



Sr. Armela (Maria) Praeiro de Lima OSB

September 30, 1932 - July 17, 2004

*"See my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom I am pleased.
He will not shout nor raise his voice, nor make loud speeches in the streets.
He will not break off or bend a reed, nor put out a flickering lamp." Is. 42, 1-3*

We heard these above words of the Prophet Isaiah in our convent Mass on the morning of the day when our Sister Armela died, and they express very well the nature of our dear deceased Sister. A few hours later we prayed and sang at her bedside the "Suscipe me Domine, secundum eloquium tuum et vivam."

Sr. Armela was born on September 30, 1932 in Agreste Pau Santo, near Caruaru, in the State of Pernambuco. She grew up among 13 brothers and sisters some of whom died in childhood. She was baptized on November 11, 1932 and given the name Maria. Her father, Antonio Praeiro de Lima, was a farmer. Together with her wife, Maria José do Espírito Santo, he cared for his big family in a deep spirit of Christian Faith

In the few written notes left by Sr. Armela, we read: "I experienced my greatest joy on the day of my First Communion. My mother had prepared me. From my early age I worked in the house and in the fields. I could not go to school because there was no school at the place where we lived."

At the age of 16, she came to know our school "Sagrado Coração" in Caruaru. Her cousin Cecilia was working there and invited her to apply there for a job, too. Upon the latter's request and "with the permission of my parents", as she writes explicitly, she was accepted for half-day work and could go to school in the afternoon. She finished the first four years of elementary school. Later, already in the convent, she added the fifth year. In Caruaru, she also attended a cooking course. In the evening, after work, she used to go to the chapel. In those years, the desire to become a sister took root in her.

Maria confided this wish to Sr. Bernadette and was received into our Juvenate in Recife on January 29, 1955. On January 3, 1956, she became a candidate in our Priory House at Olinda. In her notes she wrote: "My second great joy came on the day of my clothing, on February 3, 1958." Sr. Armela pronounced her temporary vows on February 5, 1959, and her final vows on February 5, 1962.

One year after her final profession, she worked for one year in Recife where she could revive some memories of the juvenate time. Then she was transferred to the State of Ceará where she worked for 15 years in the community "Nossa Senhora de Fátima", in Barbalha. Called back to Olinda, she worked there for 11 years in the Priory House. Once again, she was sent to Ceará and assigned for 6 years to Porteira and 1 year to Palestina near Maurity. Her last station was Malhada de Pedras in the South of Bahia. Here she remained from 1998 till one month before her death.

In all these stations we could say with the Prophet: "She did not discuss nor cry aloud, and her voice was not heard in the streets." And also with the Psalmist: "Serve the Lord in joy." Sr. Armela dedicated herself with joyful equanimity and a sense of responsibility to whatever work was assigned to her in house and garden. As she was a good cook, the kitchen was entrusted to her most of the time.

She regularly brought Holy Communion to the sick in Porteiras and Malhada Pedras, two stations without priest in the interior of the country. The manner in which she held the host in her hands demonstrated clearly her interior adoration of the Eucharist. Her presence and the few words she spoke to them strengthened the sick and elderly people.

At Holy Mass and Services of the Word she helped with the distribution of Holy Communion. Sr. Armela was a Eucharistic and a Marian soul. Often, after Compline, she remained still for a long time before the tabernacle. She prayed devoutly the daily rosary. The people loved her and gave her the name "Sister of Silence".

In Malhada de Pedras she helped the altar servers to do their functions well. She knew how to educate them to conscientious service at the altar. Sr. Armela possessed a great zeal for religious services and taught others to make everything in church most beautiful and perfect for Christ. At a fitting moment she could say: "You may not continue to do it this way!" Her admonition was well-known: "You may not talk about others". She did not even want to hear criticism about President Bush, but would say: "I pray for him that he will be converted." Sr. Armela was the consequent person and she did herself what she demanded of others.

Sr. Armela loved the poor and was compassionate with them. She was in charge of doing the shopping at the weekly market. Occasionally she bought something that was not really necessary, in order to give to the vendor a chance to earn a little. While her fellow sisters were busy with their manifold and fatiguing apostolates in the city or in the villages, she was the good spirit in the house. In her slow, careful way she kept up the house, and on feastdays, she always had a surprise of her culinary art in store for them. – Her apostolate was to visit sick and elderly people in their homes.

It was not easy to make her go to the doctor. She hid her pains, even incessant pains, from her fellow sisters. In early June this year she suffered from a flu which did not subside. She became pale, then turned yellow. The doctor suspected hepatitis. So it became necessary to bring her to the Priory House in Olinda for proper treatment. An appointment with a specialist was set. An operation revealed cancer of liver in an advanced stage and a special treatment was no longer possible; so she was dismissed from the hospital. To relieve her pain and ameliorate the itch caused by the gall fluid in her veins, a Korean doctor prescribed acupuncture of her hands; this made her suffering more bearable.

We do not know how much she suffered. She did not complain or groan even a single time during her illness. She remained recollected in prayer, so the secular nurses were astonished and considered her a saint. Her fellow sisters who lived with her in Malhada de Pedras during the past six years, confirmed the same observations.

On July 16, Sr Armela fell into a sort of coma. She received once more the anointing of the sick where, at the praying of the Our Father by the sisters surrounding her bed, she opened her eyes for some moments. She was given oxygen. The following day, her breathing became weaker and was accompanied by soft moans. Her facial expression remained calm. At 10:55 she fell quietly asleep; it was July 17, 2004, 36 days after she had come to the Priory House in Olinda.

Sr. Armela left to us the example of a simple, unpretentious and helpful life, not attracting attention, the example of a quiet, prayerful person. At her daily work and wherever she was, her lips moved in prayer.

"See, my servant maid whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I am pleased."

May she rest in peace!

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