

In the afternoon of October 9, the solemn burial took place. ...

In the cemetery, below the Calvary group, a small double tomb was made of concrete and the two coffins were placed in it...(Sr. Assumpta Volpert SSpS, *Ein Rebenhang im wahren Weinberg, Geschichte der C.M.S.SP.S., Steyl 1951, pp. 140-141*).

On October 17, 1950, Bishop Lemmens of Roermond initiated the first part of the proceedings for the beatification of Mothers Maria/ Maria Virgo and Mother Josepha in the Motherhouse of the Missionary Sisters in Steyl (*ibid.*, p. 141).

Having arrived at the place of honour – the wish fulfilled

The proceedings for the beatification of Mother Maria / Maria Virgo were completed in 1995 and she was beatified on May 7, 1995. Since April 18, 1995 those of her remains that were buried in the cemetery of the Missionary Sisters have found their final resting place in the sarcophagus in the small chapel, adjacent to the church in the Sacred Heart Convent in Steyl, whereas her “praying hands and knees” are placed in a small shrine in the church of the Cloistered Sisters in Steyl.

For Mother Josepha the proceedings for the beatification find their completion this year 2008: on June 29 her beatification will be celebrated.

Part of the proceedings for the beatification require that the remains be canonically identified. After the small zinc coffin with the remains of Mother Josepha – with permission of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities – had been transferred on April 17 from the cemetery to the Sacred Heart Convent, this identification took place on April 18. Thereafter two Sisters covered the mortal remains in pure linen und placed them in a new zinc coffin. The documents of this procedure were also placed in the coffin and then it was soldered. In a simple procession the coffin covered with a white cloth was taken to the chapel next to the main church and placed in the sarcophagus right next to Mother Maria (Sr. Mechtilde Berger SSpS).

Fr. Arnold and surely many Sisters, as well, wished that the two Mothers would be given a place of honour in their respective cemeteries. Their wish was finally fulfilled – but in a way they would never have dreamt of.



17 and 18 april 2008



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The Arnoldus Family Story

A WISH

On the occasion of the death of Mother Josepha, on May 20, 1903, Arnold Janssen wrote to the Missionary Sisters in Steyl:

With regard to the graves, it was not possible to give the two Mothers Maria and Josepha a place of honour in the present cemetery. But they are to have one as soon as the new cemetery (or rather the two new cemeteries) are ready and the bodies can be transferred (Ortrud Stegmaier SSpS, ed., transl. Jacqueline Mulberge SSpS, Arnold Janssen, M. Josepha, Hendrina Stenmanns, Correspondence 1884-1903, p. 445).

On April 17 and 18, 2008 the mortal remains of Mother Josepha were transferred from the cemetery to the church of the Sacred Heart convent in Steyl, the motherhouse of the Mission Congregation, Servants of the Holy Spirit. There she found her final resting place next to Mother Maria in a common sarcophagus. Now Fr. Arnold's wish for a place of honour for our two Mothers has finally been fulfilled. Yet it was a long way which led to April 18, 2008.

The way to the place of honour

Mother Maria / Maria Virgo and Mother Josepha are co-foundresses of the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit which in their time consisted of two branches: the Missionary Sisters (since 1889) and the Cloistered Sisters (since 1896). Following the wish of Fr. Arnold, Mother Maria, then Superior of the Missionary Sisters, joined the Cloistered Sisters on December 8, 1898 and began her novitiate as Sr. Maria Virgo. However, already on February 3, 1900 she died. Only a few days before her death, on January 31, she made her vows as a cloistered sister “until the end of the novitiate”. *“She herself signed the vow formula ‘with hand shaking, but without interruption’”* Fr. Wegener, who represented the absent Fr. Arnold, accepted the VOWS (Karl Müller, transl. Frank Mansfield SVD, Contemplation and Mission, Sister - Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, 1896-1996, Analecta SVD – 76/2, p.75).

When Fr. Arnold, in St. Gabriel, learned of her death he wrote to the Cloistered – and Missionary Sisters:

...I have just received the sad news that our good mother, former Superior General Sr. Maria, has been called by the Lord of life and death from this temporal existence into eternity. This is a great blow to me. I esteemed the deceased highly because God

himself had called her to stand at my side as first co-foundress of the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit....

Just as she was leader of the Sisters for so long, particularly at the time when the Congregation was taking its first steps, may the Lord God make her leader of our Sisters in the land of the saints! She represented both branches of the Congregation; she belongs both to the Cloistered as well as to the Missionary Sisters. ... May her remembrance always be honored by the Sisters and because of her position may she be given special distinction ... (ibid., p. 76).

In those days both branches of the Congregation lived in those buildings which today are called “St. Gregory”. Fr. Arnold had bought the oldest building from the Augustinian Sisters, Sisters of Notre Dame, who had come earlier from Essen/Germany to Steyl because of the “Kulturkampf” in Germany and who had returned to Essen when it was over. A convent garden and cemetery also belonged to that building. In this cemetery, in which 8 Augustinian Sisters had already been buried, all Missionary and Cloistered Sisters were buried until 1904 as well. On February 7, 1900 Mother Maria / Maria Virgo was buried there. Mother Josepha died on May 20, 1903 and was buried there on May 23. On the occasion of her death, Fr. Arnold wrote to the Missionary Sisters from St. Gabriel:

... This death is another hard blow for me, as I am robbed of yet a further support whom the Lord God had placed at my side for the building up of the religious foundation.

It is also a harsh blow for the sisters, because they have lost a good Mother who rightly bears the title of a co-foundress of the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit. ...

Having described the life and virtues of Mother Josepha he continued:

... Like the late Mother Maria she was also sincerely devoted to the Society of the Divine Word, from which your Congregation was founded. In this regard she has left a shining example to all her daughters. Altogether everything that I have said here about Mother Josepha applies equally to the late Mother Maria. Therefore I would like to place these simple lines as a wreath of recognition at the grave of the two beloved Mothers Maria and Josepha and consequently I also address these lines to the Reverend Cloistered Sisters. May you, beloved daughters, all hold the pious memory of these two Reverend Mothers in honour and faithfully imitate the example of their virtue (Ortrud Stegmaier SSpS, transl. Jacqueline Mulberge, Arnold Janssen, M. Josepha, Hendrina Stenmanns, Correspondence, 1884-1903, p. 443.444).

At the time of the death of Mother Josepha, the building of the new convent for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit was in progress and in October 1904 the Sisters were able to move into it. It is that convent which today is called “Sacred Heart Convent”. From 1904 – 1914 it was the common home for both branches of the Congregation, the Missionary and Cloistered Sisters. The part the Missionary Sisters occupied was called “Sacred Heart Convent” and the part of the Cloistered Sisters was called “Holy Spirit Convent”.

In the garden of this new convent two cemeteries were laid out, one for the

Missionary and another one for the Cloistered Sisters. On February 7/8, 1907 the coffins with the deceased Augustinian, Missionary and Cloistered Sisters were transferred to these two new cemeteries. Since the foundation of the Cloistered Sisters, three of them had died and they were the first to be buried in their cemetery. Mother Maria / Maria Virgo got the place of honour in front of cross. On her grave a bigger cross was placed than on the others, because more information about her life was written on it than about the lives of the other Sisters on their crosses, for instance how long she had been superior.

In the cemetery of the Missionary Sisters, Mother Josepha got a place of honour as well: *“There she rests in the most beautiful part of the cemetery, in front of a large cross with Mary and John standing beneath it, awaiting the hour of blessed resurrection”* (Assumpta Volpert SSpS, Mutter Maria Stollenwerk, Mutter Josepha Stenmanns, Herz-Jesu-Kloster Steyl, 1920, p. 261).

In 1914 the Cloistered Sisters moved to their own convent next to the River Maas. The name Holy Spirit Convent, that Fr. Arnold had given to their part of the common convent in 1903, in today’s St. Gregory, moved with them and so their convent and motherhouse is called “Holy Spirit Convent”. The new convent had a new cemetery, and so in May 1915 all the deceased Cloistered Sisters were transferred to that new cemetery. In the official report we read:

“Mother Maria Virgo again got a place of honor in the semi-circular bed at the foot of the cross” (Müller, Contemplation and Mission, p. 78).

On December 30, 1932 the Missionary Sisters celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Mother Maria’s entrance in Steyl. The magazine “Genossenschaftsbote” (the Congregation’s messenger), No. 69, May 1933, wrote:

Soon after the celebration we were given a great surprise. The General Council of the Cloistered Sisters had decided to give to our Congregation the larger part of the mortal remains of our blessed Mother Maria. Shortly after the celebration Reverend Mother Michaela [Superior General of the Cloistered Sisters] gave us that news. On hearing it, all of us were filled with gratitude, particularly our Reverend Sr. Gregoria, who some time ago had suggested asking for this favour and who then personally had asked the Reverend Superior of the Cloistered Sisters for this precious gift.

In September 1934 the remains of Mother Maria/Maria Virgo and Mother Josepha were exhumed. The part of Mother Maria’s remains which was destined for the Missionary Sisters was solemnly brought from the Holy Spirit Convent to the Sacred Heart Convent. The “Genossenschaftsbote” [Congregation’s messenger] wrote: *In the early morning of October 3, after a solemn High Mass had been celebrated in thanksgiving for all the graces which the dear Lord had given to our Mothers and the whole congregation, Reverend Mother Regis and four other Sisters brought the precious remains by car from the convent of the Cloistered Sisters to us. The Cloistered Sisters kept some of the remains, the ‘praying hands and knees’ ... for themselves, since Mother Maria as Sr. Maria Virgo had been one of theirs as well... Mother Maria’s remains were laid out in the chapter room in a small coffin, beside those of Mother Josepha. ..*