

Haiti gave us Mother Mary Lange

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted...” (Mt 5:3-5) reverberates in my head as the world looks on in stunned horror and sadness at the aftermath of a devastating earthquake on the island of Haiti. Millions have been affected by this natural disaster and hundreds of thousands are estimated to be dead. Thousands of unidentified bodies have already suffered the additional indignity of burial in a common grave. Many of us in the diaspora wait in anguish on news of the status of our loved ones.

The international community is converging on the island to offer humanitarian relief to its brothers and sisters in the country, named by its indigenous inhabitants to reflect its naturally mountainous terrain. Heaven is stormed by prayers from around the globe on behalf of the people of this materially impoverished nation. Amid the rubble and turmoil, voices of the “poor in spirit” can be heard praising God in prayer and song. Survivors contacting relatives abroad are grateful to report that they remain in possession of the most precious gift, life.

Against this backdrop of death and desolation, it perhaps helps to recall that it was from Haiti two centuries ago that Elizabeth Clarisse Lange emerged. A well educated and deeply spiritual woman, she and her family fled the aftermath of the violence of the French Revolution and sought refuge on the neighboring island of Cuba. To avoid swearing loyalty to the Spanish crown, she emigrated to the slave state of Maryland around 1812.

Despite suffering the indignity of racism, her faith remained intact. Recognizing the importance of a good Christian education, she would finance and offer such an education to the children of freed slaves in her own home. Providence would provide for her path and that of Father James Joubert, a French Sulpician priest who championed the education of those of African descent, to cross and ultimately collaborate to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Their foundress took the name by which she is better known, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, O.S.P. Her sisters remain committed to the education and evangelization of

others, especially those of African descent. In 1991 then-Archbishop William H. Keeler, with the approval of Rome, formally opened the investigation into her life and works of charity. The cause for this servant of God remains under investigation for canonization.

Now as “ ... the Lord God ...wipe(s) away the tears from all faces...” (Is 25:8) let us ask Mother Lange to intercede on behalf of her brothers and sisters before the throne of God. Let us pray for the speedy arrival of the day that she is publicly declared a saint by reciting her prayer for canonization:

“Almighty and Eternal God, you granted Mother Mary Lange extraordinary trust in Your providence. You endowed her with humility, courage, holiness and an extraordinary sense of service to the poor and sick. You enabled her to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence and provide educational, social and spiritual ministry especially to the African American community. Mother Lange’s love for all enabled her to see Christ in each person and the pain of prejudice and racial hatred never blurred that vision

“Deign to raise her to the highest honors of the altar in order that through her intercession, more souls may come to a deeper understanding and more fervent love of you. Heavenly Father, glorify Your heart by granting also this favor (here mention your request), which we ask through the intercession of your faithful servant, Mother Mary Lange

“ Amen.”

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