



World Confederation of Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
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Nucleus 27°

Chiquitunga, Past Pupil close to the young

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In this nucleus 27, I propose a reflection on the life of an FMA Past Pupil, today proclaimed a Blessed by the Church.

It regards María Felicia Guggiari Echeverría, called Chiquitunga, a girl who lived in Paraguay in the first half of the 20th century. Her life is characterized by two dimensions: the **Eucharist**, source of her apostolate, and **love for the little ones and the poorest**. These dimensions marked her life with the typical tone learned in a Salesian house that we bring with us in whatever time or place we live.

As a little girl, Chiquitunga became an accompanier of children and of the young on the path of their human and Christian growth. This too is good for us as we prepare for the Synod on the young. We look at her, a simple young girl, convinced and committed to others, to feel ourselves fully inserted in the Synod journey.

Chiquitunga was beatified on June 23, 2018, in Asunción, Paraguay. Pope Francis said of her: “the witness of this young Blessed is an invitation to the young to live their life generously, lovingly, and happily. As a Salesian Family Group, we also want to accept this invitation with awe and gratitude.

Maria Felicia, her real name, was born at Villarrica of the Holy Spirit, capital of the district of Guairá, in Paraguay, on January 12, 1925. She was the first born of seven children of Ramón Guggiari and Arminda Echeverría, who were well off. She was baptized in the Cathedral of Villarrica on February 28, 1928. The nickname her family gave her and which would then become famous, Chiquitunga, was given to her by her father because of her slimness.

At five years of age she was enrolled in the pre-school of Mary Help of Christians where she also frequented the elementary grades and learned the elements of the faith. What she learned was quickly translated into charity towards the poorest, as when she gave her sweater, a gift of her father, to a child who was cold as she returned from school.

The day of her First Communion marked a further step in her spiritual journey. As she wrote in remembrance of that event, “from then came my resolution to be better and better”. She then began to visit Jesus in the Tabernacle every day, either in her parish church or in the school chapel, whether alone or with some other children like Amaru, the youngest of her brothers and sisters.

Chiquitunga loved her parents very much, as her sister Magalí recounts: “For a birthday of our papa, she changed the words of famous songs and gave each of us a paper with the new words to sing”.

When María Felicia was sixteen years old, Catholic Action in Paraguay was ‘renewed’. She enthusiastically adhered to it and at the same time she began what she called ‘the path of perfection’, realized through intimate and constant prayer, joyful asceticism, and unconditional dedication for children, young people, the elderly and sick, although facing opposition on the part of her family. Two years after her adhesion, she made her ‘consecration to the apostolate’, that is, she expressed her solemn commitment to dedicate herself to charitable activities, to which she added the intention of virginity.

The source of her dedication was the Eucharist which she received daily. To devote herself to her studies tranquilly in order to qualify for teaching, she attended morning Mass, even if she had to remain fasting, according to the use of time.

In order not to worry her father, who advised her to take care of her body, she adopted a stratagem: she got up before everyone, then dirtied the breakfast cup and sprinkled her place at table with crumbs so as to pretend she had eaten.

Her exterior demeanor inspired simplicity: she gathered her long dark hair into two braids; she did not wear make-up or high heels. Her favorite garment was a white apron, for two reasons: it reminded her of the necessity of having a pure soul and because clothing suited to her social class risked keeping her away from her beloved poor. Her one ornament was a sprig of jasmine from Paraguay, characterized by small flowers, but with an intense perfume.

Because of the civil war that exploded in 1947, she suffered a lot. Her father and a brother, Federico, were deported to Posadas, Argentina. Even economic difficulties began for the family, so much so that the house was mortgaged. She herself had problems in continuing her studies. Her paternal surname recalled José Patricio Guggiari, former president of the Republic and member of the liberal party (in fact she was his nephew). It is therefore understandable that the academic authorities were against facilitating her course of study. Despite this, María Felicia did not lose hope. On the contrary, she invited everyone to end the struggle through forgiveness and reconciliation. In the end, due to political persecution, Ramón Guggiari, who had returned from exile, decided to move the family to the capital Asunción, a transfer that took place in February 1950.

María Felicia, who had reached 25 years of age, quickly adapted herself. Right away she joined the Catholic Action of the new parish. Then she took up her studies again in order to help support the family. She first taught in the parish school of Perpetual Help, in the Barrio Obrero quarter, then in the one directed by the Redemptorist priests.

Her apostolic commitments were extended when she was called to assume diocesan responsibilities, without neglecting the small children she preferred, and the political prisoners of any faction. She continued to be smiling and available in the family and nourished her faith with visits to the Blessed Sacrament, nocturnal prayer, and the recitation of the Rosary, of which she meditated the fifteen mysteries.

On April 23, a few months after her arrival in the capital, she had an important meeting. During the assembly of Catholic action in the area of Asunción, the President of the Students' section spoke. He was Ángel Sauá Llanes, degreed in Medicine and the son of a Muslim who had immigrated from Syria.

María Felicia intervened in the debate many times and she quickly became friends with the young man. Thus they began to go together to take care of the sick, also because it would have been dangerous for a girl to go alone into those poor areas.

As the days passed, Chiquitunga seemed to sense a special feeling for her friend. Then she intensified her prayer, continually asking the Lord if it was His will that she should marry. The answer came in a surprising way, through the mouth of Ángel Sauá himself.

One day in May of 1951, he took her aside and confided his secret to her. He had decided to become a priest, to expiate the sins of his father who did not want to be converted. After listening to him attentively, she promised to keep the secret and that she would do all she could to help him to achieve his dream. "I will remain at your side, day and night, praying and offering my life so that you can

be, God willing, a holy priest” and “if we cannot be united here on earth, we will be united one day in heaven, at the end of time”.

In order to avoid a direct confrontation with Mr. Manuel, the boy’s father, the two made a plan. Once he had finished his studies in Paraguay, Sauá would go to Spain to take graduate courses and there he would realize his vocation.

For his part, María Felicia's father was convinced that they would be engaged and that he was a good match, so he no longer objected as he did in Villarrica, to her charitable outings. To sanction their offering, on 1 October, the birthday of Sauá, he and his friend consecrated themselves to the Immaculate, performing a sort of mystical marriage. On April 10th he left to accompany his father to the Holy Land and to Syria, and then headed for Madrid.

Chiquitunga wrote him many letters to encourage him. On his part, he began to vent his worries by compiling an intimate Diary, also because he felt uncertain about his future. He needed another, unexpected meeting in order to begin to understand where God was calling him. On August 20, 1952, he was passing by the Spanish Hospital of Asunción where Mother Teresa Margherita of the Sacred Heart, prioress of the first Carmel in Paraguay, was hospitalized. He spoke to her at length and received advice and encouragement, to the point of writing in his diary, “I found a mother”.

On November 16, Sauá wrote that he would enter the Seminary, but she too had decided to take another step in discerning. She made a Spiritual Retreat and after having attentively meditated on “The treatise of true devotion to the Virgin Mary”, on September 9, 1954, she made her consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary, according to the outline of the author of that book, St. Luigi Maria Grignon de Montfort.

In the meantime, a month after the Retreat, she had to tell her parents that Sauá was in the Seminary, during the engagement party of her cousin Yaya. They were all upset. Her parents threatened to break relationships with the young man's family.

His father was furious, left his home, warning that he would return only if his son returned too. In the end, he returned to his wife and children on the evening of January 6, 1954. In the eyes of those directly concerned, it seemed like a miracle obtained by their prayers.

During another Retreat, María Felicia made the firm decision to enter Carmel. She again experienced parental opposition to which was joined that of the priests who saw in her a very useful support for the diocesan Catholic Action. But she had already decided.

She who a short time before had written: “It kills me to be tranquil”, now goes to limit her life between the four walls of a convent, where she went on February 2, 1955. A little before entering she had written her last letter to Sauá, to say good-bye: “My brother, until we meet in eternity! She knew she had found a greater love as she confided to a nun, “I am in love with Sauá, but even more with Jesus”.

A concrete example that is close to us of home life, of family, invites us to do the same.

WORK SHEET FOR THE CONFEDERAL, COUNCIL, FEDERATION, UNIONS AND FOR ALL THE PAST PUPILS OF THE WORLD.

- Read the proposed text well
- Describe a concrete invitation found in reading this life.
- Send a response and, if you want, also a photo or video.
- Pray with the universal Church for the young.

Lord Jesus,
in journeying towards the Synod, your Church
turns her attention to all the young people of the world.
We pray that they might boldly take charge of their lives,
aim for the most beautiful and profound things of life
and always keep their hearts unencumbered.

Accompanied by wise and generous guides, help them respond to
the call you make to each of them,
to realize a proper plan of life and achieve happiness.
Keep their hearts open to dreaming great dreams
and make them concerned for the good of others.

Like the Beloved Disciple, may they stand at the foot of the Cross,
to receive your Mother as a gift from you.
May they be witnesses to your Resurrection
and be aware that you are at their side
as they joyously proclaim you as Lord.

Amen.

Please send your personal or group reply by e-mail to:
delegatamondialeexallieve@gmail.com or through regular mail to:
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