

FOUNDATION DAY!
HOMILY GIVEN ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

One cannot fully celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Divine Providence without spending some time reflecting on some of the details of its story.

Since I recently received the Chronicles from St. Louis, some of this material is taken from these memorable pages of our History.

In the summer of 1851, four young women who felt the call to consecrate their lives to God in the religious state, confided their resolution to the Reverend Anton Autsch, the pastor of the parish church at Finthen, near the city of Mayence. Fr. Autsch, like Bishop Ketteler, deplored the absence of religious education of youth and knowing of the Bishop's plans without delay acquainted him of the resolution of these ladies. The Bishop at once recognized the hand of Divine Providence and felt encouraged to pursue his plan without hesitation. He interviewed the young women and found them fit instruments to carry out his work. The bishop discussed the matter with Fr. Autsch, who wished that the foundation be made in his parish and promised to do all in his power to assist in the undertaking.

On September 29, the feast of St. Michael, the four young ladies who had applied to Fr. Autsch of Finthen took up their residence there, to lead henceforth a life, dedicated to God and to strive for perfection. September 29, 1851, therefore may be considered the foundation or birthday of the Community. It was fitting that the new Community begin its existence on this day, a significant one on which the Church directs our attention to this prince and commander-in-chief of the heavenly army, who together with the loyal angels conquered the rebellious spirits and drove them from heaven.

A lady of noble birth, Baroness Fanny (Stephanie) Fredericka Amelia de La Roche, also felt the call to renounce the world and to consecrate herself to God. This new candidate who so providentially came to the Bishop just at the opportune moment was a very refined, highly educated lady. She had command of several languages—French, German, Italian and English and had acquired skill in the fine arts and in poetry. She was modest and unassuming in manner and bearing and was loved and admired by all who knew her.

On August 2, 1852, the Right Rev. Bishop, for the first time, visited the little community at Finthen, in their poor dwelling on Kirchgasse. On this visit he observed the austere poverty and great need of his "dear children" as he was wont to call them. With much difficulty the small number of candidates could barely maintain livelihood and they endured privations of

even necessities. The Bishop's heart was deeply touched and he warmly sympathized with his poverty-stricken daughters. At once he planned ways and means of relief. He advised that a novena to the Blessed Virgin be kept, in which he would join.

They were much consoled when they heard that the Holy Bishop promised to keep the novena with them. The Sisters began the novena at once, reciting daily the Rosary and the Litany of Loretta in common and assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. They united works of mortification and penance with their petitions. Before the close of the novena, the Bishop announced to them that the sum of 6000 marks(\$2000) was at his disposal for the Community.

From September, 1851 until November, 1852, the Sisters had observed a definite order of the day but now the Reverend Founder gave them the first Holy Rule which he himself had drawn up and sanctioned on November 11, 1852.

The Bishop also gave them the title "Sisters of Divine Providence," a beautiful, inspiring title, which the Sisters have ever cherished and loved. The Prelate always fostered love and devotion to God's Providence and in his work of bringing a new religious community into existence, his unshaken confidence in the guidance of Divine Providence shown forth visibly.

As we ponder on this material throughout this day, perhaps, some of our reflections could be centered on:

. . .How thankful we should be for the presence of Bishop Ketteler's life in guiding our Community through his spiritual support and monetary assistance especially during the early challenges of our Sisters.

. . .How our loving God wove into this early fabric of our Congregation's life, the modest, humble, spiritual and valiant "lady of noble birth"—Mother Marie de la Roche.

. . .The steadfastness and perseverance of the four young women who courageously endured the unsurmountable challenges facing the beginnings of our Community.

. . .The great privilege that each of us has in accepting, witnessing and sharing the spirit of the "providence of God" in our own lives as well as in the lives of those whom we share with on a daily basis.

Let us always remember: Providence has provided, Providence is providing and Providence will always provide!

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