



## St. Nazaria Ignacia March Mesa

**Born:** 10 January 1889 Madrid, Kingdom of Spain

**Died:** 6 July 1943 (aged 54) Buenos Aires, Argentina

**Venerated:** in Roman Catholic Church

**Beatified:** 27 September 1992, Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City by Pope John Paul II

**Canonized:** 14 October 2018, Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City by Pope Francis Feast 6 July

**Patronage:** Missionaries of the Crusade

Fourth of eighteen children born to José Alejandro March y Reus, a merchant, fisherman and industrial worker, and Nazaria Mesa Ramos; Nazaria had a twin sister, Ignacia, and ten brothers who survived infancy. She and her sister were baptized on the day they were born, Nazaria made her First Communion on 21 November 1898 and made a personal vow of consecration to God. Unlike many children who are drawn to religious life at an early age, her family was indifferent to the faith, and grew so tired of her of her devotions that they once "grounded" her from going to Mass. By the time she was confirmed on 15 March 1902, which was celebrated by Blessed Marcelo Spínola y Maestre, her family had grown used to her piety, and allowed her to join the Franciscan Third Order and more actively practice her faith. She succeeded in getting several of them to return to the Church.

In late 1904, business failures led the family to move to Mexico. On the trip, Nazarie met sisters in the Instituto de Hermanitas de los Ancianos Desamparados (Institute of Sisters of the Abandoned Elders), and was so inspired by their charism that on 7 December 1908 she followed a calling to religious life, and entered the Institute in Mexico City, Mexico; she made her perpetual vows on 1 January 1915, and took the name Sister Nazaire de Sainte-Thérèse. Her diaries of the time show a deep devotion to her calling, but struggles with her vows of obedience to her superiors. She was assigned to the Institute hospice in Oruro, Bolivia where she worked as a cook, housekeeper, nurse

and occasional beggar to support the poor and neglected for twelve years. The region around Oruro was not entirely Christian, many Protestant groups were establishing missions, and the few priests in the area were often lax or lived scandalous lives. Beginning in 1920 Sister Nazaire began to feel a call to found a new congregation devoted to missionary work, evangelization and religious education. On 18 January 1925, the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Sister Nazaire made a special vow of obedience to the Pope, and on Pentecost that year she made a vow to work for the union and extension of the Holy Catholic Church. On 16 June 1925, with six other sisters, she founded the Pontifical Crusade, later renamed the Congregation of the Missionary Crusaders of the Church, and began service as their superior. The mission of the Congregation was to catechize children and adults, support the work of priests, conduct missions, and to print and distribute short religious tracts. Mother Nazaire met with opposition to her work, much of it from within Church administration. Her sisters in the Institute treated her as a traitor to her original vocation for turning away from their work; her superiors considered her disobedient, and some Claretian clergy considered her a glory-hound, ignoring all the help members of their order had given her. But Nazaire clung to Christ and pressed on.

Monsignor Felipe Cortesi, while in Bolivia, had worked to help Mother Nazaire to found the Congregation. When he was assigned to be the apostolic nuncio of Argentina in 1930, he asked her to open a Missionary Crusader house in Buenos Aires. The Congregation received an early test under fire during the 1932 to 1935 war between Bolivia and Paraguay; Mother Nazaire and the sisters cared for and brought the sacraments to soldiers on both sides, and helped establish homes for war orphans. In 1934 she founded the first magazine in Bolivia for women in religious life, *Al Adalid de Cristo Rey*, and the first female trade union, *Sociedad de Obrera Católicas*

In early 1934, Monsignor Cortesi asked the Vatican Congregation of Religious to approve the rules for the Crusaders that Nazaire had written, based on Ignatian spirituality. Later that year, Mother Nazaria travelled to Rome with an Argentinian pilgrimage group to work for the approval of her Rule. She made pilgrimages to several sites, and had a private audience with Pope Pius XI during which Nazaire said that she was willing to die for the Church; the Pope told her that she must, instead, live and work for the Church. Leaving Italy for her native Spain, Mother Nazaire founded a retreat center for spiritual exercises in Madrid under the flag of Uruguay; the sisters there survived the Spanish Civil War as Franco did not wish to risk the international incident killing them would cause. With the help of the Bolivian government, Mother Nazaria was able to leave the persecutions in Spain and return to the Americas. She summoned a general chapter of the Congregation in 1937 to strengthen the unity and zeal of her sisters. Worked on the spiritual formation of new sisters, and set an example by her pious, simple life. To the superiors of the Congregation houses she always recommended a maternal approach to the sisters in their care, to remember their role as Mother of the house. When the Spanish Civil War ended, Nazaire returned to Spain to check on the sisters she had left behind, then returned to the Americas for the final time. The Congregation spread throughout South America and began to work in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Cameroon. Though Nazaire did not live to see it, the Congregation received Vatican recognition on 9 June 1947 by Pope Pius XII.