

Saint María Soledad Torres Acosta  
(Manuela Torres Acosta)

Born 2 December 1826, Madrid, Spain

Died 11 October 1887, Madrid, Spain

Manuela was on the waiting list for a contemplative order in which she planned to spend her time in prayer and meditation when she was called to a very different vocation: home nursing.

Father Michael Martinez y Sanz, a Servite porter, had become concerned about the lack of such care in Madrid. All nursing was done by religious orders inside their own institutions. Manuela agreed that there was a need for nurses who would visit the sick in their homes. She overcame Father Michael's reservations about her stamina and became one of the founding members of the Servants of Mary, Ministers to the Sick. On 15 August 1851, with six companions, she made her religious vows and took the name María Soledad. She did not come to nursing easily, but Soledad's struggles with fear and disgust helped her later counsel novices about their own doubts. The congregation grew rapidly in a time of civil unrest and epidemics, but turnover was high. In 1856 Soledad faced her greatest challenge when Father Michael left to found a mission in West Africa, taking half of the congregation with him. He insisted that Soledad must stay behind in Madrid as superior general or the community would fall apart. Soledad remained superior for thirty-five years in spite of slander, poverty, and the opposition of the Madrid government. One of her novices observed, "Mother Soledad is like an anvil: she is constantly taking a beating." Today there are more than two thousand Servants of Mary, Ministers to the Sick in twenty-one countries providing care for the sick in their own homes at no charge. Her feast day is 11 October

**The Genius of María Soledad Torres Acosta:**

Marking her 175th anniversary of Soledad's birth Pope John Paul II praised her unique genius: she saw that illness need not be an unbearable burden and that it must never deprive patients of their dignity. On the contrary, Soledad understood that illness could become an enriching experience for the patient's whole family.

**Reflection:**

"I was sick and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25.36 (motto of her Congregation)

Gallick, Sarah, [The Big Book of Women Saints](#), p. 308