

# Sister Maria Troncatti, missionary of hope among the peoples

*In the photo, Mr. Juwà Bosco, a member of the Shuar people, miraculously healed through the intercession of Blessed Maria Troncatti.*

The second Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to be honoured on the altars!

*The message of the 99<sup>th</sup> World Mission Day 2025 finds its concrete and luminous fulfilment in Blessed Maria Troncatti. Sister Maria was an extension and continuation of Jesus the Good Samaritan and of Mary Help of Christians for the Shuar indigenous people and the colonists of Ecuador. She embraced the joys and hopes, the rights of the weakest, and became a mother and defender of human and spiritual life. She educated the two peoples in solidarity, prayed and worked to create a happy, supportive, and reconciled humanity among them. The hope of uniting the two “enemy” ethnic groups and building a lasting fraternity between them was so strong that it led her to ask the Lord to accept her sacrificial offering for their reconciliation. Nothing could have been achieved without a life of prayer and fraternal communion.*

For World Mission Day 2025, a Jubilee Year, a message focused on hope (cf. Bull *Spez non confundit*, 1) has been chosen, entitled: “Missionaries of hope among the peoples”. The Holy Father Francis, referring to the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, highlighted some important aspects of missionary identity that invited us to follow in the footsteps of Christ, to be bearers and builders of hope among the peoples and to renew the mission of hope. Christ, in his earthly existence, came to proclaim liberation to the poor (cf. Lk 4:16-21), and

through His disciples "He continues His ministry of hope for humanity. He still bends today over every poor, afflicted, desperate person oppressed by evil, to pour 'the oil of consolation and the wine of hope on their wounds' (Preface 'Jesus the Good Samaritan')."

Sister Maria Troncatti was an extension and continuation of Jesus the Good Samaritan and of Mary Help of Christians for the Shuar indigenous people and the colonists of Ecuador. Born in Corteno Golgi in 1883, Lombardy, she became a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians in 1908. She left Nizza in 1922 for Ecuador and from 1925 until 1969 (the year of her birth into heaven) she was a "pioneer" in the new mission of the Amazonian East. With the balm of her exquisite motherhood (she was affectionately called "*madrecita*"!) she eagerly went to meet all those in need to help, heal, and save them: the sick, men wounded by the law of revenge, victims of poisoning, girls and adolescents who had fled a chivaria where families were in conflict, women struck with an axe by violent and drunken husbands, unwanted children, orphaned newborns due to their mothers' poisoning, and these last were the object of her predilection. As a young Sister in Varazze during the First World War, she had taken a Red Cross nurse's course and knew well how to bandage and what to pour on wounds to make them heal. There were also wounds to be healed in the spirit. Thus, her *botiquín* became, in addition to a clinic, also a "*camera caritatis*", a centre of human and spiritual formation, a place for courageous examinations of conscience, **a true clinic of the soul**. While disinfecting and bandaging wounds, her gaze was directed to the soul in need of the balm of God's forgiveness.

When asked what medicines she used to heal the most desperate cases she reached by canoe, on horseback or on foot, she replied, "I don't know." However inexplicable, she managed to heal people. In front of patients, she manifested her hope placed only in God and in the Madonna, with simple but incisive phrases that encouraged listeners to take refuge under the mantle of the Holy Virgin. "I give you the

medicines, but it is Mary Help of Christians who obtains healing for you!"

Even the Salesian confreres affectionately defined her: "*like a mother*", "*a true mother*", "*a mom*". Sister Maria invited them to her *botiquín*, listened to their difficulties and joys related to evangelisation, offered them a cool drink, a medicine or a remedy for tired and aching feet, and regenerated them physically and spiritually.

Blessed Maria Troncatti had made her own the concrete living conditions of those to whom she had been sent to bring the good news of salvation and hope. Indeed, Pope Francis in his message, referring to the Second Vatican Council, reminds believers that "the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the people of today, especially of the poor and of all those who suffer, are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ, and there is nothing genuinely human that does not find an echo in their hearts" (*Gaudium et spes*, 1).

United with Christ and driven by the love of Christ, Sister Maria was able not only to listen to the cry of the poor who asked her for life and health, dignity and rights, but she made their hopes and sorrows her own. A caring and responsible guardian of everyone's life, and especially of the weakest, while caring for the Shuar she became a defender of their rights, especially those concerning land, wages, purchases, and sales, and followed every phase even though she knew that some colonists were not happy with this progress. The colonists used the Shuar as servants or labourers to clear land for their profit in exchange for paltry compensation, agreed upon with degrading selfishness, for example: mirrors, combs, necklaces. Sister Maria maternally understood everything and advised for the best.

The hope of a relationship of peace and reconciliation between the two ethnic groups was always the dream of Sister Maria, the FMA, and the Salesian confreres. Their aim was to educate the new generations of "adversary ethnic groups" together, promoting a serene coexistence between them at school, in the

boarding school, and in the playground. They wanted to educate them to encounter, recognise, and appreciate different cultures. The Pius XII hospital was also considered a home for everyone, where everyone was welcomed without distinction and cared for both in body and spirit, with great competence and much heart by Sister Maria.

The future of that corner of Amazonian land was built only on fraternity and this found great resonance in her heart, so much so that she asked the Lord to accept her sacrificial offering for their reconciliation, a reconciliation that flourished stably after her death, which occurred in a plane crash on 25 August 1969. Sister Maria had stated, "I would be very happy to be able to offer my life so that peace may return to this population." That day the colonists and the Shuar affirmed that their 'mother' had died; that a saint had died! Consoled by the Heart of Christ, she became a sign of consolation and hope for all.

With her life and death, she was a true artisan of reconciliation and peace and restorer "of a humanity often distracted and unhappy," as Pope Francis urged.

She educated for a supportive and reconciled humanity by promoting responsibility among the young women. Indeed, for each village she dedicated herself to preparing young nurses who could offer first aid. In addition, she organised sewing, cooking, hygiene, and childcare courses to complete the formation of the boarders. To save abandoned Shuar children, she invited Christian Shuar or colonist women to act as wet nurses, adopting them, and many Italian women committed themselves to supporting these children from a distance.

Sister Maria created a network of humanity attentive to others and happy to do good, a humanity that in the message of World Mission Day is called "paschal humanity" and "people of the Spring", as it is "the Pasch of the Lord that marks the eternal Spring of history" and therefore "death and hatred are not the last words on human existence (cf. 'Catechesis', 23 August 2017)."

This hope – Francis affirmed – has its roots in prayer and

fraternal communion. Sister Maria, between a conversation and a cool drink, or between administering medicine, extracting a tooth, and removing a bullet with a simple penknife, cleaning and bandaging an infected wound, always had the prayer of the *Hail Mary* on her lips. Every day, she woke up before dawn to be in the chapel very early and live the Way of the Cross in silence. Even before starting treatments, Sister Maria would say, "One moment". It was a brief time of discernment, courage, decision, and strength to act. Then she would repeat, "My Jesus! Mary Help of Christians, pray for us."

At the conclusion of his message, Francis asserts that "evangelisation is always a communal process, like the character of Christian hope (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 14)." Blessed Maria Troncatti had always been the soul of cohesion between herself and the Sisters of the community; between the FMA and Salesian confreres; between them and the peoples who had to recognise each other as 'brothers'.

The desire for communion and of her maternal goodness, ready for any sacrifice for others, accompanied her until the end. As an old woman, she was always at the door of the Pius XII Hospital, ready to welcome. She would say, "I can no longer work, but I am happy to stay with my poor savages. The sick always come to the hospital; they always come from afar to visit me."

The message of this World Mission Day finds its concrete and luminous fulfilment in the life of Blessed Maria Troncatti. Pope Leo XIV will canonise her on 19 October 2025, together with Blessed Ignazio Choukrallah Maloyan, Peter To Rot, Vincenza Maria Poloni, Maria del Monte Carmelo Rendiles Martínez, José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros, and Bartolo Longo. Seventy-four years after the canonisation of the Co-foundress Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, presided over by Pope Pius XII in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican on 24 June 1951, another Daughter of Mary Help of Christians with a fully missionary heart will be declared a Saint, and precisely in the Jubilee Year of Hope: Blessed Maria Troncatti, who was a

true missionary of hope among the peoples!

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