



On Her Way to Sainthood Mother Mary Lange

We do not know much about the early years of Mother Mary Lange, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. She was born Elizabeth Lange in the around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in a primarily French speaking community. She received an excellent education and in the early 1800s Elizabeth left Cuba and settled in the United States. By 1813, Providence directed her to Baltimore, Maryland where a large community of French speaking Catholics from Haiti was established. Elizabeth came to Baltimore as a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman. She was a strong, independent thinker and doer. As a well educated, it did not take Lange long to recognize that the children of her fellow immigrants needed an education. There was no free public education for African American children in Maryland until 1868. She responded to that need by opening a school in her home in the Fells Point area of the city for the children. She and her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (later Sister Frances, OSP) operated the school for over ten years.

Elizabeth, foundress and first superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, took the religious name of Mary. She was superior general from 1829 to 1832, and from 1835 to 1841. This congregation would educate and evangelize African Americans. Yet they would always be open to meeting the needs of the times. Thus the Oblate Sisters educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Slaves who had been purchased and then freed were educated and at times admitted into the congregation. They nursed the terminally ill during the cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly, and even served as domestics at Saint Mary's Seminary.

Mother Mary's early life prepared her well for the turbulence that followed the death of Father Joubert in 1843. There was a sense of abandonment at the dwindling number of pupils and defections of her closest companions

and co-workers. Yet through it all Mother Lange never lost faith in Providence. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. In fact, it was her deep faith which enabled her to persevere against all odds. To her black brothers and sisters she gave herself and her material possessions until she was empty of all but Jesus, whom she shared generously with all by witnessing to His teaching. In close union with Him, she lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home, February 3, 1882 at Saint Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.