

Saint Francis and Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys

July 2020

Note: This year is the 400th anniversary of the birth of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1620 in Troyes, France. We used to have a library in our Fraternity of Saint Francis and Saint Clare and one of the books we had was a biography in French of Marguerite Bourgeoys. There were some references to Saint Francis in that biography so I thought I would put together a translation of these. My translations rely a lot on Google and my own inadequate efforts.

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This year, 2020, marks the 400th anniversary of the birth of Saint Marguerite in Troyes, France. She is most known for being the first teacher in Canada, and establishing the Congrégation de Notre-Dame (CND) – one of the first un-cloistered religious communities in the Catholic Church.

What is less well-known is her relationship to Saint Francis and how he influenced her coming to New France and her way of life.

This translation comes from Hélène Bernier's biography of Marguerite Bourgeoys (Fides, Montréal, Collection Classiques Canadiens no. 3, 1958.) On Page 79 ff -

Taken from the first early biography of Marguerite Bourgeoys by Abbé Charles Grandelet. The paragraph is entitled: "Following in the Way of Saint Francis"

<<One can easily discover a brotherhood of soul (fraternité d'âme) between Saint Francis and Marguerite Bourgeoys. Like him, she passionately loved Lady Poverty. Like him she suffered, at the end of her life, from the incomprehension of her Sisters, from the concern of seeing them lose the fervor of the first days of the foundation. In the mystical and mysterious dream that she had the night before her first meeting with Maisonneuve, Marguerite Bourgeoys saw Saint Francis with a young man and another man, bald, plainly dressed, like some priest who ministers in the countryside, and who was hardly learned. The next day, seeing M. de Maisonneuve for the first time, she exclaimed:

"Here is my priest whom I saw in a dream. " As I feared illusions, I said to myself: "If it is God's will that I go to Ville-Marie, then I don't need anything. I will not bring a penny for my voyage: and since then I have always been led by this path of perfection, although I have not profited from it.... But in all my endeavours, I have always promised God to do my best to reach the goal, with the help of His Grace.

I leave Troyes, without a penny, without a stitch, with just a small package that I can carry under my arm. The obligation of poverty is in the heart, the interior making the exterior act... And in the true members of the congregation, the thought that it is to God that they have devoted their poverty makes them deprive themselves of all that can break their obedience, not only in clothing, food and the rest, but also in their conduct.....they will receive everything by alms, accepting employment and work as they are offered to them, without comment or murmur, always trying to edify their neighbour, and to render service to him."

Should not every Secular Franciscan, indeed every Canadian Catholic, be aware of this link between Saint Francis and Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, of the dream she had of him and of the blessing of Saint Francis for the work of this great Canadian Saint?

Would we be going too far in saying that Saint Francis has blessed our country and its foundation and will continue to bless it we pray?

Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys pray for us!