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On this day: St. Bertilla Boscardin

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Oct. 20, 2011 NCR Today

On this day we celebrate the feast of St. Maria Bertilla Boscardin.

Anna Francesca Boscardin was born in 1888 to a family of peasants in Brendola, Veneto. Her father testified to his abusive behavior during her beatification process. Everyone considered her slow. A local priest called her a goose.

She was turned down by the first order she applied to, but the Sisters of St Dorothy [1] admitted her to their convent, "assigning her the religious name Bertilla and sending her to peel potatoes at their large charity hospital in Treviso."

--*The Big Book of Women Saints,* [2] by Sarah Gallick, HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, page 319.

Sister Bertilla worked in the kitchen, taking time off only to return to the motherhouse to make vows. Back at the hospital she was operated on for cancer. After recovering, she was assigned to "work with the children. Most of them were suffering from diptheria, had undergone tracheotomies, and needed constant attention. . . . One of the doctors at Treviso later testified that many of the children, separated from their families for the first time, arrived at the hospital in such a state that it took two or three days to calm them down. . . . Sister Bertilla, he recalled, 'succeeded in rapidly becoming a mother to them all; after two or three hours the child, who was desperate, clung to her, calmly, as to his mother and followed her wherever she went.'"

"When the war broke out in 1915, Bertilla wrote in her diary: *'Here I am, Lord, to do according to your will, under whatever aspect it presents itself, let it be life, death or terror.'"* During the bombing of Treviso, she stayed with "patients who could not be moved, praying and providing marsala wine for those who needed it."

After the war, she was sent to a sanatorium to care for soldiers with tuberculosis. Next she was sent to a seminary to care for "survivors of a devastating epidemic." Finally she was sent back to the hospital at Treviso. The cancer recurred, and she died on October 20, 1922. Some of her former patients, as well as some of her relatives, were in the crowd at her canonization in 1961.

Click here [3] to see a picture of St. Maria Bertilla.

Click here [4] for Wikipedia.

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[1] http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suore_Maestre_di_Santa_Dorotea,_figlie_dei_Sacri_Cuori

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