

Saint Raphaela Maria Porras

born 1 March 1850, Pedro Abad, Cordoba, Spain
died 6 January 1925, Rome, Italy



In the prime of her life, Raphaela was removed from leadership of the religious order she had founded and barred from any future role. Rather than challenging this injustice and destroy the order's reputation, she accepted her exile to a small convent in Rome. False rumours that she had mental problems followed Raphaela to her new home, and the sisters there ignored her. She endured thirty years of "*purgatory of inactivity*," making herself useful by sweeping the floor or collecting stockings to darn.

Raphaela's situation was especially painful because one of the leaders of the movement against her own sister, Dolores. In 1873 Raphaela and Dolores had formed the congregation known as the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart. Although young and experienced, Raphaela showed a gift for working with people, and as the congregation expanded, her many letters to Handmaids were full of concern for their welfare. "*Take care of yourself*," she wrote to one sister. "*God does not want his spouses to look as though he fed them on lizards.*"

Meanwhile, Dolores accumulated resentments that made her a willing tool for another jealous Handmaid who coveted Raphaela's leadership role. Ironically, a few years after ousting Raphaela, Dolores herself was overthrown and banished. She wrote to Raphaela, asking forgiveness, and Raphaela continued to correspond with her, without a word of reproach, until Dolores' death.

Shortly before Raphaela's own death, she was recognized and honoured as the founder of a great order. When she was canonized in 1977, her official portrait showed the new saint at prayer, with her ever-present sewing basket beside her.

The Genius of Raphaela Maria Porras:

Raphaela advises us to *"Keep a holy simplicity. Remain perfectly at peace, certain that God makes it his business to make you successful."*

Reflection:

"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Gallick, Sarah The Big Book of Women Saints p. 14