

# MARY WARD WEEK 2020



# MARY WARD - A SPECIAL GIFT TO OUR WORLD

## **Introduction**

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4. Mary Ward - A woman of courage (Ireland)
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## Introduction

In this perplexing world milieu where social, political, cultural and religious pluralism is more felt, we are called to re-interpret Mary Ward's spirituality to meet the needs of our present time and place. In such a complex social background, there cannot be only one interpretation of Mary Ward's life, especially when it comes to answering deeply, at times, the painful quest of people. Millions of people live in great poverty. Corruption, gender discrimination, increasing population, ecological crises and migration cripple our society in many ways. The experience of Mary Ward needs to be re-appropriated and shared with the world in the light of the Gospels and rooted in real-life context.

Mary Ward is a special gift to the world, as Pope Pius XII rightly describes "that incomparable woman, whom England, in her darkest and bloodiest hour, gave to the Church." We are in continuous need of Divine-churning to mould us into dangerous visionaries like Mary Ward, to respond to the needs of our time. "In every age and in every country we find many "perfect" women who, despite persecution, difficulties and discrimination, have shared in the Church's mission," said Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on women, "Mulieris Dignitatem," mentioning her with other women. A spiritual journey with Mary Ward is a search for the Divine, who is always more than what we know and experience, as well as a call to identify ourselves with the poor and the needy, without fear.

The reflections in this booklet offer us the opportunity to gaze at this "incomparable woman" from various perspectives of women, lay and religious, who are proud to be called friends of Mary Ward. These diverse reflections will unfold an array of Mary Ward's life and give us a thrust to communicate deeply with her as a companion and be inspired to heed the voices of the marginalized and the cry of our dying planet.

### MARY WARD - A WOMAN ROOTED IN GOD

Writing to the Ephesians St. Paul says... “to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:17-19). One can with conviction attribute this to our foundress Mother Mary Ward who had to face all sorts of accusations and trials, but never gave up because she was rooted in God. She planted herself in the love of God and grew deep into His love and that kept her strong even during the time of persecution.

Can we recall what happened to Mary Ward in the Church of St. Peter in Chains in Rome, in 1625? It is recorded in Painted Life No. 36, “that the prosperity, progress and security of the Institute did not depend upon wealth, dignity and the favour of princes, but that all its members had free and open access to Him from whom proceeds all strength and protection.” Such was the rootedness of this great woman Mary Ward who had the courage to dare, a characteristic unique to any pioneer.

Mary Ward dared what no other woman before her had dared; she went all the way to Rome there to present her request personally before the Holy Father. The one who has her roots in God is able to overcome difficulties, to avoid dangers and to have great confidence in God because she/he is moved by the gift of fortitude. Her foundation was abolished and the continuation of her work was made impossible; she was taken into custody and was imprisoned.

The measure and norm of this courage is infinite strength, the strength of God; with this strength one observes how obstacles become means to some good end in the all-powerful hands of God. When we are secure in God’s love, we can face our fears, deal with the wreckage of the past and can affirm our intrinsic self-worth. This indwelling power helps us to deal with the most difficult situations that may weigh us down.

Reading the signs of the time and the needs of the time, can we call ourselves Mary Ward women who will go about doing good because our Master and foundress have paved the way for us. And today Mary Ward looks down from heaven inspiring us and praying for us. As daughters of Mary Ward, we pray that we grow deep into God's love and be rooted in Him so that we will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.



Painting by: Madhabi Brahma IBVM

*How deep is my rootedness in God and what are those things that hinder me from being rooted in God?*

### MARY WARD - A MODEL OF FORGIVENESS

Mary Ward is a role model for modern social workers and all people who want to commit themselves to the path of support, advocacy, and re-socialization of the individual who has lost his/her way and needs assistance to find their true selves once again. The essence and the foundation of Mary Ward's worldview is forgiveness, which is so hard to find in modern society. People like Mary Ward, are extremely rare, and thus, they should be valued at all times. Mary Ward is the embodiment of a humane attitude to every person, regardless of the background and the past. The only objective for her was to advocate the re-establishment of that person in society so that the others could accept this person. Perhaps the religious component of her worldview also inspired and encouraged her to engage in the activities, like helping those in need and requiring immediate guidance when going through a rough period in their lives. Though historically women are deemed weak and unsuitable for anything but care, Mary Ward managed to prove the error of such a point of view.

Regardless of the historical period, women were and will be strong and capable of great deeds and achievements. Mary Ward was the embodiment of this idea, and she managed to inspire women through the ages to commit themselves to what they were discouraged from doing. The primary driving force for every person is a belief in self and one's own gifts and skills. So, when society is discouraging them from acting and neglecting them due to misdeeds and mischiefs, like drug addiction and other types of dependencies, addicts require a push to face the new opportunities. Mary Ward was that push, as well as the promoter of trust, encouragement, and advocacy of the best interests of every individual. The example of behaviour and interpersonal relationship set by Mary Ward remains accurate and applicable to any situation. Trust, support, and bringing up self-esteem in people are the foundation of her worldview, and these categories remain relevant even now.



*What helps me to forgive and accept myself  
when I struggle with failures?*

*What do I need to let go of in order to forgive  
and accept the rejects and outcasts of our world  
today?*



### MARY WARD - A PIONEER FOR WOMEN IN EXPRESSING THEMSELVES THROUGH ART

From time immemorial women wanted to be beautiful in order to be loved or to have power, but until the last century they had no right to express their inner beauty through art. That was an area reserved for men. Mary Ward was beautiful according to the description in her biography, but not only in a physical way: noble, educated, a practising Catholic, gifted with compassion, committed and courageous in defending Catholicism in a country where it was persecuted; always seeking the essential, she remained cheerful, friendly, attentive, full of concern for all those around her and for her work. In everything she did she poured forth her inner beauty and she did so specially through the art of educating.

In the schools she established, the curriculum for girls (from amongst the poorest families, those at risk or from vulnerable groups as we would say today) included, in addition to intellectual and practical courses, training in the arts: music, drawing, drama. Well educated girls of that time needed to know how to manage a household, how to cook and sew, to be a good conversationalist and above all to play the piano in order to create a good ambience at different society gatherings. But drama, painting, poetry and literature - all these were for men with their “rational” nature and who could therefore think, not for women who were very “emotional” and could not ascend to the heights of thought and expression through art. If they did take the risk of doing so they used a pseudonym. Mary Ward, however, wanted this for her pupils and the first companions fought for it.

Although apparently just a small detail in the school curriculum it actually became the seed of a revolution for changing the image of women in society. Women are not ornaments to be judged for their physical beauty, a good acquisition to be shown off in society, someone with the right vital statistics who is well adorned, but rather intelligent persons with a spirit ennobled through education, capable of what is good, truth and beauty which they express in her daily life, in relationships and in work but also in art. Furthermore, art is a way of contemplating God’s creation and of turning it into action: singing,



movement, reflection, communication, and communion. A woman liberated from the set patterns of time can express herself freely, in all her beauty, becoming a reference point and an inspiration to those around her, those to whom she has been entrusted through her vocation... in the family, in society, and in the Church through her consecration.

A woman who has been formed as a whole person – mind, body and soul – will know how to see herself in the light of the Creator in all her beauty. She will know how to see the whole of creation in His light and then express herself through the arts, in particular through the art of educating, i.e. the art which includes all the others.



*Have I realised my inner beauty  
in the light of the Creator?*

*Do I enable others to find their own inner  
beauty and support them in their  
transformation?*

### MARY WARD - A WOMAN OF COURAGE

Mary Ward had courage as she listened to God's dream unfold for her. She listened to God's call and courageously responded. 'Jesus' she heard, 'Jesus' she repeated. She listened to His deep dream within her, courageously following where He led - over the seas to St Omer, seeking His will only, seeking His truth alone. Courageously leaving the Poor Clares' and sailing back to England, searching for His will - 'Glory Glory Glory', she heard as she combed her hair. Go and bring God's love to all. Courage to found in St Omer, 'Take the same' confirmed her Way. Liege founded and to Rome over the Alps, via Loreto, to get her rule confirmed. Opened schools in Rome, Naples and Perugia. Went to Munich. Houses and schools closed in Rome and Italy. Imprisoned in the Anger Convent, Munich, suppression of all houses and schools. Back to Rome. Back to England, to York, where she died, with, 'Jesus' on her lips. 'To love the poore... was all [her] ayme.'

#### Challenges she encountered:

- Opposition to her vocation, uncertainty, disillusionment, physical hardships
- Cold, hunger, sickness, no money. She had little support, opposition to her form of religious life. Lack of understanding from clergy, Jesuits and Rome
- Suppression of houses, Civil War, physical suffering.

#### Her response:

- Prayer, Contemplation, Penance, Discernment, Forgiveness of her enemies
- "To be placed with Christ" was her prayer. She prayed.
- She searched for the will of God. Was open to something new - she trusted, was faithful and remained cheerful. "*Mirth at this time is next to grace.*" 1631
- She prayed and worked for the spread of the faith.

*"We must await God Almighty's time and leisure for we must follow not go before Him..."* Rome 1629

*"Let us sing and thank God for His infinite loving kindness."* Heworth 1645

*"Have great courage and confidence in God, and seek to be solid and grateful to God for giving you such a vocation..."* Instruction, St Omer 1614

## **My response:**

I need courage as I listen to God's dream unfold for me today

A radical shift in religious life as we have known it...

A time of transition...

Circles of trust...

Laudate Si...

Intercultural life as a sign of prophetic hope...

(XXI UISG Conference 2019)

## **Vision statement (IBVM ELM)**

"In the now, we claim the freedom of the boundary-breaking love of Jesus. As people in exile, we embrace uncertainty and in our quest for oneness, we seek new ways of being for mission".



*What seeds of hope are you sowing?*

*What act of courage can you do today in  
memory of Mary Ward?*

*"With real strength and courage do  
what is seen to be good in all circumstances in  
which we are placed, not letting ourselves be  
deterred from this good  
by any opposition."*

### MARY WARD – A BEACON OF LIGHT IN DIFFICULT TIMES

We have often heard people say, ‘behind every successful man there is a woman.’ Did we ever stop to think about the vice versa – who is there behind every successful woman? No one. Why? The reason behind this is that from ancient times our society has been a male chauvinistic society. But then, there was this great woman who saw and believed in the strength that women possessed. This great woman was Mother Mary Ward, born on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1585 in Elizabethan England. She firmly believed that,

*“Divine love is like fire which will not let itself be shut up  
for it is impossible to love God and not extend God’s honour.”*



And so she started to be a beacon of light in the society. Mother Mary Ward from her childhood had seen religious intolerance in England and throughout saw the Catholics suffering. Her grandmother too had been imprisoned but this did not scare her. She was born in a noble family and if she wanted she could have led a comfortable life.

But she was a woman of great faith; she left her home to serve the society. She joined a convent and dedicated herself to active ministry. She did not doubt her Master, instead she trusted Him totally. She, with a band of devoted companions, established themselves as a religious community at St. Omer and opened schools for girls. Her venture was a great success, but it was not acceptable and she had to face opposition. Mary Ward rose above the storm in search of sunshine. She said,

*“The best way to bear troubles is to thank God for them;  
and act not out of fear but solely from love.”*

No matter how hard the times were she held her head high and she has truly been a beacon of light. Within her was the fire of God and His cause. It is this fire that shines till now. Mary Ward offered an audacious vision of what women could and would do in religious life and pioneered a system of education which prepares them for a role in the service of the Church and society at large. Many schools have been established since then and they have groomed many young girls into beautiful ladies who are serving the society, carrying the torch and passing it on removing the darkness. The smile on their faces is the signature of her efforts fulfilled.



So dear friends, Mother Mary Ward has truly been a Beacon of Light. She was right and God was by her side. She left everything in God's hands because she knew that eventually she will find God's hand in everything. Though times were dark and hard she moved on to enlighten the path of others. And now it is our turn to keep the fire burning. Remember **“Her vision is our Mission”** and we need to pass it on.



*How do I pass on Mary Ward's vision  
through my life each day?*

*Have I experienced God's divine  
spark within me?*

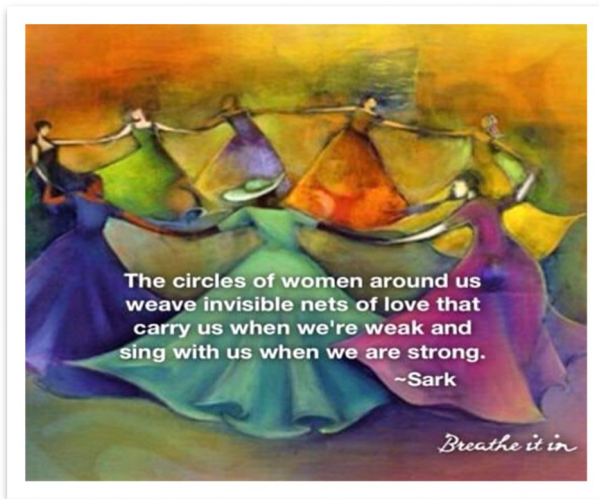
### MARY WARD - AN INSPIRATION FOR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WOMEN

When I reflect on Mary Ward and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I think of the gift of friendship. I feel her message to “let your love at all times be rooted in God, and then remain faithful to your friends, value them highly, even more highly than your life” will renew us in these times. At the Friends of Mary Ward Conference in York England 2017, Elaine, Gemma and Imelda spoke on Mary Ward’s relationship with God, her companions, and the inspirational women who came after her through times of danger, scarcity and uncertainty. When her vision was misunderstood and vilified by the religious of the times, it did not diminish or deter her or these women from moving forward in their mission of education and justice for women and girls, for she knew through God “women in time to come will do much”.

For over 30 years, I have worked in a shelter for abused women and their children. Now I facilitate groups to educate and create awareness to end violence against women. I am no stranger to oppression, the strength of women who make change and the power of friendship. Mary Ward and her companions mirrored that struggle to remain constant in God’s vision despite structures and institutions that oppressed her vision and her work. My Associate relationship with the sisters who bear her legacy, has given me hope in my work that deals with the same challenges, and a renewed connection to my spirituality and Jesus to help sustain me. In the associate relationship, I have learned about missions, education initiatives, schools carrying forward the love of Jesus and heritage of Mary Ward’s vision. Our sisters have envisioned a way to continue to further Mary Ward’s mission in relationship with God, to bring education and justice to our world even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our circle meets in friendship as companions on a journey to learn and bring forward issues as well, like the #MeToo movement, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and Human Trafficking and supporting education initiatives in Africa.

I pray this vision of friendship, circles and companionship will endure and grow in these disconnected, frightening and often dark times. When I facilitate groups, I sense a divine presence, especially when I feel that I am not enough and I have

no answers to the struggles women face. When I stop worrying, trust the process and let go, God brings together the right people to heal our mistaken beliefs and stories, so we can be the divine spark we were born to be in this world. During the conference, Imelda gave this analogy of hope when she closed her talk about the difficult issues of human trafficking. She shared during a drumming exercise at a workshop in Canada. She was surprised to hear so many inexperienced drummers with no practice making a good sound together. Then she noticed the leader was keeping a steady beat. This allowed each person's unique drumming to enhance the sound but stay in union. For me this echoed Mary Ward's legacy. Like the drums, with constancy and clarity she, her companions and followers could hear God's message and throughout time, this beat from God has kept his truth and will lead us forward. She was a woman ahead of her time and for all times ...Without fear or anxiety expect in quiet confidence that God's dream will emerge in the confusion – Mary Ward.



*How do I feel called and challenged like Mary Ward to respond to the needs of this century?*



### MARY WARD – A COMPASSIONATE WOMAN

Receiving compassion from another is a human, life giving desire. We live in a world full of so many problems; illness, poverty, family struggles, natural disasters, war and social problems. We cannot change all of them, but if we responded, each one of us, even a little, with generous kindness, if we are compassionate, the entire world would change.

Our compassion enables the people around us to feel seen, loved and understood, in the same way that Christ enabled all whom he encountered to feel.

When Mary Ward started the journey across Europe opening schools and supporting girls, she struggled and had very little money. In her letters we read, that even in these most difficult times, Mary Ward was thinking of others in her community and those who were struggling, with a huge kindness and care.

Mary Ward was imprisoned. Mary Ward was often very sick. Mary Ward is now with her loved one in heaven.

Mary Ward, the compassionate. It was her strength to suffer with others, to help the community. She was not focused on becoming famous or credited for her work. To understand her brothers and sisters in the light of their suffering was her way of being Christ to all.

Mary Ward had a compassionate heart that yearned to share God's light with everyone she encountered.

*"God is rich enough for us all."*

*Where do I need to allow compassion  
to take a major role in my life?*



*What hinders me from expressing compassion  
to people whom I shun?*

### MARY WARD - AND THE MARGINALISED

On the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1645, Mary Ward died peacefully. At that time, the burial of Catholics in England was difficult. Mary's companions found 'a little churchyard, where the minister was honest enough to be bribed.'

This minister was an Anglican minister in the village of Osbaldwick, near Heworth. On her tombstone, we can read this inscription:

*"To love the poor persevere in the same live die and rise with them was all the aim of Mary Ward who having lived 60 years and 8 days ayme died 20<sup>th</sup> [sic] January 1645."*

By choosing the model offered by Jesus, to promote a relationship to the world not based on domination but on dignity and equality, Mary Ward chose to respond to God's divine will with the fire of love. "To love the poor...live, die and rise with them was all the aim of Mary Ward." In Hebrew, the word 'Avodah' means call, vocation and service. But 'Avodah' is also the word used for prayer!

Mary Ward, 'a contemplative in action', lived her 'avodah' with those who were socially marginalized, socially 'bullied', especially the women who lacked the education available to men. Her 'avodah' led her to make the difference by being a Lover of Truth and a Doer of Justice, experiencing connectedness and solidarity with the 'bullied' of her time.

Living in a hierarchically structured society, Mary Ward heard the call to engage herself in works of charity and justice for 'the Glory of God'. In those days, it was a common belief that women, their lives and actions were insignificant. She had to find great courage to fight for the respect of the rights of people regardless of intellectual ability, emotional and social or physical and gender differences. Where did she find the courage? Indeed from her faith, but we must highlight the fact that the roots of her courage also came from her family background. The Ward family is known to have been protecting 'bullied' people when providing shelter to Catholic priests who were keeping the faith alive in England. She came from a family where women were brave and generous: Mary's maternal grandmother, Mrs Ursula Wright spent fourteen years consecutively in prison for her faith.



Mary Ward was able to recall her memories of the period when Ursula used to secretly provide money and food to Catholic prisoners; women who were agents of social change with all those who required respect, solidarity, empowerment. Mary Ward herself engaged in providing education for girls at all levels of society.

Her 'avodah' lead her to be with the 'bullied' of her time and to 'Take the same of the Society' (The Jesuits). Her mission was certainly a radical change for her time, yet also a change which caused her to be bullied among the bullied, marginalized among the marginalized. Mary Ward experienced verbal bullying – being called with her companions 'galloping girls', an inappropriate sexual comment which hurt their reputation; on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1631 the papal bull of suppression under Pope Urban VIII made use of harsh and rude words, compelling Mary Ward's Institute, considered as dangerous poison to suppress: "...works which most unsuited to their weak sex and character, to female modesty and particularly to maidenly reserve", thus condemning these women simply because they were women and therefore beings of inferior intellectual capacity.

"Live, die and rise with them". Bullied, marginalized, Mary Ward faced censure bravely. When the papal bull condemned her to prison, she accepted it courageously, faithfully, asking her friends in her lemon-juice letters to continue to be 'in a cheerful mind'. In front of her bullies, she continued to encounter the love of God in all situations, particularly in times of torment and persecution. She made the difference by being the difference: the one who promotes peace and respect, by living her commitment till the end, by 'rising' in love with all the marginalized, and with 'the marginalized Jesus'.

Mary Ward's 'avodah' is the 'avodah' of all those who commit themselves to God's people, who develop awareness and recognize the inherent injustices of the time. Our compassionate engagement in works of charity and justice in our own lives, families, locally and globally, allows us to witness God's divine love for and with the bullied of all times. Be the difference where we are, make the difference in any form of service to the world and to the rest of humanity.

Mary Ward's 'avodah' is an 'avodah' for all her friends, for religious and lay people, not to stand on the shore, to put out into deep water' (*Lk 5:4*), to believe in our call to mission and to extend 'to the extreme edge and cross boundaries... Let our hearts explore and reach new horizons by loving and persevering to stand up to the bullies of our times as 'it is impossible to love God and not to labour to extend his honour'.

In the school yard of Loreto College Port-Louis, Mauritius, we have a game called "La marelle de Mary Ward". It represents the life of our foundress. One square contains open circles with a question mark asking: are we extending to those who are on the border, the marginalized? The same call is addressed to us today.



