

Year of Mother Josepha



Reflection No. 1: On the Theme

All of us, spiritual daughters of Mother Josepha, have various images of her. However, as we reflect more intimately on her life, in preparation for her Beatification, some of these images may be converging. This we have realized as we were reflecting on her life as leadership team.

My Heart is Ready

If there is one phrase that could aptly summarize the life of Mother Josepha Stenmanns, we believe this is it! Towards the end of her life, in one of her letters to Sr. Andrea Hegemann (Steyl, 3 June 1902) she wrote: *If we faithfully fulfill all our duties, we will be ready to appear when God calls. Let us pray daily: My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready!* (Ps. 57,8). The book written by Sr. Ortrud Stegmaier, SSpS, on the final sickness and death of Mother Josepha carries the title MY HEART IS READY. This disposition in which Mother Josepha was found towards the end of her life, was also that which permeated her life throughout. In that spirit she lived life to the full though it was short (1852-1903).

Every moment of her life was spent in simple and joyful readiness “*to seek only to love God and what he wants, however he wants it and because he wants it.*” M. Josepha’s sole desire in life was to offer herself as a sacrifice for the work of spreading the Faith.

HEART stands for the centre of the person, the deepest core of a person’s being. In fact it symbolizes the person in his/her wholeness, with all his/her love and affection, with all the positive energies and potentials that make a person.

Mother Josepha was a *heart person*. She lived from that centre. Deep in her heart she was united to God. She said, “*A pious raising of the heart to God, there you have the complete art of walking in the presence of God*”. “*Make a tabernacle in your heart where the holy Triune God constantly dwells*”. The awareness of the love and presence of God in the heart-centre was the integrating principle of her life that prompted her to be present to God and to people, to the demands and challenges of daily life with a quality that was unique to her. The books and writings on her abound with examples and stories of her ‘being present’ even from the time she was a little girl and a young woman in her home in Issum, and later, as an SSpS, of her womanly sensitivity. Just to mention a few: Sr. Anna Sicke testified that she possessed “...a peace-loving heart for God and all people”. Sr. Raphaelle Bruns wrote: “Sr. Josepha has the noble heart of a mother”. Today we would say: She revealed the *feminine face of God*.

Her life is a living exhortation to us, inviting us to be *heart persons*, to live and act from that deep centre where God dwells, to feel with the heart of God, to sense from our depths the designs of God for the

world today. Therefore, to be an SSpS, to be her spiritual daughters is more a matter of the heart than of high, sophisticated and efficient organization.

What a beautiful disposition and what a challenging prayer it is to say: *My heart is ready*. It speaks of longing, eagerness, enthusiasm, passion, openness, inner freedom. ... She prayed it and she lived it for one purpose - *to open every heart to love*. For this she offered her life with a wholehearted readiness, without limits and conditions.

Her heart was so caught up by the Spirit that she could say with ease, "*The very breath of the Servant of the Holy Spirit ought to be, Veni Sancte Spiritus!*" Daily we sing in the *Veni Creator* – "Spirit, come! Fill our hearts with your celestial flame, fill our hearts with love."

A heart filled with love is a **ready** heart - open to listen to the groans and pains of our world, eager to reach out and touch, willing to forget self and embrace the other, prepared to take risks and face hardships, able to accept responsibility and to let go of one's own plans in service for the good of others and the mission of the Congregation. The person with a ready heart, ever-attuned to the promptings of the Spirit, goes anywhere she is sent; in whatever way she is called, anytime she is summoned. Every moment is an opportunity to listen, to serve, to love, to reveal the face of God. This wholehearted missionary readiness is an essential characteristic of our calling, to *open every heart to love*.

Let this time of grace, of reflecting on and praying with the inspiration that Mother Josepha is, touch our hearts. Let the love that the Spirit brings, create a more *ready heart* in us that meet every other heart with compassion, tenderness, whether it be inside our communities, our Congregation or outside, in our missionary setting.

A Prayer

Indwelling Spirit,
Open my heart today to your presence.
Let your Breath in me connect me to all beings.

Open my heart to hear you calling my name.
Let your beauty and grace within me come alive
So I can let your beauty and goodness shine out to the world.

Open my heart to your love-energy.
Gift me with a *Ready Heart*,
Open to hear the cries of the world,
The world close at home, and the world afar,
Ready to reach out in kindness, caring, and compassion.

May I be able to *open all hearts to love*
Fulfilling the dream of Mother Josepha

February 2006

Note: The quotes are taken from:

- Rehbein, Franziska Carolina SSpS, *Come Holy Spirit, Breath of a Servant of the Holy Spirit*, Rome, 2002.
- Stegmaier, Ortrud, SSpS, *My Heart is ready, Final sickness and death of Mother Josepha*, Rome, 1997.