OUR CARMELITE MISSION

MAY WE EMBRACE MARY'S PURITY OF HEART (PURITAS CORDIAS), HELPING US TO PONDER THE LAW OF THE LORD DAY AND NIGHT HELPING US TO BE CONTEMPLATIVES AND TEACHING US TO LISTEN. WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHER AND LEADER, ST. ELIJAH WITH HIS FLAMING ZEAL AND COURAGE. "HIS PROPHET SPIRIT IN COMBATING THE EVILS OF HIS DAY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR CARMELITE LIFE."

MAY OUR LADY'S MANTLE WRAP YOU ALL WITH HER PRECIOUS LOVE & PROTECTION.

ALL THROUGH THE IMMACULATE & SORROWFUL HEART & TEARS OF MARY IN UNION WITH THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS, YOUR SISTER IN CARMEL,

LINDA

