

S E C O N D E D I T I O N



Our Cornelia

FOR THOSE WHO KNOW AND LOVE CORNELIA

Welcome to the second issue of the Our Cornelia newsletter, a regular publication for all those who want to know Cornelia Connelly better and pray to her.

The Cornelia Connelly Promoters Committee (CCPC) has put this out to keep you informed on activities regarding the founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

Cornelia Connelly

✕ *Is Mercy Our Charism?* ✕

BY ELIZABETH MARY STRUB, SHCJ

“And you, little child, you shall be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him. To give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins; this by the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us.” (Lk 1:76-78)

“The tender mercy of our God” Zachariah is inspired to say that his little son John, only eight days old, will be the prophet of this mercy which is, at the same time, knowledge, salvation, and forgiveness. God’s mercy is tender because it rises gently, respectfully, gradually, almost imperceptibly, in human hearts and softens them. It “visits”, it doesn’t impose itself. John will witness to the supreme mercy – the dawning of the Messiah.

The word mercy is better expressed in Latin languages. The Spanish word “misericordia” makes it a quality of the heart, a disposition at the core of the person. It’s cordial, not aloof or impersonal. It reaches out to touch the other and its touch is healing. Another word for mercy is love.

Let’s turn to Cornelia to see where and how mercy dawns for her. There is a prophetic Little Child in her story, too, clearly represented by her three surviving children. Are they John or Jesus? I like to think that it was during her very first retreat in Grand Coteau,

December 21-24, 1839, that she met Jesus face to face. She made the first three days of the Exercises alongside the Religious of the Sacred Heart who would continue without her for the full eight days. So she would have been introduced only to the Principle and Foundation and the First Week and perhaps the Call of the King. Surely she would have made eye contact with Jesus on the cross asking her what she has done, is doing and will do for him. We know from her notes written the day after Christmas how seriously she entered into the experience and made resolutions for the rest of her life, but the notes have more to do with the “mechanics” of the Exercises and the Examen than with the substance. She didn’t yet have a vocabulary to describe her inner experience of consolation and desolation, but she said later that this first retreat marked her conversion. Why? If the First Week held the mirror up to her own sinfulness, the sight would have filled her all the more with gratitude for the merciful love of God for her personally. In fact, the colloquy that ends the meditation on personal sin is a sort of explosion of gratitude for life, for pardon, for salvation, for the gift of all creation, for love. Cornelia’s “history of sin” is matched by a corresponding “history of mercy” so that the climax of the week is not sin but mercy – a mercy that drives a lifetime of grateful love and service.

Michael Ivens, S.J. in his commentary on the Exercises says: “All the foregoing considerations lead to a new appreciation of God’s gratuitous mercy... The entire language in which Ignatius describes the colloquy of mercy is suggestive of intense consolation”. It’s my guess that Cornelia, making the Exercises for the first time was overcome by mercy and was made permanently aware of God’s merciful attention to her in all the details of her life.

Ursula Blake in the Positio has ventured the opinion that Mercy is the predominant charism of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. It’s not simply because Cornelia claimed that the Society was founded for all the works of spiritual mercy that she holds this view. She sees mercy running like a

spiritual river through all the “windings” and trials of Cornelia’s life story. Ursula notes that by July, 1840, “Cornelia was contemplating Christ’s all-embracing mercy: ‘Misereor super hanc turbam’ [Cornelia wrote in her journal] which was to be the outstanding impulse of her second vocation as an apostolic founder.”



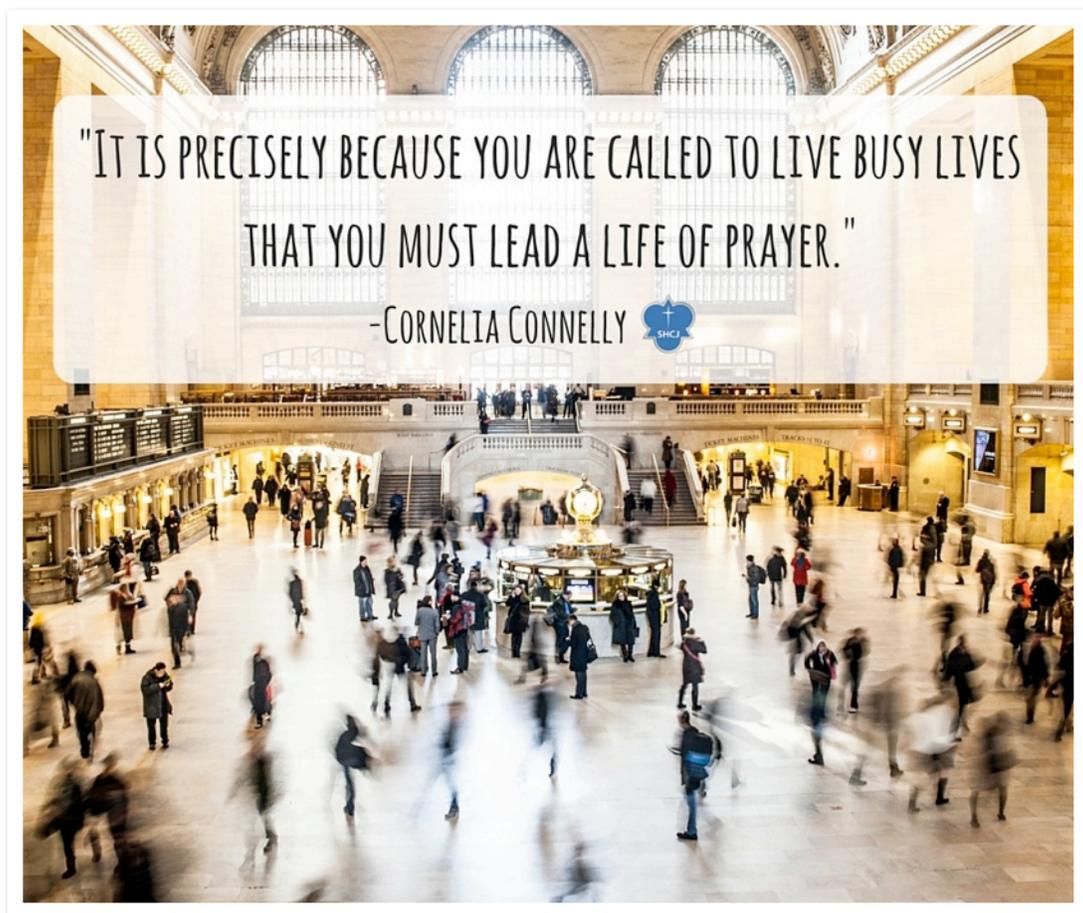
Other examples span the years. For her irresponsible son Merty (pictured above) at school at Stonyhurst, Cornelia pleads mercy. In 1844, Cornelia is at the Trinita pondering her future and that of her children. Her dismal spirits are raised by the merciful suggestion of Cardinal Vicar Patrizi that Frank should remain with her until he is five years older. She is merciful toward the scheming Emily Bowles and she mercifully pays the court costs of a husband who betrayed her. Her alienated children are lovingly received on their once-in-a-lifetime visit to their mother. The Preston cabal all but broke her and the subsequent intervention of Bishop Dannell and his alien rule tested her to the limit, but she remained firmly united to her merciful God and at one with the Mother of sorrows.

The break with the religious of the Sacred Heart came about because Cornelia did not want a cloistered life with all its restrictions. She wanted to “help souls” actively, like Ignatius. The spiritual works of mercy were more in harmony with her own natural calling but she certainly drew from their devotion to the merciful heart of Jesus a deeper understanding of mercy and a wealth of spirituality that she brought with her to the SHCJ.

The other strong influence came by way of the Salesian tradition that witnessed to the sweetness and tenderness of God. Her devotion to the Holy Child is more allied to that tradition.

Perhaps the clearest references to the possible centrality of Mercy in the SHCJ are found in Cornelia's rule text of 1853, now enshrined in our Foundation Texts: "Mysteries of the most sublime teaching are to be found in the humble, hidden life of the Holy Child Jesus in which God manifests in the most wonderful manner the treasures of his mercy and of his boundless love." And "Contemplating the Eternal Wisdom in the lowliness of his humanity we are to seek to attain the knowledge of our own nothingness and misery and that of his infinite love and mercy." It sounds even better in the original French: "Et quel enseignement plus sublime pourront-nous trouver que le mystère de l'Incarnation? C'est ici que Dieu nous manifeste de la manière la plus merveilleuse les trésors de sa Miséricorde y de son Amour immense."

Even up to the end of her life, (1875) Cornelia was encouraging her religious to "judge of things as our good and merciful God judges them". A lifetime of yearly Spiritual Exercises would have overwhelmingly confirmed that first direct contact of "creature with creator" as a merciful exchange. Finally, the one she had learned as a Protestant to call "the almighty" received her at the last as Mercy. Her repeated death-bed cry was "My Jesus have mercy on me."



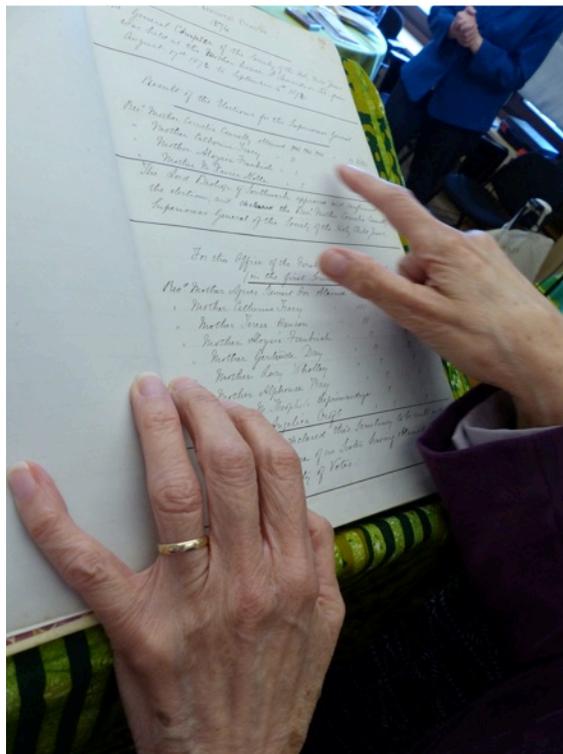
Cornelia's Role in the Society's First Two Chapters



Photos: Judith Lancaster, SHCJ, shows 2016 General Chapter delegates how many votes Cornelia received at the first and second chapters. The book dates back to 1847. Carmel Murtagh, SHCJ, signs the book at the close of the General Chapter in April, 2016.

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus recently held its Delegate Session of the 27th General Chapter. During the closing ceremony of the session, held in Nemi, Italy, each delegate signed the Minutes Book of the General Chapter, which began with the first chapter in 1874.

At the first chapter, held in St. Leonards-on-Sea, England from Aug. 17 - Sept. 4, Cornelia was elected "Superioress General" with 15 votes out of a possible 19. Three years later her position was reaffirmed in the election of the second chapter with 19 votes (out of a possible 22).

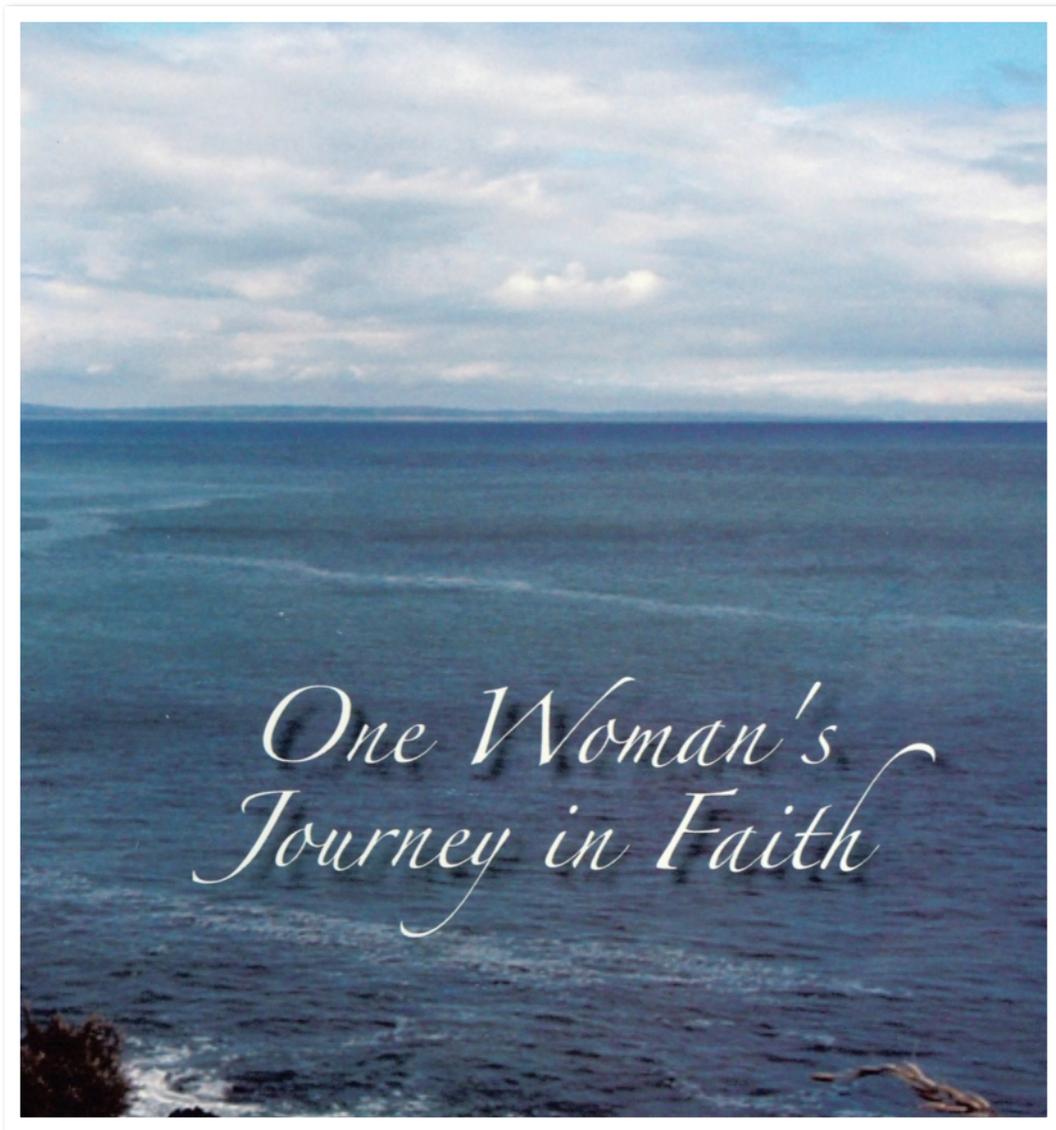


Publication News

The Society has just reprinted more than 3,000 copies of the book *One Woman's Journey in Faith*.

The book offers a synopsis of Cornelia's life along with reflection questions for the reader to help with his or her "spiritual formation."

You can email Generalate@shcj.org to enquire about obtaining a copy.





Enquiries about Venerable Cornelia

When the CCPC receives enquiries about Cornelia we ask how they became familiar with her and how they can relate to her story.

The reason is because we would like to document any favours or miracles received through the intercession of Cornelia.

Here is an excerpt from a correspondence from a recent enquirer:

I became "acquainted" with Venerable Cornelia after reading a book entitled "Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes A Saint, Who Doesn't, And Why" by Kenneth L. Woodward during my college days. This is where I had my first encounter with Venerable Cornelia and her story. I am amazed by her deep faith and trust in God in spite of all the troubles she had been through and her courage and determination to put her newly-founded community in solid footing. For me, she is a good example for all of us to follow: her docility to God's call, her confidence in his providence, and her generous heart.

- John Paolo, The Philippines



Our Cornelia

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