

In Memory of Sr. M. Berchmana (Elisabeth) Hodapp OSB

born on June 11, 1935 died on Dec. 12, 2010



On the eve before the Third Sunday of Advent, while the Sisters sang the antiphon: „Lo, the Lord is coming, He who saves all the world! ... Blessed are those who go to meet Him,“ our Sister Berchmana went to meet HIM through her dying. HE has reached out His saving hand and gifted her on Gaudete Day with the joy of eternal life.

Elisabeth, as she was named in baptism, was born on June 11, 1935 in the village of Önsbach near Achern, in Baden, Archdiocese of Freiburg. Her parents, Karl Hodapp and Theresia, nee Boschert, were farmers. As her parents had married late, Elisabeth grew up with only one younger brother. After completion of the elementary school, 1941-1949, it was natural for her to get agricultural training so that she would be able to help on the parental farm. Hence, until her 23rd year, she absolved various vocational courses in the agricultural vocational school, an agricultural school for girls and the Landvolkshochschule on the Gamburg.

In 1954, while she attended a Primiz (First Mass of a newly-ordained priest), she experienced the Lord's call to herself: „Come and help us.“ In her biography we find the following remarks regarding the background for her entry: „This call came to me again and again, especially in the more quiet months of wintertime, until I finally gave in. I felt drawn to the missions because I had read reports of Fr. Josef Damm (an uncle of Sr. Raphaelis Damm). However, I never wanted to know anything of convent life. I rather thought of helping in the missions as a lay person, because I did not want to give up the idea of getting married. In the Landvolkshochschule I came to know Fr. Konrad of Beuron; I got into contact with him and he helped me and got for me informations about Tutzing.“

Moved by the advice of Fr. Konrad to become the person for what one is called to be, and after some longer time of consideration, Elisabeth was anyhow ready for religious life and entered the convent on August 1, 1959. On February 7, 1961, she was clothed and received the name **Sr. M. Berchmana**. She celebrated her first profession on the Solemnity of St. Scholastica, February 10, 1962; and her final profession, again on the Feast of St. Scholastica, 1965. With her practical abilities, she was assigned in various areas such as the garden, housework or heating system. From December 1971 to August 1991, she belonged to the community of Weiterdingen where she served in the laundry, sacristy and many other areas of work in the house. With the dissolution of the community in Weiterdingen, a transfer to Wessobrunn became necessary for her, where she found her Benedictine home until her death. Here, too, she engaged all her strength until the end of 2008 and did the necessary work in the laundry, the heating system and the orchard.

Sr. Berchmana is remembered by many as a fellow sister who loved to work and who worked much. And this had something to do with her self-image as a religious sister, as we can deduce from her personal notes: „When one poses the question: what did you want when you entered the convent, then I must say: to be there where I am needed – more exactly, where HE needs me.“ Yes, Sr. Berchmana was very caring for others, she thought of many necessary things and let herself be engaged where she was needed. Very often, these were the inconspicuous and little services that need to be done in a big religious family. Her cooperative care and readiness to serve were combined with an attitude of thriftiness, not only in dealing with things belonging to the monastery and energy, but also with things for her personal needs.

Sr. Berchmana demonstrated always great interest in all events in the community, in the priory, in the Congregation, and fulfilled her duties as fellow sister faithfully and conscientiously. Even on her sickbed she asked the superior daily for a report on the daily happenings in the community. Besides the religious community, she was also concerned about good relationships with the family of her only brother. Therefore, his early death caused deep pain for her.

She did not lose many words about her faith; it belonged quite naturally to her actions and her being as a religious sister. Participation at common prayer and Holy Mass were important and precious to her. Also joining the rosary at the transmission from Radio Vatican and the religious services for the sick gave her interior strength in sickness. In the last days of her life she permitted us a glimpse into her soul when she confessed that she loved best the prayer of Brother Klaus: „My Lord and my God, take all from me what hinders me to you. My Lord and my God, give me all what brings me closer to you. My Lord and my God, take myself away from me and give me totally to yourself.“

Sr. Berchmana was blessed with a robust health, aside from a necessary operation in 1977. Only towards the end of 2008 did she have to confront herself with a diagnosis of serious cancer which required chemo-therapy. Though the sickness was accompanied by weakness, but not by pain, she tried to continue her daily convent life and to work, and thought everything would have passed after the treatment phase. However, in summer 2010, during a new hospitalization, it turned out that the disease had progressed and would continue to progress. This was the beginning for her of a several-month-long conscious bidding good-bye to her fellow sisters and familiar activities. She went on her way of suffering composed and without complaint, in spite of her increasing shortness of breath, strengthened and consoled by daily joining Vespers and Holy Mass in the midst of her fellow sisters. In consequence of a double pneumonia, her condition became so bad that she had to be transferred to the palliative ward of the Tutzing Hospital. There she was called home to God on Gaudete Sunday at 12:00 o'clock noontime.

For our dear Sr. M. Berchmana, who had followed the way of the Lord faithfully through 48 years, her „Suscipe“ came in the hour of completion, the „Suscipe“ which she had sung for the first time as a young sister in the church of the Motherhouse. May she now see HIM face to face whose Coming we await. R.i.P.

Wessobrunn, December 15, 2010
Superior and Sisters of Wessobrunn