

NOVENA

for the intercession
of

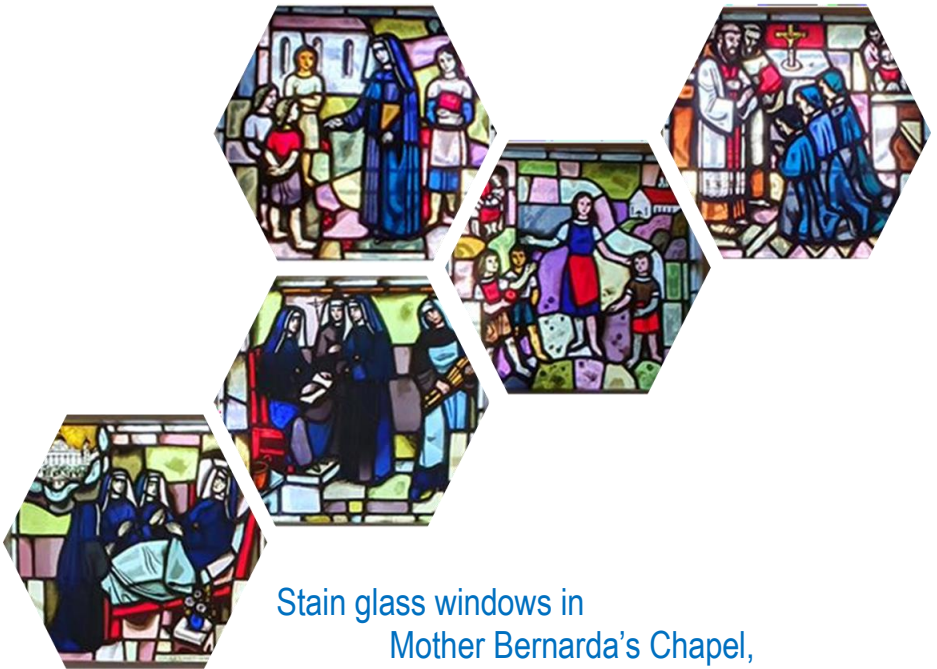
MOTHER

BERNARDA HEIMGARTNER

the Servant of God

Foundress of the

Sisters of the Holy Cross



Stain glass windows in
Mother Bernarda's Chapel,
Mother House, Menzingen

NINE DAYS WITH MOTHER BERNARDA HEIMGARTNER

INTRODUCTION

Along with the texts imploring Mother Bernarda's intercession, this Novena wishes to depict the virtues of the Servant of God. In doing so, it holds fast to the words of Pope Pius XII on the occasion of the centenary of the Menzingen Institute, words in which he honoured Mother Bernard's spiritual greatness. *“Divine Providence ordained that your Foundress and first Mother, Bernarda Heimgartner, this God-filled, deeply pious and prudent woman, this valiant and patient cross-bearer, and with her the growing community, should be placed in a very special way under the saving sign of the Redemption”.*

This image of Mother Bernarda accompanies those who make the following Novena through the nine days of prayer for the intercession of the Servant of God. Perhaps now and then it might serve as a model for our own way of life.





DAY 1

Mother Bernarda Foundress of the Institute

Mother Bernarda was the first young girl to join Father Theodosius Florentini, OFM, Cap., to help him in the bringing of his plans to fruition. Considering her youth, she showed a remarkable ability to empathise with his plans for the establishing of a Congregation of Teaching Sisters who would work in primary schools. She did this at a time when convents nearby were being suppressed by the government. Even the Convent of Maria Kröenung, where she had begun her professional and religious training, was not spared.

However, she was not discouraged when Fr Theodosius, to avoid persecution by the government, fled abroad. Following his wishes, she willingly went to the Ursuline Institute in Freiburg in Breisgau and later to the School Sisters of Divine Providence in Ribeauvillé, France, to continue her training. When Fr Theodosius, in his perplexity, suggested her entering the enclosed Ursuline Convent in Lucerne, she declined. Work in a public school, as originally envisaged, held more appeal for her. She manifestly continued to believe the Teaching Sisters would be founded in Menzingen. Mother Bernarda guided it prudently and bravely through the difficult early years and through the still more difficult times of trial. There were periods of hard

struggle to maintain the original aims and the Franciscan character of the Institute as embodied in the Constitutions. The cause of these struggles lay, on the one hand, in the impetuous initiatives of Fr Theodosius, and on the other, in the later reform efforts of the Institute's Benedictine Spiritual Director, Abbot Birker, to turn the sisters into Benedictine Oblates. Through her fidelity to the mission originally entrusted to her, and her sense of responsibility, Mother Bernarda safeguarded the Institute against the loss of its identity and ensured its continued existence, so that Pope Pius XII could rightly designate her the Foundress.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Through her, I commend to you my great anxieties ... and pray for strength and fortitude to carry out the work entrusted to me in a spirit of Christian courage. Glory be to the Father ...





DAY 2

Mother Bernarda

First mother of the family of sisters

“The sisters, united in genuine love, were content and happy; they knew that a loving mother cared for them.” Such were Sister Felizitas' recollections of Mother Bernarda as given in her notes. For Mother Bernarda to be a loving mother, meant forgetfulness of self, thought for others, advising them in matters great or small and giving them her active support. She was aware of each one who was ill, and provided medical care and wholesome remedies. She was concerned about their meals, about the living conditions of the sisters in rural schools and about the relationships with pupils and authorities. She shared the spiritual and material needs of the sisters entrusted to her and like a loving mother knew how to forgive those who failed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Help me to be ever more forgetful of self. Through her intercession, I commend to you all the intentions for which I have been asked to pray and my own personal intentions. Glory be to the Father...





DAY 3

Mother Bernarda the God-filled woman

A favourite theme in Mother Bernarda's teaching on prayer was the thought of the indwelling of God in the faithful. At the head of her letters to the sisters she frequently put the words: *“That Jesus may live in our hearts.”* For example, she wrote to one of her sisters: “He is ever near to you, even when you do not feel it. He is looking on and testing your fidelity. Just believe that he is hidden in the depths of your heart, ready to help you when help is needed.” In a letter to a sister in Buochs we read: *“I would like to know that the practice of the presence of God is observed very specially, since interior recollection is the most effective means for growth in virtue and perfection.”*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Grant me through her intercession the grace of a strong faith in your presence in all the faithful. Grant me too, your help in my present great concern... Glory be to the Father...





DAY 4

Mother Bernarda the deeply-pious woman

“*Mother Bernarda was a woman of prayer*”, wrote Sister Felizitas Mühleis in her Memoirs. This is the impression of those who read her writings. True, she seldom speaks of her personal prayer-life. However, the genuine, spontaneous, joyful atmosphere emanating from her diary and from letters to the sisters, leave one in no doubt as to her rich, religious interior life. In a letter dated 8th March 1852, for example, she exhorted the young sisters and the novices: “*Love prayer, practise it wherever you can. Expect much, yes everything from God.*”

There is hardly a letter from Mother Bernarda in which she does not ask for prayer for herself or for others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Through her, I beg for unflagging zeal in daily prayer and for help in my pressing intentions ... Glory be to the Father...





DAY 5

Mother Bernarda the prudent woman

From many of Mother Bernarda's letters one perceives her unwavering dedication to the goal of Christian life, for the sake of which it was worthwhile bearing patiently with the trials of this short earthly life. Thus, she encouraged a sister: *“Be joyful then in suffering; it will be your joy one day.”* In spite of this constant reference to the future life, Mother Bernarda's guidance of her community was very realistic.

She knew that a thorough religious and professional training was absolutely necessary for a teaching sister and she was most concerned about this. She knew, too, that everything in the spiritual life needs time and she understood the limitations of human nature.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. I pray through her intercession for the gift of prudence in all my decisions and for help in my present intentions ... Glory be to the Father ...





DAY 6

Mother Bernarda the valiant and patient Cross-bearer

The advice and encouragement in suffering which Mother Bernarda gave her sisters she herself had first lived. From her own experience, she is able to encourage her sisters: *“Don't be faint-hearted, rather be generous in trusting God, humble and patient in suffering. The good God will surely take care of you. We began small and miserably poor and yet God has always helped us in our hour of need. True, I had to exert myself to find help and I was not without anxiety and suffering; but should we not gladly make sacrifices for Jesus and show our good will? He helps us to endure; He cares for us and fortifies us.”*

Prayer: Heavenly Father I thank you for the work of grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Through her intercession, I beg for courage and patience in suffering and for help in my present great need ... Glory be to the Father ...





DAY 7

Mother Bernarda sustained by immense trust in God's Providence

Mother Bernarda possessed an extraordinary inner power of endurance because she was filled with faith in God's guidance. This faith was put to a severe test when, half a year after the foundation, Father Theodosius was forbidden by his superior to have anything more to do with the Institute. In her diary, Mother Bernarda wrote: *“From this moment on, our former Director no longer had the joy of carrying on the work which he had begun so nobly and with such great dedication. However, we did not allow ourselves to be discouraged on that account. We placed our trust in God, acknowledging that this, too, was His holy Will and trusting that He would order all things for His honour and our good.”*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Increase my trust in your wise Providence and grant me through the kind intercession of Mother Bernarda help in my great need ... Glory be to the Father ...





DAY 8

Mother Bernarda under the sign of the Redemption

Those who are acquainted with the life of Mother Bernarda know that what weighed so heavily upon her was her sole responsibility for the Congregation as Mother General during a lengthy period of very difficult circumstances. Those who were appointed to be her support became her cross. That she saw in this cross the sign of the Redemption is revealed by the humble words in her letter to the Superior, Joseph Rollin, and to the Council Sisters: *“For 16 years I have borne the burden of superior-ship. What I have suffered during that time is known to God. I hope He will accept it as atonement for my many sins and shortcomings.”*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda. Help me more and more to understand my cross as a sign of the Redemption and grant me the grace to bear it patiently. Through Mother Bernarda I trustingly commend to you my present cares and intentions ... Glory be to the Father ...





DAY 9

Mother Bernarda and her Congregation

Mother Bernarda and her sisters saw their religious family as being marked in a particular way by the Redemption. During their first year living in common they were bitterly poor but nonetheless carried out their ministry faithfully. It was in the spirit of this commitment that they named themselves “*Sisters of the Holy Cross*”. With Mother Bernarda they bore bravely and faithfully the heavy burden of the later years. Particularly painful was the aloofness of Father Theodosius after the Bishops of Basle and Chur had given their decision against the union of the Sisters of Mercy and the Teaching Sisters. Yet they continued to experience again and again the blessing of the Cross. Therefore, in 1855 Mother Bernarda could write to Bishop Carl Arnold: “*The Institute thanks Heaven for its ever-visible protection and blessing.*”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the work of your grace in the life of Mother Bernarda and beseech you to help me bear my cross in order that it may be for my salvation. Through her I bring before you my present concerns and petitions ... Glory be to the Father ...

