



World Confederation of Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
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Nucleus 24°

Mary Mazzarello woman accompanied

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Listening to the Synod allows us to go to the roots and find in them the ideas that are offered today to the whole Church by the Synod theme: "Young people, faith and vocational discernment". Listening and accompaniment are two fundamental attitudes in our Salesian charism, already highlighted in the Strenna of the Rector Major. By accompanying we learn, above all, to let ourselves be accompanied, as happened in the life of Mary Domenica Mazzarello. With this 24th nucleus, we reflect on what the life of Mary Domenica Mazzarello offers us regarding this, a woman who accompanied because she herself was a woman who had been accompanied.

This time, it is Sr. Eliane Petri, FMA, with her Conference on the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of Fr. Dominic Pestarino, held at Mornese on November 25, 2017, who will help us to listen to the sources in order to understand how the first FMA was accompanied from her girlhood when she was still a lay person. This Conference will help us to understand the wisdom and efficacy of Fr. Pestarino in his way of accompanying Mary Domenica.

Mary Domenica Mazzarello is born and grows in a large network of family relationships. The people with whom she is immediately in contact: her grandmother, father, mother, aunts and uncles, and cousins present a broad spectrum of ages, roles, and states. The child finds herself in a world of family relationships and of quite vast friendships. Thus she sees herself since her childhood, not isolated, but in rapport with many people in her family and neighborhood, well accompanied by everyone, even by her companions, and in a special way by her parents, but above all, by Fr. Dominic Pestarino.

Let us listen to what Sr. Eliana Petri proposes regarding this great priest and man. We thank her for her research which enriches us and invites us to reflection.

Fr. Pestarino, spiritual director of St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello

Fr. Pestarino revealed himself to be an able and wise spiritual guide. He was the spiritual director of Mary Domenica Mazzarello for twenty-seven years: from the years of her catechesis in preparation for the sacraments to her death, he directed her with certainty, strength, and continuity.

Mary Domenica was a young woman with a wealth of qualities: intelligent, intuitive, vivacious. But she was also a "bit inclined to vanity; somewhat ambitious; with a bent toward pride; with a ready, ardent, and fiery temperament"; well-set in her views, "she became red in the face when she was contradicted". We read in her biography, "*From her mother, Mary had inherited an ardent temperament that needed to be modified with goodness and sweetness. From her father she had inherited common sense and precision of views; but she also had great tenacity of judgment, which had to be tempered with humility, surrender, and docility, so that it would not become stubbornness. She had a very sensitive heart, whose affections had to be elevated and sanctified, so that she would not become prey to the world and the devil*".

Fr. Domenic Pestarino paternally accompanied her and, knowing that he was dealing with a young woman of a strong and tenacious temperament, “he treated that energetic nature with virile energy”, and with “the zeal of an apostle who wanted to extinguish in her what impeded her from becoming good”. *“He required her to mortify her self-love through prompt obedience, through renouncing her way of seeing things, by being condescending in all that was not sin with her cousin, sisters, and companions. He wanted her to bear their defects without complaint, and never reject anyone because of antipathy. She was not to distance herself from any companion because of diversity of character or natural repugnance but overcome herself and treat them as with a dearest friend. She was to moderate her overly lively and authoritarian character; never display impatient words or actions...she must treat everyone with sweetness and charity...”*

This deals with a real accompaniment that gradually led the young Mary to become sweeter, to moderate her character and her authoritarian tone and to become more amiable and compliant. Mary Domenica had found a guide that helped her to direct and dominate her passions, to purify her heart, to open herself to others, and to practice mercy.

As a wise spiritual director, Fr. Pestarino used the positive resources of Mary Domenica and her youthful desire to overcome herself, and thus he obtained her cordial collaboration, who did not fear fatigue and humiliations to reach her objective.

Even at the level of sacramental life, Fr. Pestarino guided her with prudence and wisdom. The determining encounter with Christ in the Eucharist marks an important moment in her spiritual journey and her successive choices. The morning pilgrimage from the Valponasca to the parish is witness to the centrality of Christ in her life.

Her natural repugnance for confession is overcome also by the capable and paternal guidance of Fr. Pestarino, who with simplicity and wisdom knows how to make her overcome the shoals of a general confession.

Sr. Anita Deleidi: writes, *“As a sacrament and as spiritual direction, confession practiced regularly by Mazzarello with Fr. Pestarino assumes a clear educational significance: it is the support for a clear awareness of herself and for her growth in virtue...It forms her to a pure, simple faith that is strong and very alive. Thus, he reveals himself to be a prudent educator who knows, discerns, and guide, gradually and methodically”*.

This kind of accompaniment from which Mary Domenica does not distance herself and knows how to correspond, obtained surprising results both for her life and in view of the educational and formative task she would have to assume in the future as the FMA guide and formator of the first Community.

If today we can boast of the holiness of Mary Domenica, we owe this to Fr. Pestarino as well. This is what Mother Ersilia Canta wrote in 1981, centenary of the death of Mother Mazzarello, recalling all those who had been God’s instruments in the formation of the co-foundress of the FMA Institute: *“For having forged the virtue of our Saint since her childhood, for having cultivated her with a very special commitment, and made himself available with his self-less action as guide in the*

first steps of the Institute are works of such greatness that Fr. Pestarino, in the words of Don Bosco himself, deserves our liveliest gratitude”.

When Mary Domenica encounters Don Bosco, she is not a woman who is at the beginning of her spiritual life: *“From a reticent, jealous, vain girl, Fr. Pestarino had led her, through prudent but strong direction, to heroic and total self-giving: the obedience to assist the relatives stricken by typhus is clear proof of this. We know then from the story of Mary that, even if it was the most beautiful, it was certainly not an isolated fruit of the direction of Fr. Pestarino: a priest who spiritually transformed his town of origin”.*

Eliane Anschau Petri, fma

WORKSHEET FOR THE CONFEDERAL COUNCIL, FEDERATIONS, UNIONS, AND FOR ALL THE PAST PUPILS OF THE WORLD.

- Attentively read the proposed content.
- Identify a challenge and a commitment to accompany the growth of children and young people.
- Send a photo or video as evidence of the commitment assumed.
- Pray **for the young** with the universal Church:

Lord Jesus,
Your Church is journeying toward the Synod,
turn Your gaze on all the youth of the world.
We ask You so that they can take
their life in hand with courage,
look at the most beautiful and deepest things
and always keep their heart free.
Accompanied by wise and generous guides,
help them to respond to the call
that You give to each of them,
to fulfill their plan of life
and reach happiness.
Keep their heart open to grand dreams
and make them attentive to the good of others.
Like the beloved disciple,
may they too be beneath the Cross
to welcome Your Mother,
receiving Her as a gift from You.
May they be witnesses of Your Resurrection
and know how to recognize You beside them,
joyfully proclaiming that You are the Lord.
Amen.

Please send your personal or group response by e-mail to:
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