

In memory of our beloved Maria Burke

By Mrs Livia Dora

This is not a life story but a short sketch from some main circumstances taken from her life.

I remember Maria Burke with a happy memory as a God-loving humble and happy person smiling often. A person who loved to laugh, who loved birthday parties, but also really loved to help people. But most of all, she loved God and had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Maria left this earth on the morning of Holy Saturday, which fell this year on a First Saturday, April 3rd, 2010. Previously she had been given Last Rites by Father Yves Normandin (her honoured confessor). The funeral was held on Wednesday April 7th, with a Requiem Holy Mass celebrated at the beautiful traditional chapel of the Precious Blood Retirement Residence in Levis, Quebec, by Father Medard Bie-Bibang. She was buried at Mont Marie cemetery, not far from the residence where she had been living since almost the beginning of its opening as a home for the elderly.

Maria died in her 93rd year in the nearby hospital where she was often received due to her fragile health. She had been a devout member of the Third Order of the Society of St. Pius X.

Throughout all her life she suffered very much. I remember her telling me that as a child she lived in a Catholic orphanage in London, England, which was run by the Sisters whom she loved dearly. As a child she had been suffering with rheumatic arthritis and could not walk. The nuns took her to Lourdes in France, where she was cured by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This left a deep impression on her soul for the devotion to Our Lady, to the Blessed Trinity and specially to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and St. Michael the Archangel.

She said with loving words: "Our Lady made me able to walk but she made sure I may not be able to dance!". Maria limped a bit all her life and she also suffered from arthritic pain, especially during the time of Lent, which pain she offered up to Jesus instead of the fasting which she could not keep because of a serious condition of diabetes, due to which she would from time to time fall into a coma – but these annoyances did not keep her back from doing good.

She told me that during World War II, when most men in England were in the army, she for



a time drove a truck with munitions, and did other works of charity to help out where it was needed. She was a person of quick decisions of good will, but she sometimes needed to be reminded to reflect before acting, which she humbly accepted.

If I remember well, she told me that in England she was a nurse, but when she came to Canada she had been employed in a home. She loved children. She was short of stature and also short-sighted, quick to walk, or rather run. It was probably due to these characteristics that it happened that she had at least two serious accidents when a car and later a van knocked her to the ground. She suffered back and hip injuries and other serious pains.

When in the Sixties the Mass changed, she could not bear it, and went to Mexico where she bought candlesticks, altar clothes, and there someone gave her a beautiful carved crucifix as a gift. All these things she brought to Toronto, and somewhere she bought an altar Missal, cruets, and all the things needed for Holy Mass. When she heard about Father Yves Normandin who was saying the Traditional Holy Mass all over Canada, she wrote him a letter inviting him to Toronto. He accepted, came and if I remember well, he said his first Holy Mass at the late Miss Elizabeth Gail's home. Later the Mass was celebrated in a rented room which belonged to the University of Toronto. Since the beginning of our little group at the University room, a small group of the faithful, about 3-5 persons started to come together at Maria's apartment for every Wednesday to say the 15 decade Rosary, kneeling, to ask for graces to be able to have a church. This practice we still keep at the Church of the Transfiguration, in thanksgiving for the goodness of Our Lord and to ask for graces in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

It was at the University room where I saw Maria for the very first time, as she was occupied with setting up the altar (a table) with an altar stone brought with all the necessary things needed. Some other ladies were also helping her. She had set up an altar in her apartment, where occasional Holy Masses were celebrated by the priest who said the Holy Mass on Sunday, and then on the following Monday before leaving Toronto, he would come there to say Mass,

also for those of us who were assembled there. Maria would always invite all of us for a delicious hot breakfast afterward, while one of the faithful would drive Father to the airport right after breakfast.

In 1977, the Society of St. Pius X bought the priory at Shawinigan, and Father Vignoulou was sent there as Prior, assisted by Fr. Méry. When Father Jacques Emily became District Superior of Canada (1985), Maria again showed her worth and asked him to come to Toronto, to join our little group with the Society. It was only when this was realized that we were finally able to buy the old Baptist church, which under his supervision was renovated to be suitable as a Catholic church, and named the "The Transfiguration", because it was discovered on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6th) in 1991, and was bought later that same year on the Feast of All Saints.

Maria then helped much with the renovations and later mainly in the kitchen to care for the priest and for the helpers, of whom several (very generously) came on Mondays by car from Levis, Quebec, and drove home for the weeks end. They did this sacrifice for a few weeks, to help with the carpentry, plumbing, and paintings – a true Catholic cooperation never to be forgotten.

Maria was so generous that she gave all her best cookware for the use of the church kitchen, completely forgetting her own needs. Only when she came home did she realize that she had no pot left to cook her own meals.

After much work, her health really started to decline and she became too tired to help others, she finally decided to move to the Precious Blood Residence which by then had opened its doors for seniors. Once that decision was made, Maria made sure to have a room close to the chapel where she spent much time in prayer daily.

To her great regret, slowly, she had almost completely lost her sight and could not read her daily prayers anymore; but even then she said: "God's will be done."

Maria is survived by her daughter Mercia, and her grandson Michael. May she rest in peace.



Working at the re-fitting of the new Toronto chapel. Maria Burke is on the right.



Intimate celebration at the church of the Transfiguration. Rev. Fr. Emily, Maria Burke and a few collaborators.



Important work on the inside and the outside of the Toronto chapel.

