News



Servant of God Mother Mary Teresa Tallon is pictured in this undated colorized photo taken around 1920, when she founded the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate. (OSV News/Courtesy Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate)

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Before Mother Maria Catherine Iannotti entered the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate as a Catholic religious sister, she was somewhat frightened by how serious their foundress, Mother Mary Teresa Tallon, looked in photos. Her perspective changed, however, when another sister encouraged her to keep Mother Tallon's photo in her room and pray for her intercession every day.

"I started to notice in the picture that she wasn't so severe," Mother Maria Catherine recalled. "She had this little ... gleam in her eyes and a smile on her face — and I started to want to know her more deeply."

Their relationship only grew from there. Today, Mother Maria Catherine not only serves as general superior of the Parish Visitors, Mother Tallon's contemplative-missionary congregation of religious sisters, but also as vice postulator of Mother Tallon's cause for sainthood.

Pope Leo XIV named Mother Tallon venerable June 18.

Both Mother Maria Catherine and Jane Brown, the great-great niece of Mother Tallon, described the "Servant of God" as a woman with a sense of humor who was faithful and kind, and who loved children and families, especially those in need. Mother Tallon, they said, believed every person is called to holiness, and her way of life and love for God continues to impact the world today through her sisters.

"She was a woman with one idea," Mother Maria Catherine said. "And her one idea was to love God and to make him greatly loved."

Born in New York in 1867, Mother Tallon was the seventh of eight children born to Irish immigrants. Although her mother initially tried to discourage her from religious life, Mother Tallon entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in South Bend, Indiana, at age 19. She stayed with the sisters for 33 years and taught in Catholic schools.

In 1920, she founded a new congregation in New York City — the Parish Visitors — to teach the faith and, in particular, reach lapsed and uninstructed Catholics. While Mother Tallon died in 1954, her sisters continue to evangelize and catechize in the

United States, where they have convents in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio, as well as in Nigeria and the Philippines.

In 2013, the church declared her a "Servant of God," meaning that her life and virtues are being investigated for a cause for her canonization.

Brown, Mother Tallon's relative, attends Mother Tallon's home parish, St. Bernard's Church in Waterville, New York. Brown, 79, learned about Mother Tallon through her grandmother, who was Mother Tallon's niece and goddaughter. She hoped that people would take away from Mother Tallon's life "how faithful she was, and how we could all be that faithful."

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Even as a girl, Mother Tallon demonstrated a love for God. She grew up on a farm outside Waterville, a destination for hops picking for making beer. When families with children arrived, Mother Tallon would teach them about faith, Brown said.

Mother Tallon also exemplified selflessness in everyday life. Before entering religious life, she worked in Utica and would commute by train, Brown said. One day, Mother Tallon sat next to someone who was sick, and she took off her hat so the person could vomit into it.

Mother Tallon wanted every person she encountered to know that they are called to be saints, Mother Maria Catherine said.

"She understood the call of baptism — for every baptized Catholic to be a saint," she said. "Every single person she met, no matter what religion they were, she would talk to them about God and about the need to be saints."

Her students were no exception. Mother Tallon taught her pupils to grow in holiness.

"In today's world, in today's Catholic world, it's so important — her message of holiness in life is so important to bring to our people, especially our young people," Mother Maria Catherine said.

Mother Tallon's witness also speaks to families, Mother Maria Catherine said. Throughout her life, Mother Tallon cared for children and families in need. She offered night classes when she learned some of her students' siblings could not

receive religious instruction because they had to work. She taught faith at a home for destitute children. She helped students she saw struggling.

Mother Maria Catherine called Mother Tallon's charism "a charism for today" when family life is eroding.

"Families don't eat together," she said. "They don't speak to one another because they're on their phones. … They don't enjoy each other's company."

She said families and other groups of people visit the congregation's motherhouse chapel in Monroe, New York, where Mother Tallon's remains are interred, to pray for Mother Tallon's intercession. Many successfully pray for family members to return to the church. Others successfully pray to have a child. Some also pray for healing of family members or for reconciliation in their families.

Today, Mother Tallon's sisters continue to live out her mission as contemplative missionaries. They embrace a contemplative prayer life as well as their missionary visitation to parish families and religious instruction. They do door-to door-evangelization and, more recently, have begun to train lay people in door-to-door evangelization.

They dedicate their lives to God just as Mother Tallon did. As Mother Maria Catherine put it, "She loved him and she wanted to make him loved. Simple."