

**REDEMPTORIST NORTH AMERICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION  
ONGOING FORMATION AND FAITH-SHARING  
BLESSED MARIA CELESTE CROSTAROSA, OSsR**

Time Frame: 90 minutes

**CENTRE OF BEAUTY:**

- Mission Cross
- Cloth
- Icon or picture of Blessed Maria Celeste Crostarosa, OSsR
- 9 Candles, symbolizing the nine virtues that are central to the spirituality of Maria Celeste
- Bible

**HANDOUTS:**

- "Blessed Maria Celeste Crostarosa: Mystic And Founder Of The Redemptoristines"
- Prayer

**MATERIALS:**

- Name Tags (if needed)
- Pens/pencils
- Paper

**NOTES:**

In preparation for this session, copies of "Blessed Maria Celeste Crostarosa: Mystic And Founder Of The Redemptoristines" are distributed to all participants, in order that they may read the article before coming together.

## SATURDAY MORNING OR WEEKDAY EVENING SESSION

### GATHERING and WELCOME

**Experience–** OPENING PRAYER– adapted from “Living Memory of the Redeemer: Maria Celeste Crostarosa” in *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus*, by Terry Moran

**Hymn:** A Hymn of Praise

**Leader:** We gather today to recall and celebrate our sister, Maria Celeste Crostarosa. Her life’s goal was to become a *viva memoria*, a living memory of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, she longed above all else for the coming of the reign of God. Like Jesus, she knew the pain and the privilege of self-emptying love. Like Jesus, she lives forever in the lives and memories of the Redemptoristines, Redemptorists and partners in mission who are the heirs of her spiritual legacy.

The spirituality of Maria Celeste revolves around nine virtues through which the Spirit of God grows in us. Today, gathered here, we will pray the Gospel texts that inspired her, listen to the words of her Rule, words which she puts on the lips of Jesus.

**Leader:** Virtue #1: Union and Mutual Charity

**Reader 1:** “This is my command: that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love than this no one has-- than to lay down one’s life for a friend.”

**Reader 2:** Dedicate your body and all your senses for the benefit of your neighbour, your eyes to behold their needs and never to gaze on their defects; your ears to listen to their troubles; your mouth to console them in their afflictions, to defend and to help them.

**Leader:** Virtue #2: Poverty

**Reader 1:** “Those who do not renounce everything they have are not worthy to be my disciples.”

**Reader 2:** I was born in a stable; I was an exile in a foreign land. I lived an ordinary life, making my living by labour in Joseph’s shop. I went about preaching and I and my disciples were supported on the generosity of others. I lived in the open air, just like a poor beggar. In the end, I died on the wood of the cross with no comfort.

**Leader:** Virtue #3: Purity

**Reader 1:** “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”

**Reader 2:** Those who are pure of heart shall know God because they gaze fixedly and with loving affection on the Eternal Sun of Justice. They are like eagles who gaze on their goal without ever blinking, so strong is their love.

**Leader:** Virtue #4: Obedience

**Reader 1:** “I have come down from Heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me.”

**Reader 2:** As the three divine persons are one God in the divine unity, so shall you have but one will: the will of Christ, God-made-flesh.”

**Leader:** Virtue #5: Humility and Meekness of Heart

**Reader 1:** “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”

**Reader 2:** Humility is first of all living in spirit and in truth.

**Leader:** Virtue #6: Mortification

**Reader 1:** “Whoever grasps life will lose it; whoever lets go of life for the sake of the Gospel will save it.”

**Reader 2:** Live in my flesh, made holy and mortified for you; live united in my body like branches united to the vine.

**Leader:** Virtue #7: Recollection and Silence

**Reader 1:** “I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.”

**Reader 2:** The human heart is the throne of God; it is the hidden chest where God places all treasures.

**Leader:** Virtue #8: Prayer

**Reader 1:** “You must pray always, and never lose heart.”

**Reader 2:** If you wish to imitate me, remember that for me all life is prayer. Prayer was my continual activity—loving God with the same love with which God loved me.

**Leader:** Virtue #9: Self-Denial and Love of the Cross

**Reader 1:** “Whoever wishes to follow me must deny the self, take up the cross and follow me.”

**Reader 2:** O, with what love I embraced the cross; I loved it; I desired it; I took pleasure in it—all for love of you.

**Leader:** Celeste wrote that God is our mother, and that we are carried and nurtured in the womb of God. We now pray in silence that we will be given the grace to enter more fully into her spirituality as we gather here today/tonight.

**Generalization:**

Give a brief (5-10 minutes) summary of Maria Celeste’s life, drawing on the article which was circulated as preparation for this session. The following is a suggestion:

Blessed Maria Celeste Crostarosa (born as Giulia Crostarosa) was born in Naples, Italy on the 31st October 1696. At the age of twenty she entered a Carmelite monastery. When this monastery was suppressed, she went to Scala in the hills above Naples, where she entered a monastery living the Visitation Rule.

Under the direction of Bishop Thomas Falcoia, and with the cooperation of St Alphonsus, Maria Celeste reformed the monastery according to a revelation she had received from the Lord. She founded the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptoristines) on the 13th May 1731. Their vocation is to be a "living memory" of Jesus Christ, witnessing to the paschal mystery.

In 1773 Maria Celeste was forced to leave Scala, and eventually she was called to Foggia, where she founded the Monastery of the Most Holy Saviour.

The spiritual journey of Maria Celeste, favoured by many mystical experiences, was characterised by obedience to conscience, by constant searching for the meaning of the gospel, and by living simply.

Maria Celeste died at Foggia on the 14th September 1755. At the moment of her death, Saint Gerard Majella, her spiritual friend, saw her soul flying to heaven as a white dove.

On 3 June 2013 Pope Francis declared her to be Venerable due to her life of heroic virtue. In 2015 a miracle attributed to her intercession was approved. In Foggia on 18th June 2016, Sr. Maria Celeste Crostarosa was beatified.

Discuss the article which participants have read in preparation for this gathering: *St. Clement Hofbauer: His Significance for Redemptorists*. Some reflection questions were appended to the article. You might wish to use the following questions as a discussion guide:

1. What impressed you about Maria Celeste as you read and reflected on this article?
2. What can we draw from her spirituality that we could apply to our own day?
3. As you read about Maria Celeste, was anything affirmed for you? If so, what?
4. Did anything you read challenge you? If so, what was it?

**Action:** Name one thing that you will take home with you from tonight's session.

## **CLOSING PRAYER** (adapted from Terry Moran's *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus*)

**Leader:** Celeste wished above all else to be a *viva memoria* of the person and mission of Jesus...

**All:** May all Christians make the Gospel of Jesus the rule and pattern in their lives.

**Leader:** Alphonsus was an intimate friend of Celeste, and kept all her letters until the end of his life...

**All:** May we learn to esteem the gift of friendship and to nurture our friendships by gestures of concern and affection.

**Leader:** Celeste was often visited by St. Gerard Majella, with who she shared the richness of her spiritual experience...

**All:** May we be able to strengthen one another by sharing our faith.

**Leader:** When Celeste could not find a suitable priest as a spiritual director for her sisters, she said to them: "Show the wounds of your spirit to me, and together we will find healing..."

**All:** May the Spirit lead the Church to a greater openness to the gifts of women as leaders and teachers of prayer.

**Leader:** Celeste's spirit lives on in the Redemptoristine nuns. We pray for them all...

**All:** May God fill them with many blessings and fullness of peace.

### **Our Father**

**Leader:** Let us offer a Sign of Peace to one another, greeting each other in the heart of Jesus.

### **Sign of Peace**

**Leader:** Let us conclude our prayer together praying in the words of our sister, Celeste:

**All:** This morning, you have sounded the voice of goodness in my soul.

My spirit rejoices in never-ending song.

O Eternal Word, the cause of endless eternity!

You are peace, unity, joy, solitude.

O bountiful Joy, who can express the fullness of good and contentment

You have given my heart.

O my God, you love Jesus with an infinite love

And in you, my Jesus, God loves everyone,

O my bountiful Morning Joy.

## SOCIAL TIME

### **BLESSED MARIA CELESTE CROSTAROSA: MYSTIC AND FOUNDER OF THE REDEMPTRISTINES**

Feast day: September 11

“Live as though I, not you, lived in yourself.”



These words to Blessed Maria Celeste Crostarosa from Jesus sum up the meaning of being a living memory of Christ. From her earliest memories she was aware of her special relationship with Jesus. Giulia Crostarosa (later to be known as Maria Celeste) was born the 10th of 12 children in 1696 in the Kingdom of Naples. She was the darling of the family: bright, high-spirited, intelligent, the leader of the brood. But what depths hid beneath the surface: a burning love, humble piety, a pure heart.

Giulia gave her heart to her Beloved when He said, “Do not love any creature; love only Me. Imitate My life and unite whatever you do with the works of My life.”

By 1725, she had entered a religious conservatory in Scala, high above the Bay of Amalfi, and when still in formation as a novice, Celeste had a revelation that she would be the instrument by which a new rule and order of nuns would be established.

“With desire I have desired to give my Spirit to the world and to communicate it to my creatures endowed with reason, in order to live with them and in them until the end of the world. Out of immense love, I have given them my Only Begotten Son.”

After a number of years, and with the support and collaboration of St. Alphonsus Liguori, the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer was founded on the Feast of Pentecost in 1731. Inspired by Celeste and seeing the need to evangelize the poor, Alphonsus was leaning toward founding a congregation of missionary priests and brothers that would correspond to the nun’s life of prayer. Celeste influenced him all the more when she shared a revelation she had received:

Alphonsus was conversing with Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi, and Christ tells him to “Go and preach to every creature that the Kingdom of God has come upon you.”

After much prayer and discernment the Congregation of the Redemptorists was founded in 1732.

But tribulation shadowed Celeste. Those who did not understand her soul and misjudged her motives called her a troublemaker, delusional, and a witch. Twice banished to a room under the eaves of the monastery, Celeste was comforted by Jesus’ words spoken in her heart, “You are my friend and my delight, therefore, I keep you in my Kingdom of the Cross and of Glory, in the Kingdom of my Peace and Rest, in sufferings and afflictions, just the way I lived on this earth.”

Ultimately she was expelled from the original monastery for being faithful to her conscience. Celeste lived for five years as a wayfarer like her Beloved Wayfarer, Jesus, who lived among us that we might know the abundant, merciful love of God. During this time she was designated superioress to reform a Dominican convent and take charge of an orphanage. She also gave secret testimony to the Inquisition concerning a spiritual friend.

Yet Blessed Celeste’s heart was still set on founding a monastery of nuns with the rule revealed to her by the Lord. In 1738 the opportunity appeared, and she began a second monastery of Redemptoristine Nuns in Foggia, Italy.

Finally Celeste found peace in Foggia, and in Jesus’ words, “You shall possess My joy by your participation in My love.”

As a prolific writer and mystic, Celeste was now free to write her autobiography, poems, and spiritual writing known as *The Dialogues* and *The Grades of Prayer*. Celeste pondered Christ’s words to her and wrote on topics such as living in the heart of Christ, being living Eucharists for the world, love of the cross, charity and self-abnegation, the Trinity lives in us, and the prayer of breathing love.

During the last chapter of Blessed Celeste’s life, St. Alphonsus gave the unheard-of permission to a Redemptorist brother to be the spiritual director of the nuns. St. Gerard Majella not only become Celeste’s soul friend but also brought 12 young women to enter the Redemptoristines in Foggia.

On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, 1755, Gerard said from his own deathbed, “I have just seen the soul of Mother Maria Celeste wing its flight to heaven like a dove, to receive there the reward she has merited through her great love for Jesus and Mary.”

In 1762 St. Alphonsus became a bishop in St. Agata di Goti near Naples. Soon he invited the Redemptoristine Nuns to make a new foundation in his diocese. Since then the order, as well as Blessed Celeste’s message of love, joy, and liberty, has spread throughout the world.

Jesus, the Most Holy Redeemer, was the love of Blessed Maria Celeste's life. Therefore she and all her sisters down to this day echo St. Paul's saying, "Life for me is Christ."