

One hundred years since the birth of Carolina Cauchi into Eternal Life-Benefactress and Foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Malta.

Carolina's Background

Carolina Cauchi was born in Senglea on the 25th December 1824, the only child of the Notary Nicolo Cauchi, from Victoria, Gozo and Theresa nee Galea from Senglea, Malta.

The family Cauchi took up residence in Senglea for a period of time; however Nicolo worked in Gozo and travelled back and forth from Victoria to Senglea. As his work load being on the increase, Nicolo transferred his family to Victoria, Gozo where they took up residence at the zone known as San Gorg tal-Hagar.

The family Cauchi was affluent, therefore Carolina was sent off to school to continue her education inspite of the fact that at the time girls received little education. Carolina learned to write Italian well and she knew Latin as well. Above all she received an optimal Christian upbringing.

Carolina and Fortunata

Since childhood Carolina nurtured a desire to dedicate her whole life to God. She strengthened her desire on meeting her cousin Fortunata Spiteri, who had similar desires.

Fortunata was also the only child of Isidoro Spiteri from Victoria, Gozo and Maria Anna nee Libreri. The family Spiteri had been residing in Valletta City for a period of time, in St Dominic's Parish. Fortunata was quite familiar with the Dominicans and with the help of certain Dominican priests she felt drawn to the Dominican ideal.

Solicitor Isidoro's increase in his work load led him to decide to move with his family to Victoria, Gozo.

Carolina and Fortunata, although with a difference of seven years of age between them, it did not take them long to become close friends. However theirs was not a common friendship. Both of them had decided to consecrate their life to the Lord. On the 15th October 1851, Fortunata thus wrote to Carolina: "My dear sister, yes pray without ceasing until you obtain for me the grace of seeing the will of God accomplished in both of us by being espoused to Him through Solemn Profession, and thus being one with Him we will go to bless the Holy One towards whom our work tends. Praised be Jesus our Eternal Spouse. Praised be Mary Our Mother. Praised be Our Father St Dominic".

Fortunata passed on to Carolina the spirit of St Dominic which she received from the Dominican priests. Thus both of them looked at St Dominic as their spiritual Father. Both of them experienced great thirst for the love of God and like St Dominic they talked only about God and with God. St Dominic's motto "Veritas" stood out in their life. They delighted only in Jesus Christ and His teaching. They made their own the Dominican motto "Contemplata aliis tradere" – giving to others the fruit of contemplation. Fortunata and Carolina ardently sought to contemplate and live the truth of the Word of God. They did not fail to give from the fruits of their contemplation to those who came into their lives. They were not attached to material goods. Inspired by St Dominic's spirit of poverty and his virtue of compassion they helped the suffering and the poor. Above all they financially helped the Church in Gozo to be officially recognized as a Diocese.

Desire to live a Contemplative Life

Fortunata and Carolina wanted to live a life of perfection by being espoused to Christ through Solemn Profession in a Dominican Monastery. “I am set wholeheartedly on serving Jesus Christ to whom I am already consecrated”, Carolina wrote to Fortunata. There was no Monastery of Dominican Contemplative Life in our islands, therefore they wished to go to Italy. It was not easy that their desire becomes reality. Between 1851 and 1862 the idea of Fortunata and Carolina leaving their country was modified as shown in two letters which they wrote to the Archbishop of Malta – Msgr Alessandro Franchi. Both of them promised to have a monastery of nuns built out of their own funds. Originally it was Fortunata’s parents who came up with the idea of a monastery of nuns. After their death Fortunata wished to carry out their desire, with Carolina’s support and help.

Carolina loses a dear cousin and friend

After three months from the installation of the Gozitan Diocese, during the night of 15-16th December 1864 Fortunata fell ill and died at the age of thirty-two. Fortunata’s sudden death was a great blow for Carolina, because she not only lost her best friend, but also the person who inspired her and who was working with her for the foundation of a Dominican Monastery.

Doubtless Carolina went through a dark period. The hope that was born in the hearts of both young women at the establishment of the Diocese was weakened. But God, rich in love and mercy provided for Carolina the priest Fr Peter Pace, Vicar General of the Diocese of Gozo who encouraged her and kept alive in her the hope that when the time comes the monastery for the Diocese would one day become a reality.

In the meantime Carolina continued to progress in the way of Christian perfection and she lived as a consecrated person in her home. She had a habit of jotting down any counsel she received or anything that touched her as she listened to a sermon in order to remember it and put it into practice. She had a great devotion to her father St Dominic and she entrusted to him the hope that the final difficulties for the erection of a Dominican Monastery in Gozo would be overcome.

A Monastery of Dominican Contemplative Nuns

A great light appeared for Carolina at the beginning of 1872. She found herself mistress of all she possessed. She had inherited great wealth and she finally could realize in a concrete way what she had promised Archbishop Alessandro Franchi ten years earlier – the building and foundation of a Dominican Monastery. The formal agreement for the foundation of the nuns was signed at the Bishop’s Palace on the 21st September, feast of St Matthew, before Bishop Peter Pace and the notary Aloisio Calleja Pace. Doubtless this date was purposely chosen by Carolina because St Dominic always carried with him St Matthew’s Gospel together with the letters of St Paul.

The thought of a monastery for contemplative nuns “meaning enclosed and totally separated from the world” had always prevailed in Carolina’s mind. She desired the nuns to be free from the distractions of the world so that their minds would be set completely on God, while they interceded for sinners. She must certainly have been impressed by the way St Dominic prayed, sighing before God and praying to Him, “Lord, what will become of sinners?”

Bishop Peter Pace worked very hard to obtain the necessary permissions, because contemplative nuns used to depend directly on the Pope.

The laying of the foundation stone took place on the 1st May 1885 at the beginning of the month dedicated to Our Lady of Pompei. The ceremony started with a talk by Fr Vincent Borg, Dominican Prior at the convent of Our Lady of the Grotto, Rabat. Fr Vincent spoke about the great works of St Dominic and praised the nobility of the project.

First Community of Maltese Dominican Sisters

The first Dominican community consisting of 9 women was born on the 6th October 1889, feast of Our lady of the Rosary. These women after taking part in the procession, returned to the monastery and started to live as contemplative nuns. However until this community was formally recognized and accepted by the Dominican Order in August 1893 the ideal was modified and they started to be known as a community of the Dominican Third Order.

The pleasures and riches of this world never distracted or hindered Carolina from her union with God. She knew how to use the material goods she possessed for the glory of God and the good of humanity. She lived the spirit of poverty after the example of Our Mother Mary and Our Father St Dominic. She consecrated herself to God so that she would carry out solely His Will. God looked down on her littleness and worked great things for her.

Carolina who was almost sixty-five when the monastery was founded, did not interfere in any way with the administration of the Congregation which she had founded. She had a very good relationship with the Sisters. At the beginning she frequently visited the Sisters but she never stayed at the monastery. During the summer she would often invite the Sisters for a vacation at her holiday house in Xlendi.

Carolina was pleased to see the Congregation growing in number and progressing in the apostolate. In fact she confirmed her former dispositions in favour of the Monastery.

Carolina's Last Years

Carolina spent the last years of her life almost completely retired at her home. If she would have so desired, Carolina could have taken up residence at the Monastery of the Annunciation as it was called, where the Sisters would have taken good care of her. However she chose to remain at home so that she would leave the Sisters free for prayer and the apostolate. Languishing from the illness which had overtaken her years earlier, but calm and always with a smile on her face, Carolina went to meet God the Father on the 17th July 1907 at the age of eighty-two.

Carolina Cauchi will always be remembered as Benefactress and Foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Malta.

Benefactress because she gave all her material possessions in favour of the Congregation. Doubtless Carolina is also **Foundress** of the Congregation. Her desire to join the Contemplative Dominican Nuns was the foundation of the hidden thought of God for the founding of the Congregation. This desire was modified and she worked for the erection of a Dominican Monastery. The zeal for holiness and the Dominican Spirituality which she learned from her cousin Fortunata and from certain Dominican priests, she passed on to the first Sisters. With gentleness and tact she admonished and encouraged the Sisters to observe the Dominican Rule and to grow in holiness.

Carolina's name will remain inscribed in the book of the saints because the consecration which she made to the Lord in her youth, she kept untarnished to the end of her life.

Carolina's name will be remembered with love and great respect for the great good that our Congregation carries out with suffering humanity.