

# Chapter I

## THE ROOTS

(1830–1855)

### 1. Sigüenza in the XIX Century

*Saturnino López Novoa* was born in *Sigüenza*, in the province of *Guadalajara*, Spain. The city of about 5,000 people, owes its splendor not to industry or commerce, but to the fact that it is the head of a diocese with a rich history. It counts a splendid Cathedral, a great Episcopal-palace, beautiful churches, an old University, etc. In the nineteenth century, city life unfolded around the Cathedral and its Chapter, religious Orders, old guilds and liturgical feasts. In fact, religious practices characterized city life.

### 2. Birth, Family and Infancy. Death of Mother

These were the circumstances surrounding *Saturnino's* birth. His father was *Julián López Muñoz*, a native of *Santibañez*, Province of *Segovia*, Diocese of *Sigüenza*. Initially inclined to the priesthood, Julian received the clerical tonsure while studying Philosophy at the *Sigüenza* University. Eventually, he shifted from Philosophy to Music, and joined the Cathedral's Choir. In 1827, he abandoned the ecclesiastical studies for good, and married *Ildefonsa Novoa Bueno*. Three years later, on November 29, their first child, *Saturnino*, was born. The second child, *Silverio*, followed in 1832.

Unfortunately, his mother died a few days after giving birth to *Justa*, who also passed away shortly after birth. All

these happened in 1835, when *Saturnino* was less than five years old.

As *Saturnino* wrote later in his *Regla de Vida*, his mother was an excellent wife and a loving mother, so good that she was considered a saint by those who knew her well.

About his father *Don Saturnino* wrote:

*“As a good father, he knew how to inspire in his children the sentiments of a Christian and solid piety and religious education, teaching them from early childhood to recite certain prayers, like the holy rosary, which was always prayed by the whole family, the frequent reception of the sacraments and others. In all this he was very much helped by the most virtuous Manuela Bueno, mother of my Lord uncle Don Basilio Gil y Bueno. It was she, who once our mother died, took her place in relation to us.”*

### **3. In Berlanga de Duero, Learning from His Auntie Manuela**

After his mother's death, *Don Saturnino* began a new period in his life, truly decisive for his future mission. And, again, it was his aunt *Manuela*, 64 years old, who helped him to prepare for it. As an orphan, *Saturnino* was entrusted to the care of his auntie *Manuela*, a virtuous lady, who frequently accompanied by young *Saturnino*, visited the poor and gave them not only the bread she cooked at home for them, but also other farm products. Good *Manuela* had eleven children, of whom only one, *Basilio*, survived. In 1861, *Basilio* became bishop of *Huesca*. *Manuela's* husband was a shoemaker.

In 1838, *Saturnino* and *Manuela* went to *Berlanga* to live with her son *Basilio*, who had been ordained a priest in 1835. *Basilio* had been such an excellent student. When he is



1. **Praying with his auntie Manuela in Berlanga de Duero.**

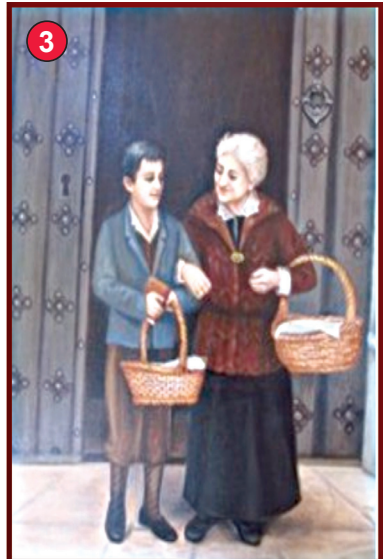
My auntie *Manuela* accustomed me to go to Mass every day, accompanying me herself; she taught me to pray the Holy Rosary, to the recitation of pious prayers which she taught me, to confess and receive Holy Communion frequently and be a devotee of the Holy Virgin (*Rule of Life*).

2. **Saturnino, receiving lessons on generosity from his auntie Manuela.**

In the distribution of alms I had the duty of measuring the goods and was always warned by my auntie not to skim over the measured goods. (*Rule of Life*).

3. **Saturnino distributes alms to the poor.**

Charity for the poor was the most prominent virtue of his auntie *Manuela*. I gave alms of bread with her every Friday and I was her confidant for other kinds of alms, like oil, *bacon*, meat, that we gave frequently.

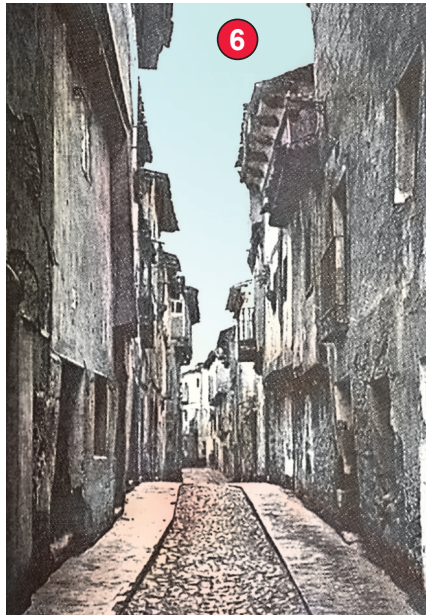




4. General view of Sigüenza.



5. Puerta del Mercado of the Cathedral.



6. Travesana Baja Street, where the Father Founder was born.

still a deacon, he won in a contest among the diocesan clergy, a canonry in the local Collegiate church.

It is not known when and where *Saturnino* made his first communion and received the sacrament of confirmation, though most probably it was in *Berlanga* around the year 1840.

Shortly after arriving in *Berlanga*, *Saturnino* began to study Latin and other subjects in the private school of Canon *Miguel Ormazábal*. The studies lasted for four years, during which *Saturnino* lived with his uncle-priest Basilio and his aunt Manuela, whose virtues and life greatly impressed him. Already at this time, *Saturnino*'s character showed certain maturity and equilibrium, reflexive spirit, and a sense of order—traits that characterized his whole life.

Aunt Manuela will be the code that will explain the life of the future Founder, as he himself admits:

*“I have always considered one of the most important gifts received from God the help extended to me by such a virtuous person in my upbringing and education.”*

Manuela, a sister of *Don Saturnino*'s maternal grandmother, was born in 1771 in *Las Inviernas* (Guadalajara). The family settled in *Sigüenza*, where *Manuela* married *Juan de Dios Gil*.

*Don Saturnino* called both father and mother “*honorable, hardworking, and humble artisans.*” Thanks to the sacrifices they imposed upon themselves, they could educate their niece *Ildefonsa* and allow their son *Basilio* to enroll at the University of *San Antonio of Portaceli*, in *Sigüenza*. In 1827, *Basilio* received a scholarship that permitted him to transfer to the *Sigüenza Seminary*. He was on his third year of Theology. He

finished the ecclesiastical studies in 1832. Being still a deacon, he took part in competitive public exams, obtaining a canonry in the Collegiate Church of Berlanga de Duero. He was ordained a priest in 1835. In 1838 Manuela and his nephew in law, *Julián* went to *Berlanga* to live there. *Saturnino*, seven years old, accompanied them.

Berlanga was at that time a peaceful village of 1,700 inhabitants, whose life unfolded around the Collegiate church. About his life in *Berlanga*, *Don Saturnino* wrote:

*“While Don Basilio took care of my literary formation, his mother, whom I consider my own, carefully educated me according to the principles of our religion and of Christian piety. Both of us went to Mass and said the rosary daily, and frequently went to confession and communion; she taught me the devotion to our Blessed Mother the Virgin Mary and to practice charity with the poor, which was her most outstanding virtue.”*

Now, we have to say something about the future orientation of *Don Saturnino*’s life. Considering his uncle’s exemplary priestly life, and Manuela’s example of charitable generosity towards the poor, we will be able to explain *Don Saturnino*’s vocation to the priesthood.

The years spent at *Berlanga* shaped *Don Saturnino*’s spirituality. His priestly ministry would be characterized by an outstanding charity towards the poor and in this we can discover aunt Manuela’s influence as he says:

*“I owe to her my sentiments of charity towards the poor.”*

When Manuela distributed each Friday portions of bread, pork, meat, oil, etc., to the needy, *Saturnino* was always at her

side to help. She told him that, when measuring the wheat loaned to farmers for the sowing, he should never give the bare minimum, but rather a generous overflowing.

*“The more we give”, – she used to say, “The more we received from God.”* No poor ever called on her door without receiving some alms for, as auntie Manuela used to say, *“God could be in the person of any poor.”*

Such precious example of aunt Manuela’s charity was a great catechesis for *Saturnino* teaching him to identify Christ with the poor. It was a great lesson he learned at such a young age:

*“She taught me to love the poor much and as a result my only friends were two poor boys, to whom I gave everything I had get. As the father of one of them was bedridden for years, and since his only sustenance were the alms gathered by his son, I used to go to their home to help cook food for him. I also took care of their laundry...”*

This was the environment in which *Saturnino* lived for four years. After his mother’s early death at the age of 33, auntie Manuela took over.

#### **4. Ecclesiastical Studies**

On September 1842, almost twelve years old then, young *Saturnino* went to *Sigüenza* to begin his ecclesiastical studies. Paying a daily pension of five “*reales*”, he was for the first three years of Philosophy and first of Theology a day student seminarian. He lived with his father, whose salary, as one of the musicians of the Cathedral, was only seven “*reales*”, and had married Antonia Arauzo in 1840. One year after, Guillermo,

the only son of the couple, was born. In the same year, Julián was elected Vice Mayor of the City. Soon after, he lost both jobs on account of the persecutory laws against the Church by the Madrid's Government: as Administrator of the Rents of Pious Works of the Cathedral's Cabildo and as a musician of the Cathedral. To survive, Julián opened a groceries' store on the ground floor of his house. His son Silverio, who had finished the first year of Philosophy as a day student of the Seminary of Sigüenza, obtained a minor job in the Cathedral, thus, helping in the daily sustenance of the family. Also, *Saturnino* that same summer obtained a scholarship that permitted him to live in Seminary. These two jobs, small as they were, were a great economic help to the family.

This was the family environment of *Saturnino's* youth, during which he learned precious lessons of virtue: the patient silence and meritorious poverty of Antonia, his father's second wife, whom *Saturnino* revered, considered and called mother, and the constant sacrifice of his father to rear his family. *Saturnino's* great regard of his father:

*"a truly Christian man, most honest and able,"* increased notably during those years. He was so esteemed by his fellow citizens that they elected him City Councilor for the period 1841 to 1849, and Vice Mayor for the years 1852–1855.

The four years that *Saturnino* spent in his father's house during his schooling days, were very important for his personal maturity as preparation for the mission the Providence had in store for him. Living with his family, *Saturnino* learned the domestic virtues that would later help him in his priestly life: obedience, hard work, humility, and sacrifice. If in *Berlanga Saturnino* learned charity from his virtuous aunt Manuela, in *Sigüenza* he discovered the value of poverty. Later, he would faithfully practice this virtue in his priestly life, while at the same time doing all he could for the poor.



## 5. Exemplary Seminarian

The seminary of *St. Bartolome* was founded in 1651 by bishop *Bartolome Santos Risoba*. Originally it was located in “*Calle Nueva*.” It was there until bishop *Benavides* (1858–1876) transferred it to the Convent of “*Jeronimos*.”

The War of Independence (1808–1814) disrupted life in the seminaries; and the almost continued upheavals in of the social and political life of Spain in the nineteenth century seriously affected the religious life of the people, whose customs became lax; there were fewer vocations, the level of their spiritual life was low, and the intellectual formation was very poor. However, the decade 1843–1854, during which *Saturnino* made his studies, was exceptionally peaceful, a fact that was favorable to life in the seminaries. The Seminary of Sigüenza was considered one of the best in Spain in so far as scientific and cultural life was concerned even better than that of the local University. However, the fact that two-thirds of the seminarians were living outside the seminary contributed to the relaxation of their spiritual life. In a sermon to the seminarians on the feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Saturnino* lamented this situation.

In spite of all this, the Sigüenza seminary gave the Church during those years a considerable number of exemplary priests, among them, the Servant of God *Eladio Mozas*, founder of the Josephine Religious of the Holy Trinity and the first bishop of Madrid, *Narciso Martinez Izquierdo*, assassinated in 1886. His process of beatification has been opened.

In the seminary *Saturnino* was faithful to his vocation and advanced in the interior life through frequent personal prayer and his encounters with Christ. In the period 1847–1852, *Saturnino*, still a seminarian preached nine sermons to his fellow seminarians as part of the literary exercises of the month of May. He obtained the highest qualifications. Through them, we can discover a priestly soul that encouraged his companions

to be faithful to their priestly vocation and to act consistently— counsels proper of a person conscious of his future mission and of his apostolic character.

In the seminary, *Saturnino* observed all rules and behaved as a very good and conscientious student, always receiving the highest notes. He spoke Latin fluently, and acquired a good knowledge of Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Sacred Scripture and Patrology. He also made it a point to write correctly, clearly and to certain extend, elegantly.

Towards the end of the third year of Theology, on June 21, 1848, he and his brother Silverio received the priestly tonsure, first step towards the priesthood.

*Saturnino* used to spend his vacations in *Berlanga* with his uncle *Basilio* and aunt Manuela, who continued to help the family giving a great example of charity and other Christian virtues.

## 6. Death of Auntie Manuela

*Saturnino's* aunt, Manuela, died on January 25, 1849 in *Berlanga*, at the age of 77, leaving behind her a fame of true holiness. *Don Saturnino* received the news a few days after. He felt it deeply for aunt Manuela had been a mother to him. In his writings, *Don Saturnino* dedicates more pages to Manuela than to his parents and to Bishop *Basilio*. In them he shows how much he loved her and his deep gratitude not only for having taken his mother's place, but very especially for her example of a deep spiritual life. *Don Saturnino* praised her resignation and joy during her sickness.

*“Her edifying devotion and her exemplary fervor were impressed in the reception of the sacraments of the dying. Her holy death was attested to by the whole village, while the cries and the tears*

*of the poor showed their pain at the loss of such a great benefactor.”*

*Don Saturnino* adds that the three priests, the two doctors and other persons that were present at her death heard a beautiful music.

Manuela:

*“Always observed a most virtuous, industrious and exemplary life. Notwithstanding the high dignity of her son, Bishop Basilio, she always dressed modestly, as a humble artisan from Sigüenza... She never went to public or profane representations, and found it painful to make personal visits, except to the sick neighbors, especially if they were poor, to whom she always brought some alms...Her devotion was very great and constant. Her behavior was natural and quite simple, and her character affable and most kind. She liked very much to talk to persons of lower birth like farmers, gardeners and artisans and most of all, to the poor.” “Her love for the virtue of charity was such that her greatest glory was to practice it continuously. After God, the poor were her greatest treasure; they were her good friends with whom she talked delightfully sharing their pains and sorrows. When she could help a misfortune and alleviate a need, she felt such a great joy that she could not hide it. More than once, I saw her giving away her own dresses, still good, to dress poor women. It would be a task without end to give an account of the many fine actions of her profound charity.”*

*“The poor will make us rich.”* This saying of auntie Manuela will frequently appear in *Don Saturnino’s* writings to the Little Sisters.

## 7. From Sigüenza to Barbastro

At the end of the 1851–1852 school year, *Saturnino* ended his ecclesiastical studies, but he was only 21 years old, three years short of reach the ordination age. To use his natural talents and the good traits he had learned during his seven years as a seminarian, the following school year he was appointed sub-Director or Vigilant of the seminary, with Silverio as his assistant. Besides that, he taught Latin, Spanish and History. In the school year 1853–1854, he taught third year Latin, Poetry, first year Greek and History.

On March 12, 1852, he received the four minor orders. As was the custom in those years in Spain, he participated with many other priests in a contest for parishes, obtaining one of the highest notes.

On May 22, 1853, his uncle *Basilio* was appointed “Dean” of Barbastro’s Cathedral. As it was difficult to find good professors for the newly opened Seminary of Barbastro, *Don Basilio* suggested to the bishop to call *Saturnino*, who had already a good reputation in Sigüenza. Accepting the advice of his uncle, *Saturnino* went to *Barbastro* in 1854, just on time for the opening of the new school year.

*Barbastro* had at that time about 6,200 people, mainly engaged in agriculture, commerce, and small industry. The city history had been closely linked with the diocese since 1100 when the city, just reconquered by the Arabs, Pope Urban II appointed Saint Poncius as the first bishop at the request of King Peter I of Aragon. Suppressed 43 years later, it was restored by Saint Pius V in 1571 at the petition of King Philip II, as a way to prevent the infiltration of the Protestants from France through the Pyrenees. The period 1500–1553 and the construction of the Collegiate church later transformed into Cathedral and around which evolved the city life.

*Saturnino* lived in the seminary devoted to the formation of the seminarians. As he had a little time left, he enrolled in

the faculty of Canon Law, where he obtained the highest note, (*meritissimus*) both on the first and second year.

## 8. The Gift of the Priesthood

The year 1855 was a memorable one for *Saturnino*. On March 3, he was ordained subdeacon; on June 2, deacon and, on September 22, he received the order of the **priesthood**. The place of the three ordinations was not *Barbastro*, whose bishop was sick, but *Huesca*, fifty kilometers away, the ordaining prelate being bishop *Pedro de Zarandía y Endara*. *Don Saturnino* celebrated his first Mass at the *Sanctuary of Our Lady of El Pueyo*, Patroness of the city, five kilometers away from *Barbastro*.

Unfortunately, we cannot know the inner feelings of *Saturnino* upon receiving the priesthood because no reference to them has been found in his writings. But knowing him, we can presume that he celebrated the event with deep joy, giving sincere thanks to God for such great a gift.

Once ordained, *Saturnino* found himself in a great deep conflict. On the one side, he was still incardinated in the Diocese of *Sigüenza*, where one of the best parishes—won in the contest mentioned above — was waiting for him. On the other, his uncle *Basilio* needed him in *Barbastro*. His father wrote him a nice letter explaining the material advantages of returning to *Sigüenza*, but leaving up to him the final decision. Putting aside those material advantages, good priest *Saturnino* decided to remain in *Barbastro* to help his uncle Dean *Basilio* who, at after the death of the local Bishop *Fort y Puig*, was elected Vicar Capitular and Administrator of the diocese. From then on, *Saturnino*'s life would be connected to *Barbastro*, especially with regard to beginnings of the great work for which the Divine Providence had set him aside: the foundation of the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly.

## *Chapter II*

### **IN THE SERVICE OF BISHOP GIL Y BUENO**

*(1855–1870)*

*Don Saturnino* was in the service of his uncle bishop *Gil Y Bueno*, first as Vicar Capitular of Barbastro, and afterwards, as Bishop of *Huesca*, from 1855 up to 1870, the year the bishop died in Rome. Don Basilio found in his nephew great help in pastoral ministry, and *Don Saturnino* had the opportunity to become acquainted with great ecclesiastical personalities. The discharge of great responsibilities shortly after his ordination matured his priestly character and increased his experience.

*Saturnino* lived with his uncle in the episcopal palace, and both were taken care of by *María Magro Novoa*, the bishop's niece and *Don Saturnino's* cousin.

*Saturnino* was appointed private Secretary of the bishop, indeed a most confidential post. At the same time, the Ecclesiastical Governor's secretary of the Diocese of *Barbastro*.

#### **1. Professor of Theology, Secretary General, Canon and Parish Priest of Barbastro**

Besides having him as Secretary, Basilio wanted to make use of the good abilities of his nephew for the good of the diocese. And so, on December 1856, Bishop *Basilio* appointed him "*Secretario de Cámara*" (*Secretary General*) of the diocese, professor of Dogmatic Theology and of Sacred Scripture. Years

after, some of his disciples remembered how much they had learned from his teachings. As already mentioned, *Saturnino* combined all this work with his studies of Canon Law.

On September 1856, he was present at the first high Mass of his brother *Silverio* in *Siguenza*, and a few months later, he was back in the city for the burial of his father, whom he praises as a good Christian and a man of total integrity.

In June, 1857, *Saturnino* was in Toledo to take the examination for a Master's degree in Theology, obtaining the highest qualification. Soon afterwards, in a contest among the clergy of *Barbastro*, he obtained the highest note, and so he was appointed Canon and parish priest of the Cathedral, and then the only parish in the city.

In 1858, *Don Saturnino* began a period of his life, fully dedicated to his duties in the government of the Diocese and in the Seminary. The previous year, he had established the Confraternities of Our Lady of El Pilar and of Saint James, Apostle, whose feasts he fostered. As parish priest, his apostolic duties greatly increased in relation to preaching, to the hearing of confessions, and to the administration of all other sacraments as well as the promotion of pious associations.

Every Lent he preached Popular Missions with great fruit. He was ably assisted in his apostolic work by three vicar priests, with whom he kept an excellent relationship, indeed a friendship. Years after, they will help him in the foundation of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly.

## **2. Close to the Poor**

Charity towards the needy marked his apostolic ministry. On December 8, 1858, he established in his parish the Conference of Ladies of Saint Vincent of Paul, taking care of all the expenses. For sometime, he also undertook the repairs of the

parish chapel in the Cathedral. The poor of *Barbastro* and the “*Casa Amparo*” (a charitable institution) were the recipients of his generous donations; donations sometimes openly approved by God, as he acknowledges in his personal notes.

Some typical examples:

*“Returning one day from one of his afternoon walks in the company of one of his secretaries, they found near a farm a poor lady with three small children. Since she did not ask for anything, they just greeted her and continued their walk. After a while, Saturnino stopped, thinking that they might be in need of help. So, retracting their steps they asked her and found out that the husband was hospitalized, and that their only food was the small pieces of bread that the oldest girl, ten years old, found around. Don Saturnino gave her some money, promising her that the ladies of the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul would take care of her.*

*At about 9:00 in the evening, approaching the city, Don Saturnino stopped his walk and said to his friend that he was not in peace thinking that what he had done was not enough. True, he had given some money to that poor family, but what if, they could not buy anything until the following day? What if they had nothing for dinner? Or, if they would die of starvation that night? No, “I cannot go home”, he said, “have a good supper and go to rest comfortably while that family is suffering from hunger!”*

*In spite of the late hour, and the need to have to explain things to Don Basilio if they arrived home late, they proceeded to a store from which the poor bought food with the relief-tickets Don Saturnino*





7. He celebrated his first Mass in the Santuario of the Pueyo of the Barbastro.

In the first days of October 1855 he celebrated his first Solemn Mass in the Santuario of Our Lady of Pueyo (to whom he had a very great devotion), a distance of six km., from Barbastro.



8. He meets with the lady of the “Andrew” Tower and caress her children.

*“When passing before the Tower and adjoining the path we were taking, we saw a lady with her small children. We went to her and I asked. Are you sick? Yes, sir, she answered and I have my husband sick at the hospital and without bread to give the three children. And I thought of tonight: Poor lady or one of her children die because of lack of food. I will not go home without helping her. How can I be calm and eat dinner and lie down in back before the thought that tonight one member of the family could die from hunger.”*



9. Saturnino had always been very responsible in his studies.

When starting to study (that showed samples of his dedication by the success in the examinations) or any other work, he prayed the accustomed prayers.



**10. Saturnino receives and shelters in his house to Antonia Turmo (Auntie Ordina) sick.**

*"When she became sick, I asked that she moved to my house, be given a good bedroom, a decent bed and be visited by the family doctor. With the good assistance given to her, she recovered and was able to leave the home."*



**11. With the boy Francisco Olivan and relatives in his house of Huesca.**

*"It was long that I desired to have at table the company of a poor person... When God our Lord in his inscrutable justice came to satisfy my desire, suggested the adoption of a poor little boy to live with me and sit at table with me."*

*regularly gave them, bought what he thought best for the family, chocolate included, and returning to the farm, discovered that they had not had any supper.*

*After giving them the chocolate, Don Saturnino himself cooked some food over a lamp and served it to the family. Before leaving, he asked the mother to send the eldest girl the following morning to the parish office.*

*At 10:15 Saturnino and his friend arrived in the palace, without Basilio taking any notice of their late arrival.*

*When the husband was discharged from the hospital, he began to work, but shortly afterwards, the family was dislodged from the farm. As they had nowhere to go, Don Saturnino found them a house, himself becoming the guarantor of the monthly rent.*

*“One morning, one of his assistant priests informed him that a very sick man had not only refused to confess but was blaspheming right and left.*

*In the afternoon, Don Saturnino went to visit the sick man with the same result. As the good wife told him, it was an impossible mission. In fact, instead of answering the greetings of the priest, the man turned his face towards the wall. With all care, Don Saturnino introduced a scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel under the pillow, said good-bye and promised to come back after a while.*

*While going for a walk, Saturnino invoked the protection of Our Blessed Mother, and asked the Lord to apply to the sick man whatever merit he could have acquired for the charity he had a few days earlier extended to the poor farm family, so that he*

*could confess and be saved. When he went back to the house, he greeted the family with his usual Ave María purísima! (Hail, Holy most pure), to which the wife answered, “Sin pecado concebida” (Conceived without sin), adding most happily, “Father, you arrive on time; just now I was going to call a priest, for my husband wants to confess.” Saturnino told her, “Don’t you know that our Blessed Mother is very powerful?”*

*Upon entering the room and greeting the sick, who gladly welcomed him, Saturnino prepared him by quoting the main commandments, telling him about God’s goodness and compassion, and hearing this, the sick man began to cry. After hearing the man’s confession and giving him the Holy Communion as viaticum, D. Saturnino retrieved the scapular from under the pillow and imposed it on the sick man, who recognized it as that of the Blessed Mother of Mount Carmel. Saturnino then, told the wife to call one of his assistants in case the husband would need the anointing of the sick. The man died the following morning.”*

### **3. History of the City and Diocese of Barbastro**

Upon D. Basilio’s suggestion, *Saturnino* wrote the *History of the City and Diocese of Barbastro* in two volumes, with a total of more than 800 pages. The main purpose of writing such a book was to provide reasons for the defense of the diocese in the face of possible suppression. *Saturnino* began the work in 1858.

After a very serious and ample investigation, the publication appeared in the summer of 1861. The first volume dealt with the history of the City, and the second, with that of the Diocese.

Helped by the information provided by the priests of the Diocese, *Saturnino* was able to write down, not only all the available information of Barbastro, as the head of the Diocese, but also of each parish, sanctuary, confraternity, etc. of the Diocese. He says even something about the civil history and customs.

The publication was so well accepted that *Don Saturnino* was made also of the Commission on the historical and artistic monuments of Huesca Province, and member of the Commission in charge of re-editing the Chronicles of Aragon and other related works.

#### **4. Uncle Basilio, Bishop of Huesca**

Towards the end of August, 1861, *Don Saturnino* went to Toledo to take the test and obtain a doctorate in Sacred Theology. The examination, in Latin, was on the theme *De Deo uno*. As expected, he obtained the highest qualifications. Grateful, he offered his success to our *Blessed Mother of El Pueyo in Barbastro*, where he had celebrated his first high Mass.

On December 23 of the same year, *Don Basilio* was appointed Bishop of Huesca, a fact that *Saturnino* received with mixed feelings, because it meant his departure from Barbastro, with which he was very much in love.

On one of the trips in preparation for the consecration and the solemn entrance of *Don Basilio* in Huesca, *Saturnino* almost lost his life when trying to cross a river. He attributed the *miracle* to the Blessed Mother's protection.

*Don Basilio* was consecrated bishop on April 27, and solemnly took possession of the Diocese on June 1, 1862.

In the middle of the XIX century, the Diocese of *Huesca*, counted 210 parishes, in 162 cities and villages. The priests

numbered 500, and total faithful of the diocese, 60,000, of whom 11,000 lived in the capital.

Christian life was deep. Apart from the Cathedral's Chapter, there was another in the church of Saint Lawrence Martyr, the Patron of the Diocese.

Side by side with a political traditionalist minority in the capital, there was a group of so-called moderate "progressive" citizens and this explains some of the future sad events that later took place there. This was the environment in which *Saturnino* would live from 1862 until the end of his life. Huesca would for 33 years be a witness to his great zeal, extraordinary dynamism and the charitable institutions established by him.

## **5. Secretary, Professor, Canon and "Chantre" of Huesca**

Understandably, the new bishop wanted *Saturnino* to be General Secretary of his Diocese. As it was common in the Spain of the XIX century, blood relation was probably one of the reasons; but certainly not the main one. The real reason was the confidence that they had in each other. Besides, *Saturnino's* apostolic zeal, doctrinal preparation and experience were really extraordinary.

*Saturnino* was incardinated in the diocese of Huesca on June 15, 1863, and on same day he was given a Canonry. He celebrated the day by giving generous alms to the "*Casa de Amparo*" of Huesca (a charitable institution like that of Barbastro) and to the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul. Shortly after, he was appointed Pro-Sinodal Examiner of both the Dioceses of Huesca and of Sigüenza.

At this point, we should ask whether so many positions and canonries bestowed upon a priest not native of the Diocese did not arouse envy among the diocesan clergy. The answer is no.

His extraordinary qualities were easily recognized by all both in *Barbastro* and *Huesca*. With regard to the improvements made in Barbastro by him and his uncle, a Barbastro priest wrote that “*they had found a diocese in a state of abjection and misery, and they had left it full of life.*”

When in January 1864, the “Chantre” of *Huesca* was promoted to Dean of the Cathedral’s Chapter, the Holy See, through her Nuncio in Madrid, appointed *Don Saturnino* to that position. *Saturnino* was greatly surprised. Grateful to God and to Our Blessed Mother, he sent to the *Sanctuary of Our Lady of El Pilar*, in Zaragoza, two golden “onzas” (ounces) not a small amount.

During these years two important family events happened. The first was in relation to his half-brother *Guillermo*, born of his father’s second nuptials. After being married for one year, his half-brother *Guillermo* became widower, and decided to become priest. Entering the seminary in 1860, he was ordained four years later.

The other event was the death of his brother *Silverio*, also a priest, at the age of 33. Although *Saturnino* was his only legal heir, he only took his prayer books. Like *Saturnino*, *Silverio* had been a zealous pastor and so charitable that he gave to the poor all he had.

## **6. Years of Close Collaboration with His Uncle Bishop**

Basilio’s health was delicate, *Saturnino* resigned his professorial chair of Theology in the Seminary so that he could be at his uncle’s side. Basilio died in February 1870 in Rome during the First Vatican Council.

On the occasion of the promotion of his uncle as Bishop of *Huesca*, *Don Saturnino* wrote for him a clerical directory

with this title: “*Curious notes that could be helpful to a new bishop.*” It is made up of 16 pages of very small type in which *Don Saturnino* gives his uncle wise and prudent counsels. This daring action on the part of *Don Saturnino* could only be explained by keeping in mind their full mutual confidence.

*Don Saturnino* was the soul of the palace and of the government of the diocese. He acted as the prudent Secretary that foresees and acts ahead of events; as the counselor, conscious of the significance of his mission, always well acquainted with the situation; as the collaborator who gives himself soul and body, without any limit of time, to the great task of managing the spiritual and material affairs of a diocese. And so the Bishop, trusting in the prudence, wisdom, and fidelity of *Don Saturnino*, left in the hands of his nephew the common and day-to-day affairs. *Maria Magro Novoa*, the Bishop’s niece and *Don Saturnino*’s cousin, acted as housekeeper.

During the bishop’s absences to take care of his health in the spas of *Alhama de Aragon* and *Panticosa*, he entrusted to the Vicar General the judicial affairs, and to *Don Saturnino* all the rest. Every three days, *Don Saturnino* sent to the bishop letters informing him about the situation in the diocese.

Another important job of *Don Saturnino* was the preparation and publication of the official *Bulletin* of the diocese. He did not only select the topics, but he wrote most of everything. More than one hundred decrees bear his signature. And the style of the twenty-four pastoral letters published by the bishop show *Don Saturnino*’s hand.

The pastoral archives of *Don Saturnino* have preserved a good number of files on judicial, canonical and pastoral matters, all well classified, which deal of time and unlimited patience.



## 7. The House of Poor Students and the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul

*Don Saturnino* was a good administrator; but he was conscious that the priesthood existed to serve God's people. So, besides his dedication to hear the faithful's confessions, it was during these years that he became famous as a good preacher. Many of the sermons are kept in his archives. As he did in Barbastro and would continue doing all his life, he brought into them new ideas, not common in Spain at that time, about the Catholic association movements and the lay apostolate.

In 1863 he erected, at his own expense, the Confraternity of *Our Lady of the Agony* to pray for the dying before the holy sacrament of the Eucharist exposed.

As vocations to the priesthood were another of his worries on account of the alarming decrease since after the Independence War (1808–1814), *Don Saturnino* was the very first in Spain—others took the idea from him —, to establish in 1866 a residence for poor but gifted students who, on account of their poverty, could not study in the regular seminaries. After analyzing the problem, and obtaining the bishop's approval, he rented a house to accommodate eight students, who would only pay the insignificant amount of one *real a day* (=0.09 php)

*Don Saturnino* wrote the rules of the house. Once approved by his bishop and printed, he sent them to several bishops, who also erected similar institutions. In order to prevent the intrusion by the secular powers in the administration of the residence, *Don Saturnino* gave the place the character of a lay institution, to be administered by the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul.

The residence was opened on October 15, 1866 with eight students. To be sure that everything was in order, *Don Saturnino*, who covered all expenses involved in the furnishing

of the house, frequently visited it. The experiment was so successful that the following year he bought a bigger house good for thirty three students.

Unfortunately, such a great idea came to an end when in September 1868, just before the opening of the third year of operations of the House, the revolutionaries gained control over things in Spain. They closed the seminaries as well as *Saturnino's* residence for poor students. Worse still, the new "authorities" exiled the bishop and his secretary to Zaragoza. A most shameful outrage! All was lost except *Saturnino's* idea that was taken up by other dioceses, and his love for poor seminarians. Later, his House for Poor Students was converted into an asylum for the elderly.

In the Spain of the XIX century nobody was scandalized over the division of students for the priesthood in two categories according to their economic possibilities.

The love of the poor, deeply rooted in *Saturnino's* heart from his youth, increased after his ordination. As earlier pointed out, in 1858, he founded in *Barbastro* in 1858 the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul that had been established in France by *Frederic Ozanam* in 1833, and had been introduced to Spain in 1850. *Saturnino's* love for the poor was known not only in *Barbastro*, but even outside the Diocese; and so, a few days after his arrival in *Huesca*, he was appointed counselor of the "*Casa de Amparo*" of the City, serving as such for many years.

But his most important charitable enterprise in *Huesca* was the organization of the feminine branch of the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul in December 1866, just two months after the opening of the House for poor seminarians. *Don Saturnino* wrote the by-laws of the new branch, that the rest of the Spanish dioceses later adopted as their own. It is a small-size book of about 300 pages. Although it was inspired in two French books

about the life and work of Saint Vincent of Paul, and copied his method of practicing charity, *Saturnino's* hand can be seen in every page of the book. Besides the by-laws, the book carries a fervent exhortation to practice charity. In the printing of the manual, *Don Saturnino* spent 6,000 “*reales*”, donating the whole edition to the Conference to increase its capital. Beside the one founded in the city of Huesca, *Don Saturnino* founded the Conference in other cities of the diocese.

For more than thirty years, *Don Saturnino* gave yearly retreats to the ladies of the Conference. The talks contain a fountain of theological doctrine and of the Christian message of charity.

To *Don Saturnino* belongs the honor of having fostered the first manifestations of lay apostolate on a national level: in 1900 there were 500 Conferences with about 10,000 male members and more than 13,000 female. The assisted families numbered about 25,000. Most of the prominent persons in society became members of the Conference.

*Don Saturnino* took advantage of the Conference to foster the spiritual formation and sanctification of its members. In his talks, he emphasized the right motivation, the main Christian doctrines, the reception of the sacraments of communion and confession, God's presence, and the devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Another wonderful undertaking was *Saturnino's* promotion of the Sunday Morning Schools, an idea of *Santa Micaela del Santísimo Sacramento*, Vicountess of *Corbalán*, for the spiritual formation of maids and working women, with the Conference Ladies in charge of things.

*Don Saturnino*, considered the spiritual formation of the laity a must. That is why in the *manual* he gives detailed instructions for the practice of charity with the poor.

Both material and spiritual formation were combined in another charitable institution founded by *Don Saturnino: Asylum House for Indigent Girls*; an institution older than the modern *day-nurseries*, where the ladies of the Conference would take care of and teach the girls, 6 to 12 years old, daughters of working widows. They were day schools. *Don Saturnino* was convinced that not only the girls would benefit from their education and learning, but that they would also have some influence on the spiritual life of the family.

## 8. Exile in Zaragoza

The Revolution of 1868, known as “*La Gloriosa*” (the “Glorious one”), was an outburst of the deferred consequences of the commotions that took place in Central Europe in 1848. Its immediate causes were multiple: the disastrous situation, the political intrigues in the upper echelons of power, the discredit of the previous national government presided over by *González Bravo*, the poverty of the people, etc.

With the defeat of the army loyal to the Government and to the Monarchy on September 29, the Queen took refuge in France. On October 3, *General Serrano*, the leader of the revolution, entered triumphantly in Madrid, ready to form a new Government and to prepare a new Constitution.

In are important cities, revolutionary *Juntas* were organized, demanding liberty which was readily by the Central Government, anticlerical laws, were enacted, the Jesuits were expelled from Spain, all Orders and Congregations founded after 1837 were suppressed, the disappearance of Conferences of Saint Vincent of Paul, the cancellation of grants to the seminaries and finally the Abolition of the Ecclesiastical Court of Justice.

The *Juntas* were so fanatic and violent that the Madrid Government dissolved them on October 1868. The point of

hatred of the *Juntas* was the Catholic Church, her institutions and temples, some of which were destroyed or burned, especially in Seville and Valladolid. But it was only in *Huesca* where the bishop was persecuted. On October 5, he was deprived of his diocesan jurisdiction and send together with his secretary, into exile. The official reason was: “*The urgent need of public order.*”

The satanic furor of *Huesca’s Junta* went as far as removing the bells from the churches reducing to three the six convents of nuns/sisters, the demolition of the Parish Church of Saint Martin, granting permission to work on Sundays and causing partial destruction of the Seminary and of the Church of the Holy Spirit. Not even *Saturnino’s* House for the poor seminarians was respected.

The Bishop was accused of being “intolerant” and “integrist”, of rude conduct and stubbornness, and of harshly persecuting... people with liberal ideas. As expected, there was an indictment against *Don Saturnino* “as promoter of associations and confraternities wrongly called pious...”

Bishop *Basilio* and his secretary went to Zaragoza accompanied until the limits of *Huesca* Province by the Civil Guard, who treated them with all courtesy. Although both were invited by the Zaragoza’s Archbishop to reside in his palace, *Don Saturnino* preferred to stay with the parish priest of *Santa Engracia*, then a church pertaining to the diocese of *Huesca*, offering him his help. Likewise, he extended help to a community of Sisters.

From *Zaragoza*, Bishop *Basilio* continued looking after his Diocese through instructions to the Ecclesiastical Governor, pastorals published in the official *Bulletin* of the Diocese and contact, through letters, with his parish priests, etc.

Apart from his work in the parish of *Santa Engracia*, *Don Saturnino* assisted the Dominican Sisters of Saint Rose and

attended to his sickly bishop, an act of charity in which he experienced the powerful assistance of our Blessed Mother.

The exile lasted from October 6, 1868 until September 13, 1869. When the bishop and his nephew returned to *Huesca*, they were welcome with great joy, which at the same time was a strong and clear condemnation of the attitude of the irresponsible *Junta*.

## 9. Vatican Council I and Death of Bishop Basilio in Rome

Although Bishop *Basilio*'s health was frail, he decided to attend the Vatican Council I, accompanied by *Don Saturnino* as Secretary and theological Consultant. They arrived in Rome on November 27, well ahead of the opening of the Council, on December 8. During those ten days, they visited the Vatican and the major basilicas, and the relics of Saint Lawrence, Patron of the *Huesca* Diocese, in his chapel in the Quirinal.

Bishop *Basilio* could only attend a few sessions of the Council, for soon his sickness took a turn for the worse. *Don Saturnino* took diligent care of him day and night, acting as both diligent cook and a loving nurse, "God giving him the necessary strength to cope with the situation," as he wrote in his notes. After making his confession, receiving the viaticum and the anointing of the sick, and blessing his nephew *Don Saturnino* "with words of great love and tenderness," the bishop placidly died on Saturday, February 12, 1870.

Saint *Antonio M. Claret*, who visited *Basilio* the day he died, told *Don Saturnino* that his bishop was a saint. In his notes, *Don Saturnino* writes: "*His death was the most placid and exemplary I have ever witnessed.*"

After sending word to all the pertinent authorities of his Bishop's death, *Don Saturnino* made the necessary arrangements for his burial.

The funeral, attended by 47 bishops, was held at Our Lady of Montserrat Church, where he was temporarily buried. Thankful to his Bishop, *Don Saturnino* distributed large sums of money as alms to the poor, and arranged for the celebration of more than three thousand Masses for his eternal rest. *Don Saturnino* left Rome for Spain on March 3, arriving in *Huesca* on the 10<sup>th</sup>. With his uncle's death, *Don Saturnino's* life entered a new phase.

## Chapter III

### THE CREATIVE MATURITY

(1870–1873)

On November 1870, *Amadeus of Saboya*, son of Italy's king *Victor Manuel*, was invited to become the King of Spain with the hope that the political situation would become stabilized. Unfortunately, it was not so. Three years later, and after the assassination of *General Prim*, he abdicated.

#### 1. Looking Forward with the Poor in the Heart

Now, *Don Saturnino's* life enters a new phase simply as Cathedral Canon. He leaves the Bishop's palace and goes to live in a house that, with foresight, he had earlier bought in "*Plaza Nueva.*"

He is thirty-nine years old, an age in which a person is supposed to make real his dreams. A period of prayer and meditation to discern the fullness of God's will for him. He continued studying, preaching, writing and caring for the poor. And, above all, he prayed.

Upon the Mayor of *Huesca's* request, he wrote a *Project for assistance to the needy classes* that revealed his practical and orderly method to meet the needs and urgencies of the moment. He wrote another pamphlet about the foundation of the *Ursulines of Sigüenza*. In 1873, he published the book *The Christian life or exercises to obtain and practice the virtues*. It is a devotional, doctrinal and moral catechism of about 900 pages of small size.



To this period of life, *Don Saturnino* gave it a definite orientation centralized on his love of and service to the poor—an activity that had occupied a privileged place in the first fifteen years of his ministry. In a sermon preached in May 1867, he emphasized the fact that society:

*“was in need of a love that will regenerate and give it a new life. Something is being done, but it’s not enough. We need to create big associations of charity. Politics and words are useless. Let the heart act...Instead of lamentation, what we need are good organizations that move the heart in favor of the abandoned elderly, the group in the greatest need on account of bad policies, wars and the despoilment (“desamortización”) of the Church’s properties by the State, something that left the Spanish Church totally incansable of continuing its assistance to the poor. The politicians talk about poverty, but they do nothing about it.”*

In 1871 *Don Saturnino* went to Lérida to get acquainted with the Little Sisters of the Poor, founded in France by *Saint Juana Jugan* and who were already established in various parts of Spain, offering good service to the poor. In October 1871 he requested permission from the Capitular Vicar of Huesca to lend in “*usufruct*” to those Sisters the House for poor seminarians, closed by the revolutionary *Junta* in 1868. Once the permission was given, *Don Saturnino* contacted the General Superior of the Little Sisters of the Poor in France, who agreed to the idea. In remodeling and furnishing the house, he spent 120,000 *reales* (180.30 euros), a considerable amount at that time. The first Little Sisters of the Poor arrived in Huesca on March 6, 1872.

No religious order or Congregation can be founded without God’s intervention. In the case of the Congregation of the Little

Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly, the inspiration came through an act of charity in favor of Antonia, an 82 years old and sick woman. *Don Saturnino* brought Antonia to his house and took care of her until she regained her health. After sometime, Antonia, affectionately called “*la tía Ordina*”(“*Antie*” *Ordina*), relapsed, and *Don Saturnino* brought her back home, giving her his own room and taking care of her until death. As a result of this experience, *Don Saturnino* asked himself: “How many people are there like Antonia, people we could take care of? How about founding an institution explicitly for that purpose?”

Since such an institution was beyond his personal possibilities, he rejected the idea straight forward; but again and again it came back to his mind. And so, he decided to find the necessary ways and means to carry out the project.

Meanwhile, without giving up his idea, he continued helping the asylum he had founded and to the Little Sisters of the Poor with his counsels, spiritual talks, and generous alms.

## **2. The Association Catholics of Valencia**

This association, similar to others established several in other Spanish cities, was founded in Valencia in 1871. Soon after, its President and Secretary conceived the idea of erecting an asylum for the care of the abandoned elderly of the city.

As they were acquainted with the good work of the Little Sisters of the Poor, they requested their Mother General, who was in France, to found a new house in Valencia. The petition was initially welcome but it was soon revoked, not by the Mother General, *Saint Juana Jagan*, but by an arrogant chaplain who, illegally, had usurped her jurisdiction over the Congregation.

By now the idea kept maturing in *Don Saturnino*’s mind that almsgiving was not enough to succor the poor and

abandoned elderly; that it was necessary to create permanent institutions for the purpose.

Notwithstanding his love for the Little Sisters of the Poor, in the spring of 1872 he decided, that the new foundation should be Spanish, something was more in accordance with Spanish character, sensibility and customs.

After seeking advice from his spiritual director, from the Bishop and from several priests, he decided that the foundation should not be established in *Huesca*, but in *Barbastro*, so it would not interfere with the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Right away, he drafted a set of possible Constitutions for the new Congregation, and looked for a woman to help in the project.

The summer of 1872 was exhausting. There were nights in which *Saturnino* got up from bed seven times to add, delete or modify some lines in the Constitutions. He was assisted to this effort by some ecclesiastical authorities of Barbastro, among them: *Frs. Francisco Pug*, S.J., Spiritual Director of Barbastro's Seminary, and *Diego Gavín*, Superior of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, founded by Saint *Antonio Ma. Claret*, whose spirit influences *Don Saturnino's* Constitutions.

The priest *Pedro Llacera* was tasked with finding a suitable place for the new Congregation, and searching for candidates for it. By then, he already had three, two of them being sisters *Teresa* and *María Jornet e Ibars*, from *Aitona, Lérida* (now *Lleida*), both of them teachers. On time, they were to be the first and second Mother Generals of the Congregation,

*“whose purpose it will be the permanent practice of charity, and the care and spiritual help of the elderly of both sexes sheltered in the homes of the Institution. But its main purpose was to be God's*

*glory, the sanctification of the persons living in the Homes and the welfare of society in general.”*

As agreed upon with *Mr. Jaldero*, Secretary of the Association of Valencia’s Catholics, the Mother House was to be established in that City, and the admission and preparation for the profession of candidates in Barbastro—where already existed “*Casa de Amparo*” to attend to the elderly, the helpless, and the poor of the City—until a proper Novitiate House could be erected.

The Patroness of the new Congregation would be Our Lady of the Abandoned, Patroness of Valencia; and the Protectors, Saints Joseph and Martha.

*Don Saturnino* thought of the new Congregation as:

*“an electric spark that, with God’s blessings, would extend throughout Spain for the welfare of humanity.”*

A true prophesy, as time would prove.

In September he brought the new Constitutions to the Vicar General of Barbastro, the city elected for the site birth of the new Congregation.

Providentially advised, before sending the Constitutions to Rome he adjusted them to the regulations for new congregations decreed by Pius IX. They were definitely approved by Rome on October 14, 1872.

### **3. “Casa Pueyo” and Teresa Jornet e Ibars**

In 1872 the *golden dream* of *Don Saturnino* is about to be fulfilled. On October 3, Barbastro’s Chantre, *Don Pedro Llacera*, rented in *Don Saturnino*’s name, the spacious “*Casa*



**12. The Father Founder hands Saint Teresa Jornet the Constitutions.**

*“Look after being more faithful every day to the grace of the vocation, maintaining always a holy observance of the Constitutions.”*

*“Several times the idea of how good would be the foundation of a charitable Institute in whose care would be the care of so many abandoned elderly, occurred to me...and, in spite of Spain being in the middle of a Revolution I resolved to carry out the foundation that was my golden dream.”*



**13. With the Little Sisters in the Mother House of Valencia.**

*“God wanted, Little Sisters, make yourselves, the continuation of His Holy Son on earth, so that you pass this exile doing good.”*

**14. Before Crucified Christ he found the reason of his life.**

*“Oh Jesus, in You I find light in my darkness, strength in my weakness and frailty, firm resolution in doubts, love for my neighbors, zeal for the salvation of the souls...charity in everything and for everybody.”*



*Pueyo*”, a house subsequently furnished by a group of Catholic ladies of the City. Thus, the House was ready to receive the first five aspirants. The following day, *Don Saturnino* went from *Huesca* to *Barbastro* to say the Mass for the aspirants, whom he instructed on their charism and mission. He offered the Mass in memory of Our Lady, to whom he entrusted the Congregation and the young aspirants.

Before going back to *Huesca*, *Don Saturnino* placed the Institute temporarily under the care of *Don Pedro Llacera* and *Fr. Puig*, S. J. All expenses were to be shouldered by *Don Saturnino* who, almost weekly, would go back to *Barbastro* to instruct the aspirants, already happily settled in the new house.

On October 11, five new aspirants were admitted to *Casa Pueyo*, among them, the blood sisters *Teresa* and *Maria Jornet e Ibars*, from *Aitona, Lérida* (now *Lleida*). A few days after, taking into account *Llacera*’s report, *Don Saturnino* appointed *Teresa* as the Superior (later to be called “Mother”) of the new foundation. When receiving the Constitutions from *Don Saturnino*, *Teresa* said:

*“Father, this small book will save or condemn me.”*

*Teresa*’s appointment was an excellent choice for, her death in 1897, there were more than ONE THOUSAND LITTLE SISTERS AND 103 HOMES FOR THE ABANDONED ELDERLY—a unique feat in the history of the Church, as far as I (the translator) know. More than 1000 Little Sisters and 103 Homes in just 24 years!

After such an exhausting summer, *Don Saturnino* went to *Sigüenza* to rest there during the second part of October 1874.

#### 4. The Founder, Absent from the First Vestition

From *Huesca*, where he spent four days with Teresa, whom he instructed in the spirit of the new Congregation, *Don Saturnino* gave instructions by letter to his representative in *Barbastro* and to *Mr. Jaldero*, in *Valencia*, where the Little Sisters were to go soon.

In January 27, 1873, the ten aspirants received the habit—designed by *Don Saturnino* himself of the *Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor*. They were already present in seven cities or villages of three different provinces of Spain. Accompanied by many people, both ecclesiastical and lay, the Little Sisters took the habit in the church of the Seminary of *Barbastro*, where “*nothing was missing in the celebration, except the presence of the Founder,*” as *Don Pedro Llacera* said in a letter to *Don Saturnino*. Why was he absent? Was he so busy as not to have time to be present at such an act that was the crowning of all his dreams? The only and imaginable reason could be his profound humility. He wanted all the congratulations to go to the Little Sisters, the real heroines of the day. He considered himself a poor instrument in God’s hands.

Four days later, as decided by *Don Saturnino*, the Capitular Vicar of *Barbastro* appointed Little Sister *Teresa Jornet e Ibars* as the first Superior or Mother General of the Congregation. *Don Saturnino* had already instructed her on how to govern the Home (in Spanish *Hogar*)—a name more appropriate than House (*casa*) which, however, was to be used in certain cases—and the Little Sisters. Good example was especially emphasized.

#### 5. Finally, Valencia

In March 1873, two new aspirants arrived at *Casa Pueyo*, making a total number of twelve. As a result of the information about the new Congregation, sent to the bishops and to the daily



press—there soon arrived from the bishops of *Oviedo*, *Sigüenza*, *Málaga* and *Burgos* petitions for new foundations. But at the moment, the main concern of the Founder was the novitiate and the Mother House to be established in Valencia.

In the face of obstacles that kept appearing from time to time, the Founder earnestly prayed to the Congregation's Patroness and Protectors and frequently journeyed to *Barbastro* to instruct the Little Sisters, to advise their Mother and to dialogue with Fathers *Llacera* and *Puig*. It was also this time that he printed the Constitutions of the Congregation. And he continued to offer monetary contribution to the institution.

From *Valencia* came a piece of good news: The Association of Valencia Catholics had found a better house for the Little Sisters. It was located just a few meters from the church of Our Lady of the Abandoned and of the Archbishop's palace. An ideal place indeed!

In view of this, *Don Saturnino* devised the following plan for the Sisters: On May 5, the Sisters would travel from *Barbastro* to *Huesca*; the 6<sup>th</sup>, they would proceed to *Zaragoza* and on the 7<sup>th</sup> to *Madrid*. They would leave *Madrid* on the same day to arrive in *Valencia* on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Only a man like *Don Saturnino*, with infinite confidence in Divine Providence, would dare take such steps, in the face of the adverse political situation prevailing at that time. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, just two weeks after the Little Sisters were clothed with the habit, Spain was proclaimed a Republic, a fact that was followed by instability, social disturbances, especially in the Valencia region. In the North, the civil war turned out to be increasingly more violent.

As a heady pointed out, the first seven Little Sisters, accompanied by the Founder, arrived in Valencia on May 8<sup>th</sup>,

being received by the *Junta* of the *Asociacion de Catolicos de Valencia*. All of them proceeded immediately to the chapel of our Lady of the Abandoned. *Don Saturnino* gave the most sincere thanks to Our Lady, the Virgin Mary for her protection, leaving in her hands the future of the new foundation. Likewise, he commended to her the first group of Sisters, all those who would follow them, and the elderly that would be taken cared of in their Homes.

The Archbishop promised all his assistance to the Congregation, and so, a most cordial relationship between him and the Sisters was established. Many people visited the Little Sisters and gave them their first donations.

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, the first elderly were admitted. With this admission, the first Home for the Abandoned Poor was inaugurated.

Two weeks later *Don Pedro Llacera* arrived in *Valencia* with the other five Little Sisters, thus completing the Community. Meantime, *Don Saturnino* continued with his talks for their spiritual formation. On top of this, he establish in *Valencia* a web of relations that would in the future support his work.

## 6. The Founder in Huesca, Alone with God

On the last days of May, 1873, *Don Saturnino* went back to Huesca. Why so soon? A possible answer was his absolute confidence in Divine Providence. As early as 1869, he had written in *Regla de Vida* (Rule of Life):

*“He is a saint who is humble; and he is a great saint who is very humble...God exalts and elevates a person to the degree that it humbles himself... Let the humble accept insults, for such deserve his sins.”* And he reminded the Little Sisters that *“He who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Another reason for leaving Valencia so soon was the great confidence he had in the Superior, Mother Teresa, whose character and qualities he had observed in the previous months. She would foster the first foundations, travelling in tumble-down two-wheeled carriages, her body torn by illness. Apart from this, *Don Saturnino* could serve the Congregation from Huesca. And so it was good to leave the initiative to Mother Teresa.

But the basic reason for going back to Huesca was his irresistible attraction to the contemplative life, evidenced by his spiritual doctrine that reveals a deep interior life and a love of the cross — the basis of his priesthood.

It has been said and written too hastily that the Christian life in the Spain of the XIX century was doctrinally poor, moralizing, inclined to action and to practical solutions. But such assertions are hardly true and they contradict at all the extraordinary constellation of saints that Spain produced in those years, the best after the Golden Century.

*Don Saturnino* wanted to become a saint since his years as a seminarian. During his life, he had three spiritual directors, two of whom ordered him to put in writing the most important elements of his spiritual life, like distribution of time, devotions, vows or promises, the master lines of his spirituality, etc. It is not a surprise that his spiritual life resembles the *Spiritual Exercises* of *Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, he used in his preaching and in his private prayer. *Saint Alonso Rodríguez* taught *Don Saturnino* to be humble, notwithstanding his ecclesiastical dignities.

*Don Saturnino* was naturally inclined to the contemplative life. Quite naturally he wrote in 1890:

*“I have always felt especial love for solitary life in some ‘ermita’ (isolated small church) or in a*

*cloistered community; but God has disposed that I live a ministerial public life; and I accept and respect that will."*

It is from this point of view that we must interpret his return to *Huesca*, his absences from important events of the life of his Congregation, his renunciation of honors, his resistance to accept the episcopate, and the retired life of his last years. The resolutions written in his *Regla de Vida* attest to his love for solitude and silence:

*"I will try to live alone and get away from persons as much as my priestly duties will allow, and to avoid superficial and unnecessary visits. Not to go to profane shows, mundane entertainments, banquets, parties, and recreations, however honest they may be, except in unavoidable cases."*

He tried to live according to the counsels of *Saint Alonso Rodríguez*:

*"If you want to live, control your tongue: do not waste away by talking what you earned by keeping silence, for silence keeps great riches in the soul. Should any one desire to gain much and talk correctly, let her/him talk about God and with God, living alone with him."*

God conducted him through the ways proper to a secular priest, dedicated to preaching and direction of souls and, in his case, as the founder of a religious family.

This double facet of his priestly life provides one of the most important codes to interpret his biography, his spiritual character and his longing for sanctification. In his writings there

are a frequent call to comply with God's will, and this guided him through unsuspected ways. The *Memorial of perfection of Saint Alonso Rodríguez*, that he frequently read and meditated, reminded him that:

*“the health and perfection of the soul consist in complying every day with God's will, to which nothing in life should be preferred; and in doing it every day with diligence. The more it is practiced, the higher the perfection the soul will achieve.”*

A sequel to this resolution was:

*“in all the events of my life, whether good or adverse, I will accept God's will.”*

In his personal writings, he manifests his very intensive spiritual life, the joyous presence of God in his day-to-day affairs, and in an interior life of prayer that permeated all the hours of his day. An early riser, he got up at four from May to September and at five the rest of the year. In what he calls “mental oratory”, he mentions his preferential mysteries and the saints of his devotion: the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the Immaculate Conception, Saints Joseph and Raphael, the Guardian Angel, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Saturnino, Saint Martha, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, *Saint Alonso Rodríguez*, together with *Saint Luis Gonzaga* and *Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzis*. After his morning vocal prayers, he had half-an-hour of meditation, the preparation and the celebration of the holy Mass and thanksgiving. After this, he would go back home for breakfast and work until the time to go to the cathedral to join the Canons in prayer. He used to arrive in the cathedral half-an-hour before choir time so as to have time to pay a visit

to the Holy Sacrament and to engage in his especial devotions to the Most Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph.

After taking part in the Canons' Mass, he worked until 11:30. In the remaining 30 minutes before 12, he prayed his weekly devotions..., read a chapter of the Gospel, and made an examination of conscience.

After lunch and rest, he again went to the choir for the afternoon prayers. Then, if there were no people for confession or nothing else to do, he would take a walk. Usually, he walked alone, but carried a pious book with him.

Returning from the walk, *Saturnino* would go back to his room to make the “*velada*” that he never omitted. After the opening prayers asking for light and grace, he read a chapter of the Bible, and some more reading until 7:00. From 7:00 to 8:00, spiritual reading, meditation, and examination of conscience. At 8:00 in winter, and 8:30 in summer, he prayed the rosary with the family, did some pious reading and the corresponding novena—if there was any to make. After that, dinner and rest.

Convinced that without a strong interior spiritual life, all the other activities and projects would come to nothing. He made the nineteen of every month a day of spiritual recollection and, twice a year, he did the Spiritual Exercises.

In the *Manual of the Little Sister*, written in 1892 an unfinished and yet unpublished work, he explains the excellencies of the Christian life both contemplative and active, asserting that the latter is better than the former, for it takes the best of both. Precisely, that was Christ's life!

*Don Saturnino* lived obsessed with the conviction of the need to do God's will in everything. He wanted to achieve sanctification as a secular priest, but without abandoning its demands to live a life of intimate union with Christ. He was very active to the point of forgetting his own comfort, and promoted

splendid apostolic undertakings, like the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor, that continues to produce magnificent fruits.

## 7. Three Great Supports

*Saturnino's* spiritual character explains his strong and cordial relations with the Congregation, even at a distance. Before returning to his diocese, *Huesca*, he contacted in Valencia those persons who could help his spiritual daughters and guarantee their spiritual formation and fidelity to the charism of the Congregation and work for the Congregation's growth.

Atty. *José María Jaldero* can be considered the first and most valuable support. He was the main agent for the expansion of the Little Sisters from *Barbastro* to *Valencia*.

Another unconditional friend was ***Mariano Barrio Fernández***, Archbishop of Valencia, made Cardinal in 1873. He loved the Little Sisters so much that he called them his "filletes" (small daughters). His purse was also theirs.

After Mother Teresa, the greatest gift God gave *Don Saturnino* was the priest ***Don Francisco García López*** who, at different periods of his life, served as Procurator and Secretary of Archbishop *Barrio Fernández*, titular Bishop of Loryma and, finally, Auxiliary Bishop of Valencia.

As an excellent spiritual character, his Archbishop entrusted him with the protection of the Little Sisters, a protection and service that lasted thirty seven years. He can almost be considered co-founder of the Congregation for he assisted it in its formidable expansion during its first 24 years existence. As earlier, there were in 1897 more than 1000 Little Sisters and 103 Homes for the Abandoned Elderly, the year Mother Teresa died. All this just in twenty-four years! Fr. Francisco died in 1909.

## *Chapter IV*

### **AT THE SERVICE OF THE CONGREGATION**

(1873–1882)

On May 30, 1873, *Don Saturnino* left Valencia and arrived in *Huesca* on June 2. During the trip, he thought again and again about the blessings he had received from God, and the great help from his cooperators: The members of the Association of Valencia Catholics, the Archbishop and Don Francisco, whose human and priestly qualities had made a great impression on him. Also during the past days, he had the opportunity to observe the virtues and good sense of Mother Teresa. And so, *Don Saturnino* went back to *Huesca* fully convinced that his Congregation was in good hands.

#### **1. Far Away, But Not Distant**

In the letter announcing his happy arrival, he admonishes the Little Sisters:

*“to be faithful to the rules and that they ought to accomplish all their duties.”*

A week later, he emphatically told them:

*“to avoid by all means of relaxation, so pernicious to the community. All should be made on time, even if not all the Little Sisters can be present.”*



The encouragement to faithfully observe all the rules will be a recurrent recommendation to the Mother and the other Superiors. In 1892, he wrote:

*“Let the Sisters be faithful to observe the Constitutions, under no circumstances and for no reason whatsoever, allowing for putting aside their provisions, convinced as he was, that the greatest perfection was to be attained to by their faithful observance.”*

The postulants and the elderly in the Valencia Home increased every day, and, almost weekly, *Don Saturnino* wrote to the Mother General Teresa, who consulted him on everything: the interpretation of the Constitutions, spiritual assistance to the Little Sisters and the elderly, formation of the aspirants, community life, etc. About one of the Sisters, she wrote to *Don Saturnino*:

*“If she does not make amendments, I doubt whether she is ready to be a Little Sister for she does not have humility, and is inclined to complaining.”*

*Don Saturnino*’s answer was terse:

*“... Since you have already corrected her in private, correct her now in the presence of the Consultors; if she does not pay attention, correct her in the presence of the Directorium. If no results are achieved, dismiss her, for the good of the Congregation.... Superiors ought to be strict from the very beginning, when vices are not yet so strong.”*

Against *Don Saturnino*’s opinion, Mother Teresa wanted the aspirants to be in *Valencia*, not in *Barbastro*, so that they could receive the same education and be in direct contact

with the elderly from the very beginning. *Don Saturnino* acquiesced.

From *Huesca*, where the number of aspirants to enter the Congregation was increasing, *Don Saturnino* sent the Mother the pamphlet he had written to make known the Institute, both in Spain and in South America, with a letter to be read to the whole Community and, afterwards to be kept in the archives. It is a vibrant call to humility and obedience to the Constitutions, so as make sure that the Little Sisters would live:

*“in that harmony and mutual charity that will keep them united in one Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord...without Whom there cannot be among them love and mutual understanding as demanded by the Lord from his followers... Pity one and one thousand times the religious that causes disorder, alters the peace and breaks the bond of love and fraternal affection that must unite all the members. I hope that such Community will know how to keep a spirit of the peace and union that will attract God’s blessings, the increase of graces and virtues, and prosperity for the Institute, all for God’s greater praise and glory and the good of humanity.”*

Again and again, *Don Saturnino* will go back to these thoughts in his letters.

## **2. Valencia, Bombarded**

On February 1873, *Don Amadeo of Saboya*, King of Spain, abdicated. The first Spanish Republic had only lasted nine months, and had four presidents. In the North, the Carlist wars became more cruel, the South and the East suffered continued disturbances, and there were strikes in Valencia and Alcoy. On July 15, the Archbishop visited the Little Sisters and, with all

simplicity inquired about the food they were eating. The Little Sisters had the charming custom, which continues up to this day, of placing at the foot of Saint Joseph's statue a sample of what they needed. At that moment, there was a little bottle of oil. The Archbishop asked for the meaning of that. The following day, he sent to the Little Sisters what they needed.

On July 18, *Nicolás Salmeron* was appointed president of the Republic. The following day, Valencia, Cadiz, Sevilla, Cartagena and other cities proclaimed themselves independent regions. On August 3, just when the Little Sisters had begun the annual spiritual retreat, Madrid's army bombarded Valencia. Most of the people left the City. The Little Sisters took refuge first in the cathedral, going afterwards to Alboraya, an hour distant from the City, where they stayed for two days.

### **3. Book on Sacred Oratory and a Reminder**

*Don Saturnino* always had in mind his Congregation, but found time to materially and spiritually attend to the French Sisters, who already were taking care of 33 persons in their Asylum. He admired their initiatives to provide for themselves what they needed in those calamitous times. As the Government did cut the endowment due to the clergy, he decided to give daily from his savings, and for several months, eight "*reales*" to each canon and four to each beneficiary and auxiliary persons who would attend the choir in memory of his uncle, Bishop *Basilio*. The total amount given was 32,380 *reales*.

His extraordinary power and ability to work allowed him to prepare at this time one of his important books: *Treatise on Sacred Oratory according to the spirit of Saint Alfonso Ma. of Liguorio*. It is a voluminous book of 364 pages. The first edition appeared in 1878, and the second, in 1889. It was so greatly appreciated that it was used as textbook in many Spanish seminaries up to 1939.

Simultaneously, he prepared a pamphlet of 47 pages that came out of the press in 1875, about the then controversial Liberal Catholicism. Well accepted in intellectual circles, it intended to avoid the extinguishing of Christian life by politics, and thus cause a division in the Spanish Church. The pamphlet does not talk about politics, but clearly and valiantly teaches the Catholic doctrine on the relations between the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, on which Rome had given final guidelines.

Prudent but energetic, *Don Saturnino* was a militant apostle of the time, a veteran fighter in defense of the Church and a valiant sentinel to prevent the infiltration of liberal ideas among Catholics.

#### **4. Expansion of the Congregation: Saint Monica and the First Foundations**

In the middle of August of 1873, the Little Sisters returned to their normal life, altered by the recent convulsions, and the Founder was thinking about the expansion of the Institute. Even before the transfer of the Little Sisters from *Barbastro* to *Valencia*, he had petitions for foundations in *Burgos*, *Oviedo*, *Sigüenza* and *Malaga*. Now, a petition came from *Calatayud*. He himself thought of expanding the Institute in *Valencia*, while the Mother presented other projects that, to undertake them, the number of Sisters had to increase. However, he was very strict in this matter. When the Mother told him about the disgust of *Don Pedro Lacera* for not admitting an aspirant recommended by him, *Don Saturnino* answered: “*I have in mind the welfare of the Congregation, not human considerations.*”

As the Mother believed that the expansion of the Congregation needed a more spacious Home to receive more novices, she and Don Francisco started looking for a new place.

The old Convent of the Augustinian Recolects of Saint Monica, now a private property, could be an ideal one. *Don*

*Saturnino* prayed that one day it would be occupied by the Little Sisters, whose hope in God he encouraged. The problem was money, because the Sisters were not very successful in asking help.

In September, *Mr. Jaldero* began the negotiations for the purchase of the convent, now in precarious conditions and occupied by several families. As it was vital to the Congregation to have it, he told the Mother not to be discouraged. Money would come. *Don Saturnino* did not lose hope, sent 8,000 *reales* to the Mother, urging her to trust in the Divine Providence.

Mr. Jalderos' idea was that all the members of the Association, the Curia and the Cabildo, would contribute a certain amount. For his part, *Don Saturnino* promised 20,000 *reales*.

Christmas delicacy he also sent to the Community, and this would as well help to celebrate the recent elevation to the Cardinalate of Archbishop Barrio.

Under other circumstances, he would himself construct the new Home for the Little Sisters, but now, he needed help from others, and with this help, the convent was finally bought for 52,000 *pesetas* (315 euros), of which 28,000 *pesetas* (168 euros) was the personal contribution of *Don Saturnino*. The restoration of the Convent was to be shouldered by the new Cardinal.

The Little Sisters moved into the Santa Monica Convent on November 23, 1874. This enabled them to receive more elderly persons and more aspirants. Eight months later, there were 32 novices, a fact that made Mother exclaim:

*“This Home looks like a village and, to manage it, one would need one and a half heady”*

Soon a new building for the novitiate was under construction in the orchard, and the Mother wrote to *Don Saturnino*:

*“I don’t know if we will be able to finish it, because expenses are increasing. I start to wonder: we will see how Divine Providence helps us... The Lord Cardinal visits us frequently, sometimes two or three times a week.”*

*Don Saturnino* worked for the Congregation without rest. On March 1874, Little Sister *Mercedes Calzada*, a virtuous woman, died. She had been the first aspirant received by the Mother in Aitona. New aspirants were coming. So, the Founder decided that a new foundation should be made in Zaragoza, where he spent one month in autumn, and where he had good friends, among them *Cardinal García Gil*, O.P., who was interested in the idea. It was inaugurated on May 10, in *Calle Mayor*. *Don Saturnino* frequently visited and helped it. The Founder of the Little Sisters was jubilant.

In November 1874, Mother Teresa got sick. It seemed to be a passing problem; but her condition kept worsening until death. Since she had not yet completed the two years of novitiate prescribed by the Constitutions, she took the temporal vows. The Founder comforted her, advised her to take it calmly and have full confidence in Providence.

Towards the end of the year 1874, *General Martínez Campos* caused the fall of Republic and proclaimed *Don Alfonso of Borbón*, son of Elisabeth II, King of Spain. This restoration gave Spain a long period of peace and of economic prosperity that favored new foundation in the Congregation of the Little Sisters. And so, in October 1875, one was opened in *Cabra (Cordoba)* and a year after, in *Oliva (Valencia)*.

At around this time, *Don Saturnino* wrote to the Nuncio and to the newly elected Bishop of *Huesca* about his intention to resign from the position “*Chantre*” of *Huesca*, so as to have more time to look after the Little Sisters. The Bishop asked him to reconsider, begging him not to deprive the diocese of his services. *Don Francisco Garcia Lopez*, Secretary to the Valencia’s archbishop offer the same advice. Taking all this as coming from God, *Don Saturnino* decided to remain in *Huesca*.

In March 1876 *Don Saturnino* preached the Spiritual exercises to more than four hundred ladies of the Conference of Saint Vincent of Paul and to the members of the Sunday schools of the city and wrote the *Ordinances of the Huesca Seminary*, where his deep priestly spirit is reflected. In June of same year, the *Constitutions* of the Congregation were approved by Rome, that requested some minute changes before the final approval.

On August 31 *Don Saturnino* went to Valencia to visit *Cardinal Barrio*, his secretary *Francisco Lopez* and *Mother Teresa* to see about the changes in the *Constitutions*, requested by Rome. This was his first visit to the Valencia Sisters. Seeing so many novices, he exclaimed with the Psalmist: “*This was done by the Lord; it is a real miracle.*” (Psalm 124)

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, he gave the habit to two new aspirants, and presided over the profession of two novices. On October 4<sup>th</sup>, he left Valencia and went to Tarragona where he made arrangements for a foundation there.

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1876, *Cardinal Barrio*, who had been a father to the Little Sisters, passed away and on December 7<sup>th</sup> *Don Saturnino* sent copies of the already revised *Constitutions* to *Mother Teresa*.

At this time, the Little Sisters numbered as many as fifty and so on December 29<sup>th</sup> *Mother Teresa*, accompanied by six of the Sisters, opened a new Home in Burgos.

## 5. Absorption by the French Little Sisters of the Poor

The year 1877 was a very difficult one for the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. The Cardinal Archbishop of Rennes, France, the city where the Mother House of the Little Sisters of the Poor was located, complained to the Holy See that the Spanish Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly had usurped their name.

In Rome, *Cardinal Simeone* apparently had no idea of the existence of the *Decretum Laudis* in favor the Spanish Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor and of the short but fecund history of the Congregation founded by *Don Saturnino*. *Monsignor Rampolla*, in-charge of the Nunciature in Madrid, favored the French complain: “*Truly, the Spanish Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor had usurped the name, and they were an obstacle to the expansion of the French Sisters of the Poor*”, according to him.

Consulted by the Nuncio, the Capitular Vicar of Valencia, a protector from the very beginning of the Spanish Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor, wrote a long memorandum in which, after showing his surprise about the French complain, explained the history of the Spanish foundation and its rapid expansion, as well as differences between the two institutes, the name, the Constitutions, etc.

Nothing could convince the Nuncio, who counseled the merger of the two Institutes. In the presence of such unjustified pretensions, *Don Saturnino* reacted sharply and explained his position:

*“In no way we shall bow to the French demands: the name is different, the Constitutions have the provisional approval of the Holy See, something still lacking in the French institute. Furthermore, there are in the Church Institutes with similar names*



*and aims and nobody protest... If the French insist on pursuing their claim, I am ready to defend our Institute with the pen.”* (Letter to Mother Teresa).

The new Archbishop of Valencia suggested a change of name, from: *Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor* to the *Little Sisters of Abandoned Elderly*, but left the final decision in the hands of *Don Saturnino*, who insisted that the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars listen to both sides. Eventually, the suggested change was accepted and both Teresa and *Don Saturnino* were relieved thinking that the whole incident was closed. Unfortunately, it was to the contrary. *Le Pailleur* revived the whole controversy in 1882.

At about the same time, a new problem surfaced that was initiated by the Catholic Association of Valencia. Some of their members directed a suggestion to the Archbishop for the creation of a *Junta* which primary purpose was to manage Santa Monica Home. This idea was strongly rejected by *Don Saturnino* for a very logical reason. He believed that:

*“the Junta ‘s claim that they will be the Protectors of the Little Sisters will only be demonstrated at the beginning but later they will slowly absorb the Little Sisters, thus turning them into a Secular Institution totally subordinate to the Junta.”*

More unpleasant events took place in the year 1877. The Mother got seriously ill although she recovered later to make the perpetual profession on December 8. *Don Francisco’s* health was another added concern which took their attention and resulted to having no foundations accomplished for this year. As a matter of fact, this year was so bad for the Institute that Mother Teresa cried out:

*“This year the cross has been a lot.”*

It was indeed a painful year but as always, pain they believe is just a prelude to Resurrection. They foresaw that the next year 1878 would be a glorious one.

## 6. The Foundation's Creative Productivity

During the year 1877, *Don Saturnino*, *Don Francisco* and *Mother Teresa* had already started building their bases for the establishment of new foundations. Their efforts were rewarded because the following year they were very successful in opening nine Homes. It was indeed an extraordinary harvest.

Encouraged by this achievement and motivated to further promote this great expansion, *Don Saturnino* wrote a pamphlet outlining the aims and the nature of work the Institute was trying to accomplish. He sent out this pamphlet to the Bishops, influential people, and the Association of Catholics in Spain. Most importantly he did not forget the Daily Press to whom he sent out complete information about the Congregation and its goals including the New Foundations that were opened. The list of the New Foundations for the year 1878 included *Tudela*, *Castellon de la Plana*, *Almeria*, two in *Santiago de Compostela*, *Alcoy*, *Cuenca*, *Guadix* and *Yecla*.

These activities, however, were happening so fast that it frightened *Don Francisco*. His own idea was to first fully develop these foundations, increase the number of Little Sisters and have more time to regain the health of the Mother before adding more Foundations to what they already had. The Founder, *Don Saturnino*, however, had a different opinion. He thought that the more Foundations they opened the more aspirants they can solicit and the Institute will slowly become known to everybody. Even as he was toying with the idea, he was already dreaming of New Foundations in *Valladolid*, *Tarazona*, *Santander*, *Caceres* and even in *Portugal*.

He wrote,

*“If we work with zeal, GOD will provide.”*

Sometime this year, through the Nuncio in Madrid, *Don Saturnino* sent a copy of his beautifully-bound book titled *The Christian Preaching*, to the Holy Father and included 4,000 *reales*. The Nuncio, *Monsignor Cattani* sent it to Rome but added a memorandum addressed to the Cardinal Secretary with very unfavorable remarks about *Don Saturnino* and his Foundation.

Totally ignorant of this fact, *Don Saturnino* continued working for the expansion of the Institute. In January 1879, the Jativa Home was opened followed by those in *Cuenca* and *Gijon* which were opened in May. At that time, three years had already lapsed since the approval of the Congregation by the *Decretum Laudis*, so *Don Saturnino* prepared all the necessary documentation for the final approval of the Constitutions expecting that this approval would come back very fast. Contrary to what he had hoped for the approval only arrive in 1897, because of all the intrigues caused by the *Le Pailleur* controversy plus the negative reports written by the Nuncio in Madrid.

The following year, 1880, eight more new Homes were inaugurated in *Baza*, *Cordoba*, *Calatayud*, *Cocentina*, *Badajoz*, *Jaca*, *Santander* and *Aviles*.

In the spring of 1880, a serious conflict arose between the Cabildo (the Cathedral Chapter) of Huesca and the Bishop. Out of the eleven canons, only five sided with the Bishop, *Don Saturnino* was one of them. The situation worsened and developed into a very serious conflict that those involved begun to fear for their lives including *Don Saturnino*. The threat was so imminent that he decided to temporarily transfer his residence to *Zaragoza*.

During his stay in *Zaragoza*, its' Cardinal, *Garcia Gil*, requested the Holy See to have *Don Saturnino* appointed as his Auxiliary Bishop. His name was actually first in the “*terna*” (the list of three names presented to the King), but for political reasons and also by virtue of his Regal Patronage of the Spanish Church, the second in the “*terna*” was the one chosen by the King.

At about this time, he received a letter from the Bishop of *Huesca* asking him to return to *Huesca* as he needed him there. He promptly returned to *Huesca* where he spent his time as Canon, Preacher and alms giver.

## 7. More and Bigger Clouds Threatened the Horizon

On November 1881, Homes in *Palencia* and *Bejar* (Salamanca) were opened followed by one in *Calahorra* opened in December and another one in *Oviedo* opened on January 1882. Two months later another Home was founded in *Tuy* (Pontevedra).

It was during these months that *Don Saturnino's* name was recommended for the position of Episcopate of *Calahorra* which was vacant at that time. These rumors reached him and he immediately prepared a letter of renunciation explaining that he definitely preferred to stay at the side of his Congregation.

At the end of 1881, *Le Pailleur* sent another petition to Rome asking the Holy Father to oblige the Spanish Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor to merge with the French Little Sisters of the Poor. With the help of Don Francisco, Mother Teresa sent a letter to the Holy Father Leo XIII, urging him not to force her and her Little Sisters to merge with the French Little Sisters of the Poor. Her petition was supported by another letter from Valencia Archbishop.

Through the advice of *Don Saturnino* she further wrote letters to several bishops of the dioceses where the Homes were

located pleading for their support of her request to the Holy Father. She pointed out several obvious reasons why she was against the merging of her Congregation with the French Little Sisters of the Poor. Primarily, there was this difference in the name and the Constitution governing their Congregation and secondly the Congregation was composed mainly of Spanish Superiors and therefore was developed with such affiliation and character. In comparison, the purposes and aims of her Congregation was somewhat different from the French Little Sisters of the Poor. Furthermore, the Congregation had already been approved by the Church and its presence in 19 dioceses with 28 other homes and 249 Little Sisters was something that could not be ignored.

At the end of her letter, the Mother emphatically denied the two allegations of *Le Pailleur* that the funds coming from inheritances and legacies which initially intended for the French Sisters were appropriated instead to her own Congregation. *Le Pailleur* further alleged that the Spanish Little Sisters were trying to sway to their own Congregation, Sisters who already belonged to the French Congregation.

It was evident that *Le Pailleur* was going after the money. On the other hand, the Spanish Little Sisters acknowledged that one of their biggest fears were the legal complications that will come up should the name of the Congregation be changed.

*Don Saturnino* encouraged the Mother to be confident and wait patiently for whatever the final outcome of the petition would be.

On March 19, feast of St. Joseph, *Don Saturnino* laid the cornerstone of the new Novitiate near the Mother House of Saint Monica. After visiting the new foundation in *Castellon* on the 29<sup>th</sup>, he returned to *Huesca* to prepare the foundation in *Burgo de Osma*. Mother Teresa, on her part, went to *Teruel* to arrange a new foundation there.

On June 1882, the *Nuncio Bianchi* wrote to the *Valencia* Archbishop informing him that he had received from the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars the basis of a final agreement between the French and the Spanish Institutes to be signed in the Nunciature in Madrid by the Superior General of both Institutions.

*Don Saturnino* had some hesitations and doubts, however, he conceded and the agreement was finally signed in the presence of the Nuncio on July 13, 1882 by Mother *Teresa Jornet e Ibars*, the Secretary General and the Superior of French Sisters in Madrid. There were three noted provisions as follows:

- 1) Both Institutes will be independent from each other;
- 2) The Spanish Sisters will change its present name into *Hermanitas de los Ancianos Desamparados* (Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly); and
- 3) Neither Institute will be allowed to establish a Home in places where there was already an existing Home for either Institute.

This agreement was finally approved by Pope Leo XIII on July 21, 1882.

The conflict between the two Institutions has finally come to a happy end. *Don Saturnino* made his final decision to stay in *Huesca* where he had resolved to spend the remainder of his life. He knew that from there he could serve both the diocese and the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly.

Notwithstanding all the troubles they had been through, *Don Saturnino* and Mother Teresa were more than ever determined to continue with their crusade of opening more Homes. On September 17, a Home was opened in *Logrono*, on the 19<sup>th</sup>, in *Villarrobledo*, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, *La Coruna*, and on

November 17 still another one in *Ocana* (Toledo). The last one, however, will be the last Home opened for that year.

*Don Saturnino*, very grateful and most thankful for all the accomplishments wrote the Little Sisters ‘chaplain commending them of all the services they have rendered to the Little Sisters. He also sent out pamphlets to almost every corner of Spain complete with all the information about what the Congregation has done and achieved. He gave the same news to the Mother Superiors and encouraged them to continue confronting their difficulties with patience. He further discussed the possibility of more new foundations to be opened.

He desired that:

*“That all of them be kept united and guided by the Holy Spirit, having only in mind, the accomplishment of the mission entrusted to them: God’s Glory, their Sanctification and that of the Elderly, so to contribute to the greater growth of religion, the good of the Church and the sanctification of all Christians. If they would follow this path, “GOD’S HELP WILL NOT FAIL.”*

## Chapter V

### LOVE HAS NO LIMITS

(1882–1897)

#### 1. Family Life and Character of the Founder

When Bishop Basilio was still alive, his nephew lived with him in the Bishop's palaces of *Barbastro* and *Huesca*. After the Bishop's death, however, *Don Saturnino* went to live in a house at Plaza Nueva, a house which he had bought several years back. In 1871, *Maria Gomez*, fifty one years old, became the hardworking housekeeper of the family also taking the place of *Don Saturnino's* cousin, *Maria Magro Novoa*. In 1874, his niece *Saturnina*, 14 years old, joined the family. Several years later, however, *Saturnina* contracted meningitis and lost all her sensibilities. They sent her to *Siguenza* to live with her grandmother and later, still in the hope that she would get better decided again to move her to *Valencia* to live with the Little Sisters. Finally in 1879, *Saturnina* was moved to *Chiloeches* (Guadalajara) to join her father *Don Guillermo*. *Don Guillermo* was ordained priest after he became a widower and at that time was the rector of the parish. Both were supported financially by *Don Saturnino*. *Saturnina* died at the age of 20 (year 1880) followed by her father two years later.

*Maria Gomez* found more helpers to help her in all domestic chores in the person of *Petronila Luguin* and *Francisco Terreu*. He had a dog named *Lindo* which has greatly amused *Don Saturnino* and even the Little Sisters who used to stay with them when they travel along that way.



These three people had become *Don Saturnino's* closest family. They shared in every daily activity like Mass and the daily rosary celebrated at his home. They sat in the table with him and shared with his many worries as well as his joys. They really took good care of him that for so many years of his life he enjoyed a life of well being and good health. The only thing that occasionally bothered him was some bouts of gastric pains and common cold. Most of his photos showed his small, narrow but penetrating eyes that revealed a serene and reflective character. This reflected a quality characteristic of a person with great psychological equilibrium and total control of oneself.

In all his correspondences and the multiple works he did during his long life as a priest, it can be gleaned that he is a person of enterprising personality, practical common sense and a working capability of a person trained for perfection. He disliked improvisations and unnecessary compromises. He also had the uncommon ability to perceive problems and correspondingly find the solution for it. Along with all these admirable qualities was also a person gifted with a fine aesthetic sensibility and exemplary taste for Architecture and Music. He possessed a powerful voice and a very good musical ear for which reason he became cathedral Chantre. His musical talent was inherited from his father.

His serious and austere personality was characteristic of somebody who came from the noble region of *Castilla*, where he was born, or of the cold lands of *Aragon*, his adopted country. This was projected in all the letters that he wrote. He was very direct and straight to the point not using any unnecessary words or wasting time with exaggerated phrases of theatrical effect. It reflected a very sincere but firm expression of his opinions or purposes. He does not hide, however, his sentiments and affection that flow tenderly and spontaneously especially when writing to the family, the Little Sisters and the Elderly.

His words were always warm flowing from spontaneous emotions, constant supernatural visions which was a natural reflection of his priestly soul. However, his letters was never lacking of his sense of humor. In one of his absences from *Huesca*, he wrote the Dean of the Cathedral:

*“The Cabildo seemed a tomb, and it will continue being so until you come back.”*

## **2. Adoption of Small Child Francisco Oliván**

On Christmas of 1882, *Don Saturnino* added a new and very special member to his peculiar family. He adopted a small child named *Francisco Olivan Palacin*, born on December 14. The mother of the child died six days after giving birth to him. Upon knowing this, the Chantre quickly adopted the child on Christmas Eve. Here’s how he told this story:

*“For a long time, I have wanted to have the poor in my table but some obstacles prevented me from doing it. Would it provoke other people’s envy? Will I promote the laziness of the poor? I was thinking about these matters when God in His inscrutable actions came to satisfy my desires, offering me a poor small child that would be with me, sit at my table, and give me consolation, thus making this act of charity better than having any other person.”*

An “*ama*” (wet nurse) was hired to take care of the child. The baby was baptized and when he reached five years of age he was confirmed. On December 24, 1884, just two years after his birth, the services of the “*ama*” were terminated. The little child sat at *Don Saturnino*’s table. On December 1891, Francisco received his First Communion.

The boy, Francisco went to school for his primary grades at the College of the Sisters of Saint Ann, *Huesca*, and subsequently, the “*Bachillerato*” (High School) an Institute of that city. To prepare him for his university studies, *Francisco* was sent to *Jaca* (*Huesca*) as a boarder at the College of the *Escolapios* (Piarist Fathers).

*Don Saturnino* was very careful to put in writing all the varied events and changes in the boy’s life, recording all his grades in school and even noted down the first day he served at Mass.

*Don Saturnino* had enough reasons to be satisfied of his charity records. He had founded the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly, the House for Poor Students for the Priesthood and had established the Conferences of Saint Vincent of Paul both in *Barbastro* and *Huesca*, to which he gave his continued support spiritually and financially.

He also took care of the Little Sisters of the Poor that he brought to *Huesca*, with great tenderness especially in their worst moments amidst the controversy. He was indeed rightfully appreciated for his generosity and all his charity works.

During these years, he had sent 10,000 *reales* (15 Euros) to the parish priest of *Berlanga* to build a small chapel in the cemetery, the same place where the remains of his auntie was buried. He likewise contributed 20,000 *reales* (30 Euros) for small projects in the Cathedral of *Barbastro*, and 23,479 *reales* (35.28 Euros) to *Huesca* for similar projects. He gave out to each parish free copies of his work *History of Barbastro*. He also sent a Church ornament valued for about 3,000 *reales* to the “*Adoratrices*” of *Valencia* and for other works being done in the Cathedral of *Huesca* he contributed 18,700 *reales* (28 Euros). He also gave some contributions for the construction of an organ for the Carmelites of *Huesca*. His charity works never stopped there, it went on and on.

What was the reason for *Don Saturnino's* decision to adopt a child? It could be attributed to the remembrance of the loving care he had received from his auntie Manuela which prompted him to keep on giving love the way he had received it. Mostly, however, it was his ardent love of God that inspired him to convey this love to others through his continuous work of mercy especially to the poor.

In the person of Francisco, the little orphaned and underfed boy who arrived in his home on Christmas Eve, *Don Saturnino* saw Jesus Himself, born in a poor manger. Hence, his love for the boy and his real interest for his education. He suffered with him through the illness of his mother, continuously encouraged him in his studies and always ready to give him all his needs. He prayed for the boy every day.

*Don Saturnino* was very contented with the progress of Francisco in his studies and overall in his intellectual development and his religious formation. He started hoping that one day he would take over his work especially for the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. But his hopes were never realized because Francisco studied in Barcelona and finished it after *Don Saturnino's* death in 1905. Even before the death of *Don Saturnino*, Francisco already showed an indifference towards his protector's aspiration yet *Don Saturnino* continued offering Wednesday Mass, which was said in memory of Saint Joseph, for his intentions. His last Mass said on February 23, 1905 was also offered for his well being.

When Francisco obtained his degree of Pharmacy, he migrated to Mexico where he eventually got married. He could not forget though his mentor and protector, *Don Saturnino* and his love for him. In the year 1959, Francisco started giving testimonials about the life and virtues of *Don Saturnino* and testified about the sanctity of his life.

During two of his travels to Spain, he visited the tomb of *Don Saturnino* in the Mother House and expressed his gratitude to the man to whom he owed everything that he was.

### 3. The Acquisition of the Cuban Institute de Sancha

The combined efforts of the Founder, of Mother Teresa and of Don Francisco to extend the services of the Congregation to more elderly give way to the opening of more Foundations in 1883, Foundations of *Alcira, Villena, Alcazar de San Juan, Orihuela, Vigo, Caldas de Reyes, Burgo de Osma, Teruel, Llerena* and *Caravaca de la Cruz*. These ten new foundations could have been more had there been more Little Sisters available. For this reason and added to the frequent ailment of Mother Teresa, only three more foundations were added in 1884, *Huelva, Almansa* and *Orense*.

Meanwhile, the Dean of the Cathedral of *Huesca* died and Bishop *Onaindia* wanted to recommend the Chantre for that high position. Humbly, *Don Saturnino* begged the Bishop not to do it for two obvious reasons. First, he believed he did not possess anymore the strength and the qualities to handle such responsibility and secondly, taking the position would interfere with his plans for the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. Understanding these two good reasons for declining his recommendation, the Bishop did not proceed with presenting his name anymore.

In the year 1884, the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba requested his homologous of Valencia, Spain, to fusion the Little Sisters of the Poor Invalid of Cuba with the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly of Spain.

The Little Sisters of the Poor Invalid of Cuba was only a diocesan Institute, founded by the now *Beatus Ciriaco Ma. Sanchay Hervas*, future Cardinal of *Toledo* (Spain), Penitentiary

and Secretary General of the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. This request was not new to Mother Teresa as it was already presented before to her in 1876 by the same Sancha. Neither *Don Francisco* nor the Archbishop of Valencia, *Monescillo*, nor *Cardinal Barrio* was in favor of the merger. *Don Saturnino*, however, thought otherwise. He entertained the hope that this merger would facilitate both the expansion of his Congregation in America and the approval of the Constitution. He wrote:

*“We have nothing to lose but so much to gain  
– However, we must be careful about the conditions  
governing this merger, let us go ahead and do  
something about the matter.”*

On January 1877, Mother Teresa went to Toledo to see *Bishop Sancha*, at that time Auxiliary Bishop of that City. The Bishop made clear to her his readiness to accept any conditions that maybe imposed by the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly in order to have this merger happened. Sancha, nevertheless probably found the conditions presented by Mother Teresa for the merger, unacceptable, because the negotiations did not continue. It was only after 7 years that it was revisited this time by the new Archbishop of Cuba, *Jose Martin the Herrera* who immediately accepted the conditions presented by the Mother. There were still some hesitations on the part of Mother Teresa and of *Don Saturnino* himself, but he placed the matter in God’s hands. The final decision of acceptance was unanimously made by the General Chapter of the Little Sisters of Abandoned Elderly in 1885 under one condition. The merger was approved but at that time only the House of Santiago de Cuba was taken in, because there were not enough Little Sisters. The rest will have to wait until more Little Sisters would arrive from Spain.



15



16

15. Facade of the Cathedral of Huesca.

16. Image of Our Lady of Carmel in the oratory of Father Founder, given by the Manila Foundation of the Dominican Religious of Huesca.



17

17. Authentic picture of Father Founder with the first Little Sisters (1873)  
To his right is Saint Teresa Jornet.



**18. Receiving an elderly man.**

*"It is advisable that charity and mercy be our loved virtues."*

*"It is an incalculable merit we established before God for every soul of an elderly that is saved for heaven."*



**19. Allegory of the approval of the Constitutions by Papa Leo XIII, painted in 1943.**



*Don Saturnino's* Congregation, now legally recognized by a Royal Decree of 1884 vigorously continued with its expansion in 1885. Inspired by the numerous new vocations opened, the Little Sisters now dreamed of even further expanding their Institute not only in every corner of Spain but even across the Atlantic up to Spanish America.

On February 12, a Home was inaugurated in *Lugo*. *Don Jose Ma. Jaldero*, considered one of the first strong pillars of the Congregation because of his generous and unselfish help to the work started by the Chantre of *Huesca* in *Barbastro*, died three days later. On the other hand, while the Little Sisters were celebrating their General Chapter of 1885, *Don Saturnino* was working for another Foundation in *Pontevedra* inaugurated on May 28 of the same year.

Meanwhile, Mother Teresa's deteriorating health and frequent relapses seriously worried *Don Saturnino*. The Founder thought that her role in the continuous expansion of the Institute, the spiritual formation and development of the proper and distinctive character of the Little Sisters was very vital and essential to the Institute.

It was twelve years ago that the young *Teresa Jornet e Ibars* arrived in "*Casa Pueyo*". It was this twelve years that she dedicated her most intensive years of human and spiritual maturity and productivity. Her fidelity to God's call and her admirable services to the Congregation was beyond question. She exemplifies a person who observes and follows the Constitutions without exception. *Don Saturnino* considered her a "*Gift from God*" and was most thankful for her. To him she represented his entire work and with his usual characteristic of supernatural refinement, entrusted in her hands the propagation of the foundation's special charisma.

#### 4. The Cholera Epidemic of 1885, and the First Foundations in America

In the summer of 1885 there was an outbreak of cholera epidemic which caused a lot of desolation in Valencia. While Mother Teresa was sick in Burgos, 70 elderly people and 24 Little Sisters died in the Mother House of Valencia during the months of June and July. Several other elderly and six other Sisters died in several other locations. The death of 30 young Little Sisters was particularly an insensible loss at that time because of the impending expansion in America. The epidemic had spread in Aragon and throughout Huesca. Not minding his own welfare, *Don Saturnino* aided the parish priests in their visits to the sick, distributed food, medicines and blankets to the poorest families. They distributed 5,000 *pesetas* among the parishes, hospitals and other institutions not forgetting the orphan children and the destitute families.

Such a great and commendable work of charity did not go unnoticed. The daily press sang praises for it. The Bishop and the City Council had formulated the idea of requesting the Government to give *Don Saturnino* the “*La Gran Cruz de Beneficencia*” (The Great Cross of Beneficence) for his works. That idea was turned down by *Don Saturnino* in compliance with the resolutions contained in his “*Regla de Vida*”:

*“No use of symbols, no acceptance of decorations or titles, for it is enough for me to be a Christian, and minister, though unworthy, of Jesus Christ and the Holy Cross of Christ. I don’t want, Lord, other wealth than your glory, no other honor than my service to you and no other gratification than to please you.”*

After all the trials were over, Mother Teresa took the first steps to establish a foundation in Cuba. The Divine Providence

suggested a change of plans and was approved by the General Chapter. In the first days of August, a letter arrived at the Mother House of Valencia with the good news that a legacy of 100,000 pesos was donated to fund a New Home in La Habana. Both the founder and Mother Teresa accepted the offer and wrote to their testamentary that the Little Sisters would sail for Cuba next December.

On December 3, the Home of *Jerez de los Caballeros* was inaugurated. This was the fruit of the friendship between the founder and the Bishop of *Badajoz*, *Don Fernando Ramirez*, special protector of the Little Sisters. Three days later, another Home was opened in *Huerca-Overa* (Almeria) and on the 13<sup>th</sup> a new one in *Novelda* (Alicante). The following day ten volunteer Little Sisters were on board a ship that sailed from Valencia to Cuba. With them were several Mother Superiors, five of whom would go to *Santiago de Cuba* and five to *La Habana*, The Founder sent them with his blessings and accompanied them with his prayers.

On January 11, 1886, the ship arrived in *Santiago de Cuba* where the Archbishop and the Cuban Little Sisters of de Sancha welcomed them.

Upon their arrival at the House of the Cuban Little Sisters, their Superior, *Sister Caridad*, knelt down in the oratory at the feet of the new Superior, *Sister Vicenta de San Rafael*, as a symbol of the merger of her Institute with Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly.

Since the House of the Cuban Sisters was too small to accommodate all the newcomers, the Spanish group decided to find board and lodging in the local hospital, operated by the Sisters of Charity, who welcomed them and treated them like their own.

In February, 1886, the Spanish Sisters bought a beautiful colonial house, furnished, and with a large orchard and garden.

It was there that they received their first elderly. The House was formally inaugurated in May of 1886. Out of the ten Cuban Sisters of the House in La Habana, seven requested admission to the Spanish Congregation.

*Don Saturnino* communicated with the Cuban Foundations even more often than he did with any other Homes in Spain. In his letters, he conveyed much affection, giving them practical advices on how to better organize the Homes, the conduct of their spiritual life and the apostolate with the elderly. He emphasized the need to observe their *vow of poverty* with joyfulness. He wrote to the Mother of Santiago de Cuba:

“... *If you are given anything beautiful and of great value, sell it and buy beds and other necessary items.*”

## **5. The Servants of Mary in Huesca. Rome Approves the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Elderly**

At that same time, the Foundation which *Don Saturnino* considered his family tree had continued extending its branches all over Cuba. The zeal for more new foundations never diminished. In 1886 new Homes were opened such as Homes of *Pola de Siero* (Asturias) and of *Jumilla* (Murcia) opened in January 1887, and another one in *Valdepenas* (Ciudad Real).

On February, the new Council of the Congregation was elected. *Mother Teresa* remained as the Mother General and her sister, *Sor Maria Jornet* was chosen as Vice Superior General.

Meanwhile, *Don Saturnino* aside from helping the elderly had always nurtured the desire to help sick people too. His emotions was always moved when thinking of their suffering especially for those who had to carry their burden alone and how they would go through the agonizing hours of the night with their pain and loneliness.

Counting on the support of two friends, *Don Saturnino* made a promise to shoulder the costs of opening a House in Huesca. He was therefore greatly overwhelmed when five Servants of Mary (Ministers of the Sick), founded by the priest *Don Miguel Martinez y Sanz*, with the cooperation of today's *Saint Soledad Torres Acosta*, opened their Residence in Huesca in March 1887. He was to become their chaplain, confessor, and spiritual director but most of all their benefactor with generous contributions. The Servants of Mary had such confidence on *Don Saturnino* that they requested the Chantre to review their Constitutions even before sending it to Rome for final approval.

The incredible work of *Don Saturnino* coupled with his capability and admirable passion for ecclesiastical matters and charitable works qualified him to handle even more responsibilities in different aspects of the life of the Church. On April 1887, the Capitular Vicar of the Cathedral of *Huesca* appointed him to be the Chairman of the Committee in charged of preparing all activities for the celebration of Pope Leo XIII Jubilee.

On May 8, he went to Valencia, where he had spent with Don Francisco and Mother Teresa, the first fifteen years of their Congregation. In thanksgiving to God and to the Virgin Mary of the Abandoned, Patroness of Valencia, he celebrated his Mass in her "*camarin*" (the oratory behind the main altar). On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, he returned to Huesca full of happiness and jubilation for the exemplary expansion of his Institute.

Once he arrived in *Huesca*, *Don Saturnino* wasted no time in making arrangements to open another foundation in *Tafalla* (Navarra). His works of charity had no limits as far as doing it for God's honor and as far as the needs of the poor were concerned. People most in need and matters that involved the

propriety of his Divine Religion were the primary recipients of his most important donations. In September 1887, when the Congregation reached a total of 54 Homes in 28 dioceses, the final approval of the Institute by Rome was finally received. To the new Superior of La Habana, *Don Saturnino* wrote:

*“God has given me great consolation with the final approval of the Congregation by Rome. Very few founders were given this privilege while still alive. This is an additional motive to be thankful to God and an added stimulus to comply with our duties with more zeal.”*

In thanksgiving, a solemn *Te Deum* was sung in Zaragoza.

In October 1887, a Home in *Monforte* (Lugo) was inaugurated, and in January 1888, those in *Leon*, *Alcaniz* (Teruel), and *Montilla* (Cordoba) were opened. On August, another one was founded in *Sueca* (Valencia) and on November, a new one in *Puebla de Don Fadrique* (Toledo). At this time, the number of Congregation has already reached 62 to the extreme joy of *Don Saturnino* and Mother Teresa, who arrived in Huesca in July already seriously ill. She was in a very serious situation that the Little Sisters feared she would die on the way. Fortunately, because of the excellent treatment that was given her, she recovered and survived the ordeal.

On November 29, Mother Teresa returned again to Huesca, from where *Don Saturnino* wrote:

*“On my feast day, I felt happy because I saw the Institute represented at home in the person of the Mother Superior and of the other Sisters who came from Zaragoza to join us. We spent the day in holy peace and joy.”*

In these visits, both the Founder and Mother Teresa renewed the vigor of the history of their congregation and projected more new foundations in Spain and in the Republic of Santo Domingo. The Mother General provided *Don Saturnino* with all the details of each projected foundation. This information was used by *Don Saturnino* for the new edition of the pamphlet he was writing about the Institute. Once completed and printed, he would send copies to each Home in the first months of the year 1889.

## **6. The “Exhalation” and the Exposition of the Religious Duties**

While *Don Saturnino* was writing the history of his Institute, the Little Sisters continued opening more homes. In February 1889, they opened a new Home in *Villanueva del Arzobispo* (Jaen) and *Epila* (Zaragoza) and on May another one in *Puente Genil* (Cordoba).

During these days, a big storm passed over *Huesca* and a very extraordinary event happened to *Don Saturnino*. A thunderbolt directly hit his small room, while *Don Saturnino*, terrified, continued praying the Hail Holy Queen. The authorities of *Huesca* and some personal friends carefully examined the extent of the destruction in the room. They concluded that it was indeed a real miracle that *Don Saturnino* did not die in that damage. As a matter of fact, he did not even suffer from any minor injury or any respiratory complications which could have easily resulted from the fire and thunderbolt of this size. Nor did he lose peace of his soul at any moment during this incident. He attributed the Miracle to our Blessed Mother, whose feast of Mary the Helper (Maria Auxiliadora) was celebrated that day, May 24<sup>th</sup>. From that day on until his death, he would always observe this feast with special Devotion. At the same time in all the Homes of the Congregation, special prayers of thanks were offered to our Lord and to His Blessed Mother.

In the year 1889, *Don Saturnino* published his most important book, dedicated to *Saint Joseph*. It was titled EXPOSITION OF THE RELIGIOUS DUTIES. The book was composed of two volumes with a total of over 1,100 pages. It took him five years to complete this book, writing only during the moments that he could snatch away from all his other pressing duties. This is what he wrote in his *Regla de Vida* about his books:

*”One of the favors granted to me by our Lord during my life was the inspiration of writing several books and with his help to be able to finish and publish them particularly Christian Life, Treatise on Sacred Oratory, and The Exposition of Religious Duties. My intention in writing them was for God’s Glory and for the Sanctification of souls.”*

The book was intended not only for the priests but most especially, for the lay people, for whom the book was written for the purpose of providing them a good, clear and affordable manual. The daily press, the Diocesan Bulletin, many priests and publicists raved about the book and highly praised the writing.

## **7. Foundation in Sigüenza and Other Pastoral Enterprises**

On June 1, 1890, with two Little Sisters of *Calatayud* and five others from *Valencia*, the Home of *Sigüenza* was inaugurated. Grateful to *Don Saturnino*, Bishop Ochoa gave the Little Sisters to be their new Home the castle-palace of the bishops. Just like what he did in the vesture of the first group of Little Sisters in *Barbastro*, *Don Saturnino* did not attend the inauguration of *Sigüenza* Home. He wanted that all the glory and honor would be for God alone and not for the founder.



But on September he did go to the city to thank the Bishop, the City Council, and benefactors for their valuable support. But he has some other purposes too for taking that trip. He wanted to find a place to build another Home for the Little Sisters. The construction indeed began in 1895 with his own personal contribution amounting to 5,000 *pesetas* (30 euros).

In 1903, *Don Saturnino* sent to the second Mother General *Mary Jornet*, part of the objects included in the inheritance he had intended to give to the Mother House, 12,000 *reales* (24 euros) representing sort of dowry for twelve aspirants entering the Congregation.

In January 1890, the Home of *Requena* (Valencia) was inaugurated, in March another one in *Liria* and then a new one in Valencia. A residence in Madrid was established for the Little Sisters travelling to different foundations and passing by the city. (Madrid was then considered the main communications hub of Spain). In May, a Home was opened in *Ocana* (Toledo), on June 26, in *La Solana* (Ciudad Real) and in August, in *Rubielos de Mora* (Teruel). *Don Saturnino*, overwhelmed with the many blessings received from God, wrote in his *Regla de Vida*:

*“Another very special blessing from God, is without any doubt, choosing me as His instrument, no matter how weak, feeble, and miserable I maybe, to be Founder of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly, greatly Blessed by Him, as proven by its significant expansion . In its seventeen years of life (until 1890) 70 Homes were founded, and it has 600 Little Sisters who took care of about 3,000 elderly.”*

Practically ignored and totally misunderstood during the two years by the new Bishop of Huesca, *Don Vicente Alda y*

*Sancho*, the situation radically changed when he decided to appoint *Don Saturnino* as *Pro-Sinodal* Examiner and Chairman of the Diocesan Commission assigned to prepare the Workers' travel to Rome to thank Pope Leo XIII for the publication of the Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*. The Bishop's esteem for *Don Saturnino* increased when he had closely observed his solid religious devoutness, the upright principles underlying all his intentions, his sincere charity and his total dedication to the service of the church. Because of this appreciation, the Bishop installed him as the Ecclesiastical Governor of the diocese during the Bishop's two absences from Huesca. Furthermore, in February 1893, the Bishop appointed *Don Saturnino*, Secretary of the Diocesan Synod, which he presided as decided by the Bishop.

## **8. The Mission of the Little Sisters. Very Close to the Little Sisters of America.**

Meanwhile, new foundations continued to open, in February 1891 in *Tomelloso* (Ciudad Real) in June, in *Puerto Rico*, in August, in *Aracena* (Huelva) and in *Aitona* (Lerida) the birth place of Mother Teresa.

On his part, *Don Saturnino* never got tired approaching ecclesiastical friends from every part of Spain asking them to find more Homes for the elderly.

At the same time he continued writing the manual of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. The book, originally planned to contain five Chapters, would explain the Constitutions from the theological point of view of the consecrated life. It contained also plenty of biblical and other materials pertaining to the fathers of the Christian church reliving their evangelical writings, Unfortunately, *Don Saturnino* finished only the first three Chapters.

In the autumn of 1891, four new foundations were opened in *Alborache* (Valencia) *Banolas* (Gerona), *Quintanar de la Orden* (Toledo) and *Tafalla* (Navarra).

In December 1891, *Don Saturnino* fell seriously sick to a rush of epidemic called *Influenza* or *Trancazo* in Spain that spread all over the country. On December 23, he received the Viaticum. The following day, the Mother of the Zaragoza Home sent two Little Sisters to take care of the Founder, who recovered so well that after one week he was able to participate in the Mass that the Superior of the *Huesca* Jesuits celebrated at his home. *Don Saturnino* was so grateful to the Little Sisters that he gave each one of them a new habit and to the Home of Zaragoza, where he returned in February, a cow and a new kitchen. However, his recovery was not complete yet. At the doctors' advice, he requested the Bishop to relieve him of his duties to the Servants of Mary, duties that he had accepted supposedly for a few months only, but extended to six years. He has not accepted any material compensation for these duties. It was also during his sickness that the new altar of Saint Joseph of the Cathedral of *Huesca*, built with all expenses shouldered by him, was then inaugurated.

On January 21, 1892, twenty Little Sisters sailed from *La Coruna* to the Homes of *Cuba* in *Puerto Rico* and to the new Foundation in *Matanzas* (Cuba). *Don Saturnino* sent them a telegram with his best wishes.

The first two letters he wrote after his recovery were addressed to the Mothers of *La Habana* and *Santiago de Cuba*. He had so much love for them.

In July, 1892, *Don Ciriaco Ma. Sancha y Hervas* was appointed the new Archbishop of *Valencia*. During the period between the appointment and the taking possession of the See, the Cabildo of the Cathedral elected *Don Francisco* as Capitular

Vicar. This appointment was taken with great joy by the Little Sisters and Father *Saturnino* who knew of his profound spirituality. Several months later, the new Archbishop appointed *Don Francisco* Provisor and Vicar General. *Don Francisco* continued assisting the Institute even with his new position and even if he lost sleeping hours doing it. In November 1892 they opened the new Home of *Las Palmas* (Canarias), in February 1893, in *Berga* (Barcelona), in March the one in *Cascante* (Navarra) and in August the one in *Daimiel* (Ciudad Real).

*Don Saturnino* wrote to the Mothers of the American foundations and encouraged them to exert their outmost efforts to open new foundations:

*“To promote and propagate the Institute is one of the greatest and more acceptable works to God ... It is one of the best services that we can make for the Church... One Foundation is a lot better than any help distributed to many poor people at one time because a foundation lasts forever and will always be there for them.”*

The mission of the Little Sisters is not only for humanitarian reasons, it is as well an Apostolic mission always having in mind God’s Glory.

*“The only purpose of the Little Sisters is to help the elderly in both spiritual and corporal aspects. They are their adopted children whom they love dearly and give them all the care that real mothers would.”*

Definitely, *Don Saturnino* who was always looking out for both physical and spiritual upliftment of the elderly, conveyed to the Little Sisters that their services required not only giving the elderly the great affection of a real mother but also help

them revived their dignity especially those who have suffered the most in their lives.

The Founder emphasized that every Little Sister should show in her words and deeds her most precious treasure – JESUS CHRIST – the only purpose of her life and the only reason for her consecration to the service of the elderly.

With this inspired spirit and the blessings of the Founder, in January 1893, another group of sixteen Little Sisters headed for America to strengthen the existing foundations and to continue in opening more new ones.

The year 1893 ended with three new foundations opened in *Trujillo* (Caceres), *Monovar* (Alicante) and *Nueva Pamplona* (Colombia).

The Mother of this latter foundation had manifested her concerns to *Don Saturnino* about the hard conditions of the place. The Founder advised her to have full confidence in the Divine Providence and wait for what is in store for their future developments for no one will ever know what God's plans are.

In February 1894, a new Foundation was started in *Puerto Rico*, in April, in *Guadalajara* (Spain) in May, in *Astorga* (Leon), in June in *Albocacer* (Castellon) and in August in *Cienfuegos* (Cuba). By this time, *Don Saturnino* received a letter from the *La Habana* Home explaining to him the apostolate work they have accomplished there. The Founder answered with the following words, very familiar to all the Little Sisters:

*“How happy am I to know of all the spiritual help you extend to the elderly. It is immeasurable the merits earned before God for each of the souls won for heaven. I could consider the Founding of the Institute worthy even if only one soul would be saved through it.”*

## 9. Mary in His Heart and All the Very Special Favors from the Lord

Even in his young tender years, *Don Saturnino* had already a special devotion to our Heavenly Mother called *La Mayor*, the Patroness of Sigüenza. The Marian devotion became even more ardent during his seminary years evidenced by his frequent visits to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Health, in *Barbatona* (Guadalajara). He also had special devotion to the Heart of Mary. In his diary, *Rule of Life*, he gave an account of the various devotions to the Blessed Mother, like the *Angelus*, the *Rosary* in the family, the wearing of the Scapular of the Virgin of Mount Carmel, the *Ave Maria* every hour, Mass and fasting on Saturdays and various Novenas. He also wrote of his daily visits to Our Lady of *El Pilar* when he was in *Zaragoza*. He had more special devotions to Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces, to Our Lady of *El Pueyo de Barbastro*, whom he had requested for help to be able to take care of the souls entrusted to him. He had also placed a petition at the feet of Our Lady of the Abandoned, Patroness of *Valencia* for his beloved Institute. The glories of Mary are the frequent theme of his homilies, sermons and lectures. This extraordinary devotion is vividly expressed in this prayer written by him:

*“I would like to have all the zeal of the apostles, confessors and virgins to promote belief and trust in you, to encourage devotion to you, and to preach your greatness and glories and to make known your goodness.”*

During the summer of 1894, *Don Saturnino* went on a pilgrimage to *Our Lady of Montserrat* (Barcelona), where he stayed for three days. Praying with all his heart, he petitioned to Our Lady the grace of sanctification and entrusted to her his beloved Institute. From *Montserrat*, he proceeded to *Castellon*

to visit the foundation there and from *Castellon* he went further to *Valencia*, where he stayed from September 3 to October 5. Mother Teresa was sick at that time and was in *Berga* so he was received by her sister, Mother *Maria Jornet*. *Don Saturnino* greatly praised God when he saw in Santa Monica 30 professed Little Sisters, 108 Novices, 22 Postulants, and 278 elderly. Needless to say, he enjoyed preaching to them and giving them lectures. He also gave the habit for eight new postulants.

Back in *Huesca*, he continued with his proverbial charities and preachings most of which were kept in his private archives. His preaching was mostly simple, biblical and full of piety.

God did not forget *Don Saturnino* whom he had showered with extraordinary blessings and graces in answer to all of his prayers. On March 16, 1884, he wrote this enigmatic line in his Register of Masses “**SPIRITUS D.N.J. super me.**” (the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is over me) a writing that he related in two occasions within the span of a few months. What happened to *Don Saturnino* during the Mass? I guess it was a unique experience of the Holy Spirit that God bestows to those souls who are intimately united with him shown by their exemplary fidelity to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. As per instruction from his Spiritual Director, Father *Santiago Soler*, Superior of the Jesuits of *Huesca*, *Don Saturnino* subsequently explained with details the spiritual favors he had received from God stating:

*“As clearly and candidly he understood that this spiritual experience had actually happened, attributing all of them to God’s Glory and never to his own merit that these graces were given to him.”*

In the vision he experienced in December 1884, the Lord, in a clear and very serious tone told him:

*“I want you to become a Saint. Therefore, remove from yourself any obstacle that may impede your perfection, and break away from any ties that may affect you.”*

In 1892, our Blessed Mother the Virgin Mary allowed him to kiss her mantle with great reverence and consolation.

In the morning of June 1894,

*“During prayer, Don Saturnino saw our Lord Jesus Christ, who showed Him His open Heart, in the center of which there was three flowers...”*

On August 25, Saturday, during his stay at Montserrat, he offered the Holy Mass for the Blessed Virgin Mary. With tears in his eyes, he asked her for the grace of holiness. That night:

*“He saw in a dream her holy image with Her Son. He saw them as clearly as in a broad daylight. When he kissed his barefooted feet, the Child gave him a most beneficial lesson that he will never forget as long as he lives, a lesson that helped him achieved sanctification. “May Son and Mother be blessed forever.”*

It is a pity that *Don Saturnino* never revealed what the *Holy Child* told him.

While the Founder was delighted with these gifts, from the big tree of the Congregation that he built had sprung new branches. On March 18, a Foundation was opened in *Vera* (Almeria), on the 28<sup>th</sup> in *Vinaroz* (Castellon) on August 5<sup>th</sup> in *Hellin* (Albacete) and on October 28<sup>th</sup>, the one in *Cardenas* (Cuba).

During the spring of this year, upon the repeated requests of Mother Teresa, he allowed a portrait of himself to be taken.



Don Francisco displayed the portrait in a noble stanza of the Mother House.

### 10. Barbastro Wants D. Saturnino as His Bishop

Since Bishop Fort's death in 1855, the diocese of *Barbastro* had been vacant. It was governed by Capitular Vicars, the first among them was Don *Basilio Gily Bueno*. In 1895, an agreement was reached between the Spanish government and the Holy See to make *Barbastro* an Apostolic Administration provided that the Church would put up a deposit to guarantee the pastoral services. The Commission in order to secure that money wrote to *Don Saturnino* asking for his help. He immediately sent out 2,000 *pesetas* to the Commission. The news of the imminent appointment of a bishop at the same time an Apostolic Administrator of Barbastro became public. The daily press, all personal friends of *Don Saturnino* and many others did their best to convince the Nuncio and the Government that *Don Saturnino* was the ideal candidate for the position. A petition led by the City Mayor was signed by 900 supporters. The only one person who really did nothing was the Good *Saturnino*, who, while warmly extending his thanks to all his friends and supporters, told them kindly that the decision must be left to the will of the Divine Providence, whose Will he will humbly accept.

When the election of *Don Casimiro Pinera Y Naredo*, Dean of Ciudad Real, as another candidate for the position of new Bishop was known, the City of *Barbastro* felt cheated. The Jurist *Don Nicolas de Otto*, a friend of *Don Saturnino* wrote to him:

*“We do not weep for you but for ourselves.  
Nobody knew better of all our needs and aspirations  
as you do and only you could remedy them...”*

Don Francisco also wrote him:

*“I believed that my hopes would now be realized. I was flattered with the idea of seeing you as Bishop, the dignity of such would give the Institute of the Little Sisters greater splendour — God be blessed.”*

While so many people were working for his nomination as Bishop of *Barbastro*, *Don Saturnino’s* daily prayer was:

*“With all my fervor, I beg You, Lord that if my nomination will not be for Your greater glory and the salvation of souls, please stop it.”*

Silently, and with great spiritual dignity, *Don Saturnino* remained silent while *Barbastro* authorities along with other people were working feverishly for his appointment as Bishop of the City he loved so much.

## **11. Final Approval of the Constitutions and Mother Teresa’s Death**

The *Barbastro* events did not stop *Don Saturnino* from working for his diocese and his Institute. After the promotion of *Alda y Sancho* as Archbishop of *Zaragoza*, *Don Mariano Supervia Y Lostale* was made Bishop of *Huesca* in February 1896. Soon after, he appointed *Don Saturnino* as Pro Sinodal Examiner.

On April 29, Mother Teresa was re-elected Superior General. Immediately after, she requested Cardinal *Rampolla*, Secretary of State of Leo XIII, if he would kindly accept the Title of Protector of the Congregation. It was him who requested the Cardinal Members of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious to give the final approval of the Constitutions of the Institute.

In 1896, four new Homes were added to the Congregation: *Algeciras* (Cadiz), the Novitiate in *Palencia*, *Medina del Campo* (Valladolid) and *Ciudad Rodrigo* (Salamanca).

Mother Teresa's health deteriorated and she was getting weaker and weaker. Upon the doctors' recommendation she was not allowed anymore to take long trips. In a letter to the Founder, she requested him to pray for her total acceptance of God's Will.

In May 1897, Mother Teresa was transferred to the Home of *Liria* (Valencia) with the hopes that its rural environment would improve her health. *Don Saturnino* followed her there and stayed with her from July 15 to the 28<sup>th</sup>, giving his blessings to the Mother and comforting his Little Sisters. The Little Sisters had always known that she was nearing the end of her journey ever since the years of *Casa Pueyo*. Mother Teresa had been their mother, sister, model and guide.

On August 3, Mother *Maria Jornet* wrote to *Don Saturnino*:

*“Each day she is getting worst to the point that she cannot take any solid food. Her only food is small sips of broth and water that cannot even quench her thirst. We are very grieved at our inability to alleviate her suffering but we have to accept God's will.”*

Mother Teresa died on August 26, after receiving with great joy the news of the final approval of the Constitution. She was 54 years old. She left behind her an incredible track of holiness, her ardent love for the Church and for the elderly, a living example and a role model for all to follow.

As it was impossible for *Don Saturnino* to reach *Liria* before the internment, the funeral Mass was presided by Don Francisco, who never left the side of the Saint. Mother Teresa's

body rested in a tomb in the cemetery of *Liria* until 1904 then her remains were transferred to the Mother House of *Valencia*.

Thus, came to an end the first chapter of the history of the Congregation – the most meritorious and heroic. The ground work of the institution that *Don Saturnino* had dreamed about had become solid and firmly consolidated in Spain. In South America, 883 Little Sisters were taking care of thousands of elderly in about 104 Homes. There never was such rapid expansion known in the history of the Church.

On August 30, *Don Saturnino* presided at a funeral Mass in *Zaragoza* for the eternal repose of the soul of Mother Teresa, whose holiness and meritorious works he had greatly admired.

The Church officially recognized her sanctity in 1974, one hundred years after the foundation of the Congregation.

When Mother *Teresa* was still alive, the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly recognized *Don Saturnino* as the true Founder of their Congregation. In fact, he had been their inspiration and he was the one who wrote its Constitution. But shortly after the death of Mother Teresa, influenced by the writing of the first biographers of the Mother and her close association with *Don Saturnino* and acknowledging her spirit and the great example she had given them, they began to all call Mother Teresa their “Founder”.

We can be assured that *Don Saturnino* in his usual great humility must be celebrating in heaven this change of name accorded to Mother Teresa who he had always considered his Great Collaborator.

## Chapter VI

### TOWARDS THE FATHER'S HOUSE

(1897–1905)

Mother Teresa's death had deprived *Don Saturnino* and the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly of the one person who was considered the soul of the Institute for the first 25 years of its existence. But all of them knew that she would be their effective intercessor in Heaven.

#### 1. Mother María Jornet, New General Superior

God's Providence that up to that time had always inspired *Don Saturnino* in all of his works, continued to shower him with His blessings with more new Foundations opened. In September, one was inaugurated in *Mondonedo* (Lugo) and in October, another one in *Palafrugel* (Gerona). In January 1898, with the Little Sisters coming from *La Habana*, and at the request of the President of the Republic, a Home was opened in Peru. On March 27, an extraordinary Chapter was called for to elect the new Mother Superior General.

Mother *Maria Jornet*, Novice Master and biological sister of Mother Teresa, was unanimously voted. *Don Saturnino* was greatly enthused with this election, knowing the qualities, intelligence, and virtues of Mother Maria plus her unquestionable love of the Congregation. She was highly appreciated by several generations of the Little Sisters who had been with her even during their formation years. In her first letter to the

Founder, Mother Maria expressed her sentiments with utmost simplicity:

*“It is with great pain, as you may have surmised that I went immediately to comply with this election. I had begged the Little Sisters to accept my resignation on account of my inability to discharge the duties of such an office, but in the end, as a daughter of obedience, I have accepted, ready to make any sacrifices for the good of the Institute. At the same time, I am always ready to do God’s will and everything that I do will be for His Greater honor and glory. I trust so much in your prayers, in your direction and counsel so that I maybe able to discharge the duties of this office as best as I could and give all the glory to God.”*

The Founder’s letters to Mother Maria was full of confidence and tenderness. Like a parent counseling their youngest children, *Don Saturnino* advised her to take care of herself, to space her visits to the Foundations so she could have the necessary rest for her body. The Founder promised to pray for her and further counsel her about the other Little Sisters’ health and the destination they were aiming to reach. He further discussed the convenience of lowering the dowry for new aspirants, the use of the alms, the new foundations, and the formation of the novices who at time already reached 90 in Valencia and 50 in Palencia.

The American foundations, especially those in Cuba and Puerto, that were scenarios of the last colonial wars, occupied the attention of the Founder. He transmitted to Mother Maria any news he received from them and requested her to do the same if ever she would received any news concerning them.

## 2. Again, Barbastro Wanted Him Like a Bishop. Retirement as Canon

The brief reign of *Alfonso XII* (1875–1885) with Mother *Cristina's* regency (1885–1902) gave Spain some period of stability to religion and allowed the normalization of the relationship between the State and the Church. It allowed the latter to enforce internal reorganization and provided it with greater public presence made so difficult during the previous decades. The African war of 1893, the beginning of the Cuban war, the insurrection in the Philippines in 1896, the murder of Canovas in 1897, the war with the United States of America in 1898 and the final loss of the last colonies of *Cuba*, *Puerto Rico*, and the Philippines all contributed to internal repercussions in the economic field. So many families saw their children go to far off lands to join the war. For lack of competent leaders, the country was headed to ruins. In his letters during these years, *Don Saturnino* sounded rather pessimistic of the whole situation and offering many Masses for the welfare of Spain.

Meantime the foundations continued its work. In July 1898, one was inaugurated in *Albacete* and in October, one in *Aguilar de la Frontera* (Cordoba).

At the end of summer, the Bishop Apostolic Administrator of *Barbastro* was transferred to *Ciudad Real*. Following what they had started two years ago, the authorities and the citizens of *Barbastro* again tried to move heaven and earth just to have the *Huesca* Chantre appointed as their new Apostolic Administrator. The Canon, *Don Manuel Sese* requested *Don Saturnino* to help them do something about it.

*“God’s will is that you become our Prelate for nobody like you is as virtuous and so loved. You are very close to us. I know that to be our Bishop will present to you a great sacrifice but you have been*

*accustomed to them. This is the greatest sacrifice that our Lord is asking from you.”*

*Don Saturnino* replied to his former student asking him to discontinue their efforts. He believed that neither his condition nor his age would still qualify him to assume such a heavy responsibility. As a matter of fact, he was almost sixty eight years old at that time, and decided to retire as Canon, a position he had held for thirty five years and had given his most conscientious service to the Cathedral of *Huesca*. His retirement, however, did not become an obstacle in continuing his ministerial work. On the contrary, he had long waited for this moment that he could dedicate more time to the Institute, give spiritual direction to people of every level, including the Civil Governor of *Huesca* and the Shod Carmelites of San Miguel.

His adopted son, Francisco, almost sixteen years old, began his third year of *Bachillerato* in the College of the Piarist Fathers of *Jaca* to where he returned later after spending his vacations in *Huesca*. A few days after his return he developed a severe inflammation in one of his knees which required surgical intervention. For this reason, the young man went to stay with the Little Sisters of *Jaca*.

In the presence of the doctor, *Don Saturnino* made the sign of the cross over the knee of the sick Francisco, while saying these words in Latin “*In nomine Jesu sit tibi salus.*” (In Jesus’ name, be cured). After an aggressive removal of pus from his knee, *Don Saturnino* assured the doctor that Francisco would be cured. His full confidence in God’s favor was so evidently manifested. Two days later Francisco was out of bed completely recovered.

### **3. New Foundational Drives**

The year 1899 was another bountiful year for new foundations. In March, the Home of *Azuaga* (*Badajoz*) was inaugurat-



ed, in June, the one in *Aranda de Duero* (Burgos), in July, one in *Cangas de Tineo* (Asturias) in November the first of *Mexico* was opened and in December, those in *San Benito* (Badajoz) and *Ciudad de Mexico*, close to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe were inaugurated.

In *Don Saturnino's* letters addressed to the Little Sisters who founded the first Homes in *Mexico*, his closeness to these religious was very evident. He knew that they had embarked on their mission despite being aware of all the difficulties they would encounter because of all the anti-religious laws of the country and the adventure they are facing in a country dealing with heroines.

The year 1900 started very productively. Between January 21 and 23, four new foundations were established, in *Seo de Urgel* (Gerona), *Carabanchel* (Madrid), *Torreperogil* (Jaen) and in *Bullas* (Murcia) – the 120<sup>th</sup> Home.

Those in *Mula* (Murcia) and *Caspe* (Zaragoza) were opened in July and the one in *Cevico de la Torre* (Palencia) in August.

In February 1901, nineteen Little Sisters sailed from *Cuba* and another nine from *La Coruna* (now A Coruna) for the foundations in *Mexico* and *Colombia*. *Don Saturnino* wrote:

*“The elderly will make us rich, they are the true representatives of Christ who was born and died poor.”*

On November 29, 1900, the Chantre was seventy years old. His health was still good and he has enough strength to continue dedicating hours to hear confessions and writing letters to the apostolate. He did not travel anymore, though, not even to *Zaragoza* at the end of the summer. In February, 1901, *Francisco Terreu*, his faithful servant for more than thirty years, died. In March, the caretaker of his home, *Maria Gomez*

got ill of rheumatic fever. In August, *Francisco Olivan* who had just started his career in a University fell seriously sick that he was given the Viaticum. Fortunately, he had recovered from this ailment. These three people were taken cared of by *Don Saturnino*, who despite his seventy one years of age, was still strong enough to continue fasting during lent and went daily to the Cathedral for his morning prayers. However, he was not exempted from ailments normal to people of his age. It was however compensated by his joy at the great expansion of his Institute. In this year 1901, two more Homes were founded, in *Mexico (Chilapas and Ciudad Mexico)* and another one in *Carvallino (Orense)*.

In the spring of 1902, *Don Saturnino* requested to be relieved from the spiritual direction of the Conferences of San Vicente de Paul, a ministry he loved so much. As mentioned before, he had founded the Conferences thirty seven years ago and had written its by-laws. Wisely, the Bishop dispensed him from attending the meetings but he would continue holding the title of Director of the Conferences, a title he held until his death. *Don Saturnino* transmitted the news of the end of his services to the Lady President, asking for apologies “*for any possible defects and faults that he had committed during his term.*” The members of the Conferences wrote a very eloquent letter to the Chantre thanking him for the time he has given them and acknowledging his self-sacrificing services to the ecclesiastical work, his apostolate and of his love for the needy.

In 1902, more foundations were established in *Benavente (Zamora)* and *Bocairente (Valencia)*. On his seventy second birthday, *Don Saturnino* received more than one hundred letters from the Mother Superiors of his Little Sisters. The Institute, his adopted son, *Francisco* and hearing confessions were the three most important pursuits of the Chantre, whose priestly life was deeply rooted from a strong sense of spirituality which had become even more intense after his retirement.

#### 4. “Suffering for His Body—the Church”

In February 1903, *Don Saturnino* spent most of his time organizing his archives and preparing his testament, which he signed in the presence of a Notary on March 25<sup>th</sup>. At this particular instance of his life, he does not have much left to distribute for along the way he had given everything he possessed to his charitable works, helping poor students, to his religious affiliations to the Cathedrals of *Huesca* and *Barbastro*, asylum of the French Little Sisters, House of the Servants of Mary, to the sick people, to the jobless and to a lot more. He had always lived poorly and had given out his small earnings to all his charitable causes.

Shortly before signing his testament, he sent to Mother Superior General, *Maria*, the list of items he intended to bequeath to the Mother House of the Little Sisters, among which are the pectoral cross and the ring that his uncle, Bishop *Basilio*, had worn during the solemnities, an Ivory Crucifix, a valuable image of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and his archives and library. To his housekeeper, *Maria Gomez* and female servant, *Petronila* he gave the rights to his house for life. If both dead, the 20,000 *reales* estimated value should the house be sold, should be sent to the Cathedral of *Barbastro* for the support of the divine ministry. How well did he comply with the purposes of his *Regla de Vida!*

*“The best use of all material goods that God in His goodness has given me will be in accordance to His Will so that I do not have to answer before His Holy Tribunal if I administer it badly. I also have to practice poverty, show no interest for wealth, dresses, and food. My status and religious compromises would not allow me to be attached to these material things.”*

To this joy of living in poverty, he invited too his daughters, the Little Sisters, in the *Manual of the Little Sisters*:

*“Jesus Christ, divine majesty of infinite perfection was the most perfect practitioner of voluntary poverty. He was born poor, lived and died poor in order to teach His disciples and followers that to become perfect, they ought to embrace and practice the holy poverty. Covetousness indicates lack of confidence in God’s Providence. Ask only for things necessary — the daily bread — and God whom you serve in the persons of the elderly, will take care that you will want nothing else.”*

*Don Saturnino* was bedridden all the month of May on account of a pain he felt when trying to lift up a heavy weight. For several weeks, he could not celebrate the Holy Mass. On May 20, the Pope Leo XIII died. Three days after, *Don Saturnino* applied his Mass for the eternal repose of Pope’s soul.

The contracted sickness, probably of rheumatic origin, will accompany him until death. He took it as “*a small visit of the Lord.*” From then on, scarcely could he leave the house. He was expending his time in long prayers, writing to his Little Sisters and counseling those persons that went to see him. And he felt happy in that situation, effectively living the maxim written in 1892 in the *Manual of the Little Sister*:

*“How happy is the one who totally accepts and surrender everything to God’s Will. His heart will have holy peace and his spirit will enjoy unalterable tranquility.”*

Now, he had united his sufferings to those of Christ’s passion, “*enduring them for His Body, the Church*” (Colossians

1:24) an internal sacrifice he had joyfully accepted. His Pasch was near, but he wanted to live his life totally identified with the sufferings of Christ whose death had made him attained his own life through Baptism. He was walking towards his own Calvary and begged that his sufferings would bring down from heaven a torrent of graces for his Institute, for the Church and for the Roman Pontiff. His great veneration for the Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII was manifested in many of his writings. He had offered many masses “*for the needs of the Church.*”

Without being unfaithful to his priestly duties, *Don Saturnino* could have chosen to live an easier life but submitting himself completely to God’s will, who had called him to be a diocesan priest, he had given up his inclination to the contemplative life. With a very analytical mind and a great sensibility he detected some deficiencies in that ecclesiastical sectors of which he tried to find solutions and ways of opening it to new ideals necessary for the institution.

Always full of love for God and of the Church, *Don Saturnino* had always desired the grace of Martyrdom:

*“Would God give it to me by His Infinite Mercy  
as the best way to blot out my sins and sanctify my  
soul.”*

In 1882, Leo XIII assured that the society could only be saved by souls who would offer themselves as holocaust for the needs of Church and of the world. *Don Saturnino* caught the idea and solemnly offered himself for that purpose although every day he was already offering his sufferings for his purification.

During his seminary times, he imposed upon himself voluntary mortifications for his sanctification, for the good of his church, for his Institute, and for the salvation of souls.

As a witness to his spirit of self-denial and love of the cross, he wrote down a long list of penances in his *Regla de Vida*. It is worthwhile to transcribe the following:

*“1) To subdue the senses, especially those of the sight and tongue, try to avoid fixing the eyes on dangerous objects and practice the virtue of silence. 2) To take care of the exterior neatness of appearance and to practice charity. 3) Not to go to lavish representations, banquets, parties and recreations, even the good ones for it maybe possible that you may instead save a soul with real need. 4) To avoid unnecessary and unmeaning visits. 5) To live in retirement and will only have relations with persons as permitted within the bounds of my priestly duties and obligations. 6) To take little and simple food, and to abstain myself from exquisite dishes, liquors, sweets, ice cream, coffee and meat in big amounts. I am not to use expensive dresses but decent ones suitable to my status. 7) To fast even during days not commanded by the Church, on Saturdays, in honor of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, on Wednesdays, in honor of Saint Joseph, also on the vigils of the great festivities of our Lord and of the most Holy Virgin Mary. 8) To do self beating on Tuesdays and Fridays using hairshirt or chain at certain times like Advent, Lent and the days I usually do the spiritual exercises. 9) Never to abandon the choir during the divine office for the service of the church unless absolutely necessary or I am called away for another matter and not to lean on the choir chair neither on my back nor my arms. 10) Never to ask for special food but to take what is offered however it is presented. If I am asked what I want, my answer should be:” “Whatever you want.” 11) In order to sometimes fight my desires, wish, and appetite for something; I would consult other people even knowing there is no need for it. 12) To try to be always busy in order to avoid idleness.*

And this very same spirit he inculcated to his Little Sisters:

*“Habit alone does little. True religion is the conversion of life and total mortification of the passions. Let her go anywhere, look for anything she wants, the Little Sister will not find a better way to combat temptations than the Way of the Cross and the continued sacrifices and self-denial. This and no other is the way to perfection. This is the way followed by the Saints. Without mortification, there is neither any possible explanation of virtue nor understanding of the concept of Holiness.”*

Notwithstanding his sickness, he continued serving the Institute as best as he could. At the end of the summer of 1903, he felt a little better allowing him to take short walks and answer letters which he continued on receiving. Through the letters of *Mother Maria*, for whose wisdom in opening more new Homes he was praying, he had stayed informed with the changes of Superiors and one day blissfully received the news about new possible foundations in *Puebla de los Angeles* (Mexico) and *Sabadell* (Barcelona) which opening was owed to the generosity and efforts of his friends, the renowned writers *Sarda* and *Salvany*. On November 12, 1903, the appointment of *Don Francisco Garcia Lopez*, the beloved *Don Francisco* of the first generations of the Little Sisters, as the Auxiliary Bishop of Valencia and titular of Loryma, was made known throughout Valencia. At first, he refused the appointment because of his age. He was already 70 years old at that time. At the end, taking into consideration the Archbishop's Health and accepting God's will, he obeyed the Nuncio. In response to *Don Saturnino's* warmest congratulations, the new Bishop wrote:

*“When I was thinking about retirement to make penance and prepare myself for my death, I was called to solve problems. May God be blessed!*

As his gift, *Don Saturnino* sent to Bishop *Francisco* a beautiful rod that belonged to his uncle, Bishop *Basilio*.

## 5. Tranquil and Peaceful Death

*Don Saturnino*, whose illness “turned chronic and caused him a great deal of pain” still followed with fascination the openings of more foundations in *Rivadavia* (Orense) on December 3, 1903, and in the year 1904, *Benigamin* (Valencia), in *Popotla* (Mexico), in *Moratalla* (Murcia), in *Puentedeume* (La Coruna) and in *Alcaraz* (Albacete). On January 1, 1905, the one in *Aguilar de Campoo* (Palencia) was the last one opened when the Founder was still alive totalling the number of foundations to 138.

Meanwhile, *Don Saturnino* requested *Mother Maria* to transfer as soon as possible the remains of *Mother Teresa* from *Liria* to the Mother House. Regarding his health, he wrote:

*”There is no change in me. I leave the house a little while in the morning, and go early to bed. I try not to bend myself to get anything from the floor. I also need help to put on and take off my shoes. But my appetite is good and regularly I sleep well. As I can write, I continue helping the Institute. I shall do it until I die.”*

On Christmas’ eve, his lumbago illness, reproduced during the hard winter, forced him to stay in bed—he was already 74 years old. However, he could answer the Christmas greetings sent him by the Superiors, and exclaimed at the fact of the 138 foundations:

*“Let us give repeated thanks to the Lord for so blessing the Institute! Especially in Mexico and Colombia where it expanded even more.”*



On February 20, he wrote what was to be his last letter to a Superior in *Cuba* informing her that his health was getting remarkably worst. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, he celebrated his last Mass and went to bed not able to get up again. On March 11, three Little Sisters from Zaragoza were sent to take care of him. Upon arrival, Mother *Pilar*, the Superior sent this telegram to the Santa Monica Mother House “Father’s illness progressive very difficult for him will contact tomorrow” *Don Saturnino* was given the Viaticum and that afternoon his agony began. The members of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Agony which he founded in 1863, prayed for him before the exposed Holy Sacrament. That night he received the Sacrament of the “*Anointing of the sick*”. He was still fully alert. He never stopped asking about the Congregation.

Mother *Pilar* was right though, at dawn, Sunday, March 12, 1905 *Don Saturnino* passed away quietly, in a saintly way, in the presence of the three Little Sisters, and his faithful servants, *Maria* and *Petronila*. A little while after, two Little Sisters arrived from *Jaca* hoping to find him still alive.

Mother *Pilar* sent a telegram to the Mother House “*Father died this morning at five o’clock*”. Curiously, at this very hour, he used to say this prayer he himself had written:

*“I know that I will die but I don’t know when.  
Grant me Lord the Immaculate Heart of Mary, your  
Mother and my Mother, so that when that hour will  
come, I may answer your divine call and have a  
tranquil, peaceful and saintly death.”*

He was prepared for his death having led a life full of generosity and total fidelity to the service of God and the needy, a totally unselfish life, “*hidden with Christ in God*” (*Colossians 3:3*), sustained by prayers and a life lived in union with God.

It was a life of deprivations at home during his childhood, of obedience to his auntie Manuela during the formation years in the seminary and even in the early years of his priesthood in *Barbastro*, his love for the poor, his full time assistance to *Don Basilio*, the founding of his Institute, the generous services to his spiritual daughters, and the thousands and more pastoral initiatives born out of his love and desire to give his personal services to the Church.

Now, he had accomplished his total attachment in Christ's death, initiated in baptism: *"Unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels, a plentiful harvest of new lives."* (John 12:24)

On Sunday, the day in which the Church celebrates Christ's victory over death, and on the Eve of Pentecost, when the flowering almond trees of *Aragon High Lands* announces the beautiful spring, *Don Saturnino* entered his eternal spring, the spring without end, a world where *"there will be no more death or sorrow, no more grief or pain"* (Revelation 21:4). He will be there forever to contemplate on the true beauty and infinite loveliness of God's Face, the object of all his hopes, the reasons for his sleeplessness, and the motive for all his undertakings.

And now he meets our Most Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, both always present in his life, his beloved family, friends and his Little Sisters who went ahead of him. Now he embraces without veils, the Most Blessed Humanity of Christ and hear from His lips the invitation to his faithful servant *"Come and share my happiness"* (Matthew 25:23).

And the words to those who have seen him with the poor:

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father! Come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you fed*

*me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.”* (Matthew 25:34–36).

At the hour of his death, hundreds of abandoned elderly whom his spiritual daughters had served and assisted up to their last moments accompanied him to his encounter of the Lord. This was the Crowning Glory of *Don Saturnino's* life. It was a day after his death that he was buried. The Little Sisters, the Cathedral Cabildo, lay men and women and a legion of humble people were present to accompany his corpse to the cemetery of Huesca where his remains will stay until May 1912. It will then be transferred to the church of the Little Sisters of Valencia.

The Episcopal *Bulletin* of Huesca wrote about him:

*“Notwithstanding his humility and the seclusion in which he lived, his exemplary life, his writings, his splendid generosity and the foundation of the Institute that will immortalize his name, have made of the dead Chantre of Huesca, an interesting and important figure. He held in this Diocese, the important job of Chamber's Secretary and was involved in ministerial matters with success and prudent zeal. He wrote several books, among them the History of Barbastro. Thanks to his great generosity, the worship in the Cathedral was not interrupted during the revolutionary period, because he gave all the people working in it, enough for them to survive the war. His many alms wiped away tears and filled many needs, especially during the epidemic of Cholera in 1885.*

*To his zeal, unselfishness and his faithfulness in service was attributed the success of the Foundation and the actual prosperity of the Institute of the Abandoned Elderly. It has brought to society abundant spiritual and material benefits. May he rest in peace. He was such an excellent priest! Let all his undertakings be his Crown!”*

From the Penitentiary Canon, he said about *Don Saturnino* in a flowering prose:

*“He left many legacies to the people who loved and admired him, gratitude of those who knew him and the Corporation (the Cabildo) that was honored with his membership not to mention his exemplary conduct never tarnished by even the smallest shadow, his modesty in dressing similar to that of the poor and venerable parish priests. It is not even necessary to mention his broad knowledge and industry that helped him write several commendable books to make his memory pleasing. Just the mention of the foundation of the Institute of Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly that although surrounded with great difficulties, contradictions and large sums of money, has given the Church and society exemplary service and benefits makes him an unforgettable member of the society. Limiting myself to Huesca, I should mention the floor of the beautiful Cathedral enriched with marbles was made possible by his generous donation, as well as the altar of Saint Joseph of whom Don Saturnino was a great devout. He distributed big amount of alms to the poor, adopted a poor child, whose education he paid for, he founded the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul*

*yet he refused all kinds of honor, the Episcopate included. His only insignia was that of Christ...*

A few weeks after his death, the executors, two Canons from *Huesca*, delivered to the Little Sisters what he had bequeath to the Mother House, an ivory Crucifix and another in silver, a gilded Cross, the Episcopal vestments of *Don Basilio*, the coral vestments of *Don Saturnino*, and a box of documents.

Five years after his death, the executors reminded the Superior General of the following provisions of the testament:

*“It is my wish, as Founder of the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly, that my body be buried in the Mother House of Valencia. And so I beg the Most Reverend Superior General and my executors that after the legal period allowed for the exhumation of the bodies is observed, to make the necessary arrangements to transfer mine to the Mother House of Valencia.”*

On May 6, 1912, the Founder's remains were brought to Valencia by train. The Mother Superior General, a big number of the Little Sisters, the elderly, and the City authorities were at hand to receive him at the station. On the 8<sup>th</sup> and after another solemn funeral, the coffin was buried in the epistle side of the presbytery of the church of the Mother House at the side of that of *Don Francisco Garcia*. A year later, the remains of *Mother Teresa* and *Don Saturnino* were transferred to the crypt near the Church of the Mother House. *Don Francisco's* remains were transferred two years later.

## 6. Epilogue

Among the various aspects of *Don Saturnino's* rich personality, his ardent desire for sanctification clearly stands out. It gave real meaning to his life. From this sprang his love of

God's will, his prayerful life, simple, poor, humble, industrious and unselfish. From the vivifying spring of his interior, and deeply contemplative life, sprouted his Love for the Church, his passionate zeal for God's glory and the good of the souls, his overflowing generosity towards his multiple works and his preferential dedication to the ministry of charity.

The Holy Spirit showed him the direction that gave meaning to his life and gave him a particular charism for the service of the Church. It allowed him to perceive and understand the Christian mystery with all its richness that he made available in his time.

Thanks to his foundational spirit, *Don Saturnino* could read the signs of the time, he was able to interpret them under the light of God's plans and guided by the Church gave appropriate answers to some of the urgent need of the time. The success achieved in a few years by the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly, its universal acceptance and its amazing development during the Founder's life, evidently showed that he clearly knew the true needs of the time.

He was a pioneer, he was one hundred years ahead of the time when he originally conceived the idea formulating the benefits to help the elderly. It was a new concept in the XIX century.

But he found the base of the mission of his Institute identified with Christ's love for those with the most needs. And so following and imitating Christ, "*who did not come to be served but to serve and gave his life for the ransom of all*" (Matthew 10:45), he founded the Little Sisters, who up to this day will continue his charism in the Church. *Don Saturnino* called them:

*"the continuers of Jesus Christ's charitable mission on earth. To their care he entrusted the*

*service of the poor elderly so in imitation of your Divine Spouse, you spend your life in this valley of tears and miseries doing good and healing the oppressed.”*

This prophetic intuition discovered and opened a wide field of pastoral and evangelical activity for the Church. The charisma for service that he bequeaths as inheritance to his Institute surpassed the best provisions of today's welfare society. In this too sensible endeavour of today's social life the humanitarianism is not enough, it will eventually end up dying unless it is the fruit of true and sincere theological motivation. Only the culture intensified by the Christian Virtue of Charity, participation of God's love can subsist and unfold into an unselfish and ardent love for your brethren — the elderly in this case — the ones most in need of loving care and material attentions inherent to preserving the dignity of persons and sons of God.

Contemplative in action, father of souls, model of priests, exemplar of charity and of total service to the Church and to the poor, that is *Don Saturnino's* entire personality, strong and attractive — an actual role model and living example worthy to be emulated.





## APPENDIX

The Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Elderly was founded by the Servant of God *Don Saturnino López Novoa* in 1873. He was efficiently assisted by *Saint Teresa Jornet Ibars*, the first Mother General of the Congregation, canonized in 1974 by Pope Paul VI. On the other hand, the beatification process for the Founder is still in Rome since a few years ago.

The Congregation's growth has developed so rapidly that on Mother Teresa's death in 1897, the Congregation already had a total of 103 Homes, a number which would still increase to 138 when the Founder died in 1905.

The latest statistics done in 2010 showed the following figures – the number of Homes spread all 19 nations in four continents totalled 206, number of Little Sisters who have made their perpetual vows, 1978, those who are in temporary vows, 275. There is a total of 76 novices, 39 postulants, 239 aspirants. The number of elderly has already expanded to an amazing 23,928.

Believing that the Philippines would be a good spring board to give impetus to the spreading of the Congregation to other parts of Asia and of the Pacific, five Little Sisters came to this country in 2006 to establish their First Home. On January 27, 2010, The Santa Teresa Jornet Homes was inaugurated. It was built in the corner of 153 F. Blumentritt and R. Pascual Streets, San Juan, Metro Manila. It was an impressive six story building with a nice facade. It can accommodate 120 elderly. It has its own beautiful church.

Presently, as of May 11, 2011, there are 58 elderly women being taken cared of by six Little Sisters. They have eight aspirants, fourteen employees, and several volunteer workers. The institution depends mainly on charity and the Divine Providence for its existence. Most of the elderly cannot afford to pay anything and those who can contribute some money do not pay enough to support even just the basic needs of the Home. Since the start of its establishment, the Congregation has been wanting for benefactors for its elderly but no matter what, they continue on caring for the elderly especially the sick ones knowing that God will care of the rest. After all, this is HIS WORK and everything is done for HIS GLORY.

**Fr. Benigno Benabarre Vigo, O.S.B.**

U. I. O. G.

**THE APOSTOLATE AND  
CHARISM OF THE LITTLE  
SISTERS OF THE ELDERLY**

The Community of the Little Sisters together with the Dominican  
Fathers of Sto. Cristo in San Juan, Metro Manila





In our gratitude and thanksgiving for all the help and support extended to our community



**St. Teresa Jornet Home**



**Chapel in the house**



**Community and aspirants in the feast of St. Teresa Jornet, August, 26**



- Some places in the house:
- Room
  - Living-room
  - Dining-room
  - Cafeteria





# Our Charism...











Different Activities of the Aspirants, the Next Generation



