

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys

- b. 17 April 1620 (Troyes, Champagne, France)
- d. 12 January 1700 (Montreal, Quebec, Canada)

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700) founded the Congregation of Notre Dame who are involved in providing Christian education to many parts of the world. She worked tirelessly to ensure the rights and welfare of women and children in New France and to ensure that young people received an education. Marguerite was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 31, 1982; her feast day is celebrated on January 12.

A founder of Montreal and the first woman proclaimed a saint by John Paul II, Marguerite Bourgeoys spent years contending with bishops who wanted to enclose her community. She finally won her case by arguing that the Blessed Mother had never been restricted behind convent walls.

Growing up, Marguerite had a special relationship with Our Lady. Although certain that she had a religious vocation, she was rejected by the Carmelites and Poor Clares. When the original founder of Montreal, Paul de Maisonneuve, invited her to start a school in the colony, Marguerite feared that she was not up to the job. She prayed to the Blessed Mother who told her, "*Go, I will not forsake you.*" Marguerite sailed to New France with one hundred and eight men and six *filles du roi* or "daughters of the King," the seventeenth-century version of mail-order brides. By the time they landed, everyone was already calling her Sister. She opened her first school in an abandoned stable, welcoming native girls and colonists alike. She also set up workshops where women could learn crafts to support themselves, and she became their trusted friend and counsellor. Marguerite recruited more teachers from France and formed the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal, one of the first unenclosed religious communities for women in the Catholic Church. When a skeptical bishop questioned her plans, Marguerite replied. "*The Blessed Virgin was never cloistered...she never excused herself from any journey on which there was good to be done or some work of charity to be performed.*" With that, Marguerite won approval for her congregation. They are at work today in Japan, Africa, France, and the Americas.

The Genius of Marguerite Bourgeoys:

Patricia Simpson, a Notre Dame Sister and historian, writes that Marguerite "can tell us something about meeting the challenge of the present, in which we are all pioneers, and about the need for understanding and compassion, which are no less important now than they were three centuries ago."

Reflection:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom do I fear!
The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom am I afraid?"* Psalm 27.1

From [The Big Book of Women Saints](#) by Sarah Gallick,
(c) 2007, HarperCollins Publication, p. 20

Jeremiah 1.4-12

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.'

But the LORD said to me,
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD.'

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth;
and the LORD said to me,

'Now I have put my words in your mouth.

See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what do you see?' And I said, 'I see a branch of an almond tree.' Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.'

Mark 6.6b-13

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.