

MO. MARY CECILIA OF JESUS, O.C.D. CO-FOUNDRESS
Carmel of Our Lady, Mary Mediatrix of All Grace
and St. Teresa of Jesus
Lipa, Batangas

“It is not good to hide the secrets of the king.” In this humble sharing, we are revealing one of God’s secrets: MO. MARY CECILIA OF JESUS. It was our privilege and joy to have lived with her. She was so humble, so selfless that even if this tribute of gratitude falls short doing justice to her beautiful life, she would still be grateful because the mercy of God through Our Lady will have been proclaimed.

Mo. Mary Cecilia, the fourth child of Lorenzo Zialcita and Florentina de Leon, was born on September 7, 1908. She spent 56 of her 74 years in Carmel. Let us allow her to speak to us in her letter to Mo. Theresa of Jesus (Ma Mere), dated July 15, 1926:

“Now I am making my formal application to you to become a Carmelite. May I become a Carmelite? I am obsessed with the idea. It has been on my mind for a long time, and now it has been my thought night and day and gives me untold happiness. But of course there is a very serious side: first, am I fit for the calling? I know I am not worthy, but I mean, can I count on myself to be adaptable and ready by the grace of God? The second serious aspect for me now is the securing of a dowry. I am not discouraged. Never for a moment have I felt like giving up. I am at times a little worried or rather, struggling with uncertainties. I am like a person in the dark – by the grace of God I must be a Carmelite, and yet for the present I do not see the way.

I will be 18 years old in September and I am a High School graduate of La Consolacion College. Thanks be to God, my health is first class. I have been counted one of the strongest girls at schools and have really not been sick even for one day, though I have an eye defect which is corrected by using glasses. I have read and studied the ‘Summary of the Spirit and the Rule of Carmel’ which you kindly sent to Fr. McNulty, and I think I can say with serious conviction before God that I shall love the religious training of Carmel, that my inclinations will readily find happiness in prayerful solitude and the practice of God’s wonderful presence. Of course, I have seen very little of the world but the little has disgusted me and I am full of strong desire to get away from empty compliments and foolish styles and waste of time, and because of the sights and sounds of sin and its horrid nearness and occasions I must, with God’s grace and mercy, get into Carmel soon. I crave for your advice because I feel that a direct word from Carmel will give me light and will be something of a beginning. If I seem a bit childish in this last notion, I must say to you, my dear Mother, in all honesty, that I do at times feel very girlish and young, but I know I am mature enough about my desire for Carmel, and my Confessor assures me that I am big and mature enough to do it. And I am sure God wants me in Carmel and I like to think that He wants me now. You see, I have explained every aspect of my desire and its difficulties to my Confessor, Rev. Fr. Paulino Garcia, O.S.B. By the way, he is the Confessor of all of our family, my father and mother and all, and he has known me from childhood. He approves of my intention and he has given permission to send this, my application, to you for decision. I have consulted Fr. McNulty, too and after studying my case, he says that I may go ahead with confidence. It was Fr. McNulty who gave me your ‘Summary and Rule’. He helped me to understand it and to face the Summary very seriously and I like everything in it. I have already told my father and mother all about my plans, and after much weeping as is natural, they both have given me their consent.”

Here is another letter dated August 12, 1926:”

Your letter made me very, very happy, so happy that I jumped many times and ran to the altar to thank God after reading it. I sometimes doubt whether there is anyone happier than I. Oh! Dear Rev. Mother, if only everything is ready, I would not have rested until you had consented in receiving me right away. Can you now fix the date of your coming to Manila? I am very eager to offer myself wholly to God, to his church and her

priests. It seems the days are so slow in passing, that October will never come. Oh! to be wholly given to God, to be his forever, that is my desire!”

Finally, on October 4, 1926:

“Your letter dated September 18, made me happy and so sad at same time. Happy because I know now the probable date of your arrival, consequently, the approximate date of my entrance into Carmel but sad, because it is so far yet! I had been hoping that my waiting was nearing its end, but now I see that it is a long waiting yet. God’s Holy Will be done! Sometimes, dear Rev. Mother, I think that Jesus prolongs my waiting to make me more patient, for although I have told myself many, many times that I will not be impatient, still I find myself repeating now and again, ‘Oh, dear Jesus, if it could be now, right now! Do you think, dear Mother, that this is my fault? I begin to fear sometimes that I might offend Jesus with my impatience he might think that I am not fully resigned to His Holy Will, but no, no, I like everything He wants. Only, I don’t know why I feel impatient. I am praying to the Holy Angels and to St. Therese of the Child Jesus to hasten your coming.”

The letter of recommendation from the Superior of La Consolacion College, Sor Josefina del Patrocinio, dated December 7, 1926 reads:

“Natividad Zialcita has been a student and neighbor of La Consolacion College for 11 years and during this time she has shown exemplary conduct in her studies. At present she is one of our most distinguished and beloved catechists. I have no hesitation to give her our loyal and sincere recommendation.”

Natividad’s impatience was rewarded on December 8, 1926 when she was allowed to enter. She was the first postulant to enter the temporary house of the foundation of Manila Carmel in Singalong. Six months later, June 29, 1927, she received the habit from the Most Rev. Michael O’Doherty, D.D., the archbishop of Manila. The solemn Mass at 7:30 a.m. was celebrated by Rev. Fr. McNulty, S.J. while La Consolacion College supplied the choir.

Mo. Angelina Lazatin, who was one of her companions in the novitiate, recalls: “We were very happy together, very united, very close. There was no trouble between us.”

On November 24 of the following year, she made her temporary profession and six years later, she made her perpetual vows on September 8, 1934. These years were spent mainly in humble tasks.

Mary’s part in her life was really remarkable. She was born on the eve of Our Lady’s birthday, hence her name Natividad. Her baptism took place on September 12, at that time the feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary. Her entrance and perpetual profession days were on Our Lady’s feasts, and while we know very little of her life before she came to Lipa, her private Consecration to our Blessed Mother on Monday, August 15, the feast of the Assumption, 1934 gives us another evidence of her great devotion to Mary:

“I, Sr. Mary Cecilia of Jesus, give and consecrate to the Blessed Virgin Mary, my body, my soul, my faculties and my whole being. I choose her for my Mother, my Mistress and my Queen and I surrender to her the entire and full right of disposing of me and of all that belongs to me without exception, as she pleases, to the greatest glory of God, in time and in eternity. I make this offering of my perpetual slavery to Mary according to the spirit of Blessed Grignon de Montfort and with the approval of our Reverend Mother and of our extraordinary confessor.”

Signed: Sr. Mary Cecilia of Jesus, OCD

Sr. Theresa of Jesus
(Prioress)

After the war, Bishop Alfredo Verzosa of Lipa asked Ma Mère for a foundation in his diocese. Lipa City as a whole was not yet an encouraging sight to behold and only hearts aflame with holy love and zeal would be brave enough to take up the request for Mary's Carmel. The formal negotiations began and on May 31, then the feast of Mary Mediatrix of All Grace, the little party destined for Lipa said goodbye to Manila Carmel. As in every foundation, there were a thousand trials and anxieties regarding the construction and soon. Ma Mère had to leave her little flock for it had been agreed upon she would return to Manila Carmel as soon as things had settled down in the new foundations. Mo. Mary Cecilia was nominated as the first Filipina prioress. The day before, November 21, 1947, she had written to Ma Mère:

“It is again your little one who comes to you tonight. On a night like this, five years ago, I was writing to Ma Mère and tears were falling fast. And now it's not another, but myself who has to take Ma Mère's place! It is your maternal care that made this possible. Your little one owes, under God, everything to you, Ma Mère There are moments in life when the heart is too full for words. I wish I could tell your Rev. what fills my heart now: gratitude, etc., but Ma Mère. I know that your prayers and maternal care and solicitude will ever be my mainstay. In Jesus and Mary I trust!

Ma Mère, every morning and evening when you bless your Manila community, please always include your Lipa community. We shall ever remain yours, Ma Mère, in Jesus and Mary!”

The installation was to take place on November 22, her feast day. To all appearances, this day was to be a joyful day for all, but among the many presents and letters of congratulations were two telegrams announcing the sad news of the sudden death of her beloved brother, Dr. Carlos Zialcita, who had expired the previous day, November 21. Mo. Mary Cecilia, the valiant leader, stifled the cry of grief that arose in her heart and with dry eyes and a brave smile, she received the cheerful songs of welcome and love from the little flock now entrusted to her maternal care. The sad news was withheld from the community until the next day.

Barely ten months later, on September 12, 1948, the apparitions of Our Lady to a postulant in Lipa Carmel began. Years later, a note written by Mo. Mary Cecilia revealed her sentiments:

“In September, 1948, events happened in Lipa Carmel which made our filial hearts rejoice greatly. Up to 1949 these events took place and without our willing it, the news spread all over the world. In 1950 Holy Mother Church instituted a formal investigation and her maternal verdict was a strict injunction not to speak about these events. With childlike trust we abide by her decision while praying and hoping that our Blessed Mother herself will make known in her own way and time what is most for the glory of God, her own honor, and the salvation of souls. Almost thirty years have elapsed and yet people keep asking us about these events and their love and confidence in our Blessed Mother, Mary Mediatrix of All Grace, have never waned.”

Earlier, in 1951, after the Philippine Hierarchy had pronounced that there was nothing supernatural about the Lipa events. Mo. Mary Cecilia had copied on a piece of scratch paper that was later discovered, the following lines from THE SENTINEL (the ecclesiastical newspaper), lines with which she resonated so fully:

“The hand of God is surely in this which has happened, is happening to us. Not perhaps in the way which we assumed, but just as truly in another way. It is a test of our capacity to see in this statement on Lipa, not a rejection of our hopes and the seed of disillusion – but a chance: a chance for spiritual growth; a chance to stand steadfast in faith and loyalty under pressure, unembittered; humbled yet not ashamed.”

At this point one wonders what was Ma Mère's attitude towards the Lipa happenings. Mo. Therese Paredes (Laoag Carmel) recalled: “I was very astonished at how Ma Mère could be so influenced by the apparitions since we knew very well and she was always telling us to be very careful about such things. Well, when she said: ‘Our Lady appeared...’ and she was so enthusiastic about this, I went to her and I said: Ma Mère, what do you think about that? I think St. John of the Cross will not admit that. And she said, ‘Ah, ma petite, but this is different.’”

In Gilmore Carmel there is a box that was kept by Ma Mère containing letters and photos of Teresing Castillo. One wonders again why she kept them so preciously.

What happened to Mo. Mary Cecilia after the 1948 events?

On February 27, 1950, Mo. Mary Cecilia was called to the parlour by a well-known priest who told her confidentially that something would happen that day, something that Mo. Mary Cecilia had no idea about whatsoever. After the parlour visit, quietly, she went to inspect the construction of the still unfinished monastery.

Shortly after, there was a loud knock at the enclosure door. On opening, there were Msgr. Rufino Santos with Msgr. Domingo Librea and two Carmelite nuns who were heavily veiled. The community was summoned to the choir and Msgr. Santos announced: “You will have another prioress from now on. Here is Mo. Mary of Christ; and Sr. Magdalene to be your (novice) mistress. Bishop Santos then ordered Mo. Mary Cecilia to pack her things in 30 minutes. “And you Mo. Cecilia, I’m giving you half an hour to pack your things and no more, no more than that.”

Neither Mo. Mary Cecilia nor the community knew where she would be taken. Only later was it learned that Msgr. Librea had accompanied her to Jaro Carmel for the beginning of her “exile”. Later, she was brought back to Manila by Fr. James P. Moran, S.J. to face the Church Tribunal. Only God knows the intensity of the heartaches that she went through during those days.

Mo. Mary Cecilia’s “exile” lasted 13 long years. After her brief stay in Jaro Carmel, she was brought to Manila Carmel where she remained deprived of active and passive voice.

Mo. Natividad Dizon, ocd, who had been sent to Lipa Carmel to help out, shared deeply of the same cup of humiliation and pain. Her recollections of Mo. Mary Cecilia are precious, coming from one to whom Mo. Mary Cecilia had written when she had sent her rosaries that she herself had made: “Done with much love and gratitude for all you have been and are to me!”

Mo. Naty wrote: “As a postulant, I noticed Sr. Mary Cecilia as a very serious, silent Sister. Yes, at recreation she was jolly, but her humor was calm and always respectful. Even then she inspired me with the presence of God whenever I met her.”

Then she was chosen to be one of the foundresses of Lipa Carmel. Ma Mère accompanied them, of course. We missed her very much as she was the chronicler of our Carmel’s beginnings, together with Mo. Mary Gabriel. She was also Ma Mère’s secretary, knowing perfectly her English, Spanish, Tagalog and some French.

It was after the affair of Lipa that we lived in greater intimacy. Because of the sanctions, we had both been put under some kind of ‘punishment’ and Ma Mère was so delicate as to place her with me in the provisory and in the vestment office. I owe Mo. Mary Cecilia very much. She helped me to accept what was happening as God’s will. She always put God in. ‘God is there.’

I had gotten such a shock during the interrogations of Rev. Fr. Visitor that whenever I heard the bell I experienced something like an electric shock. So Mo. Mary Cecilia would embrace me and remind me of God’s love and of our Blessed Mother. We never spoke about the happenings of Lipa as we were told not to speak about them under pain of venial sin if we spoke among ourselves and of mortal sin if with outsiders. Mo. Mary Cecilia was very strict about this. She would never satisfy her desire to know more about the happenings. We would never commit a venial sin just to satisfy our curiosity. And our Lady helped us. Often, I would end up sobbing hysterically because of what we were suffering. Again, Mo. Mary Cecilia would then hold me in her arms and speak of God and the beauty of suffering. She spoke gently, calmly coming from her heart, and it worked. I would become calm and peace would inundate my soul. Indeed, she was my support – morally and spiritually, during those dark days, more than nine years I think.

Humility was not lacking in her though she was sensitive, being of deep and very keen intelligence. I begged her, as an elder Sister, to call my attention about my defect or fault she noticed in me. In fact she often did it for my own good and benefit, for which I felt so grateful.

She was very mortified, although she did it very discreetly. Often she would make the Holy Hour after Matins until 12:00 P.M. on the eves of big feasts, fasting on bread and water. Having the office of provisor, she would choose for herself food that needed to be consumed, especially the rotten bananas. How often her

collation consisted in the pressing fruits that needed to be eaten. She never took siesta. I remember that during the whole night of Holy Thursdays she would remain before the Blessed Sacrament on her knees all the time.

The Good God knew how to humiliate her during her last years. I remember Bishop Federico Escaler telling me after he had given a retreat to the community of Lipa Carmel: 'There is an old Sister in Lipa Carmel who is truly a saint. I don't know if the community realizes it. She is so hidden.' I told him I knew the Sister and that she was truly hidden and simple. He said he wouldn't be surprised if one day she would be among the Saints.

Now, I often pray to her for graces. For example, I ask her to wake me up before the bell so that I could make the Stations of the Cross. If I forget to ask this of her, then I would not be awakened. Or on days when I feel extra tired, she won't wake me up. The thought comes to me: Ah, Mo. Mary Cecilia wishes me to sleep longer. So I remain in peace. Sometimes I find myself in a pressing situation where I have to hurry to finish something. I call on her and she helps me.

How intimately we understood each other. I hope she'll come with our Lady to meet me at the end of my journey."

Mo. Louise Mary Tañedo, ocd of Manila Carmel remembers Mo. Mary Cecilia from the time of her own entrance to Carmel: "On March 11, 1943 I entered Carmel and met a pretty young nun named Sr. Mary Cecilia of Jesus. She was kind and was given to me as my 'angel'. She was intelligent and could write a conference word for word afterwards. At that time, when Lauds were recited after Matins, the postulant would go out to ring the bell for the Te Deum and then retire without attending Lauds. We had no electricity at that time. We only had flickering petroleum lamps. Our cell was overlooking the cemetery and I found it difficult to go to our cell and sleep. Once, I found my 'angel' following me, whispering: 'If you don't overcome your fright you cannot remain. I wanted to remain, so I closed my eyes and tried to sleep.'"

In 1946 Mo. Mary Cecilia left for the foundation of Lipa Carmel. Some years later, Mo. Louise Mary returned to Manila Carmel after having helped out in the foundation of Naga Carmel. Nothing was said to her as to why Mo. Mary Cecilia was back in Manila Carmel.

"We did not know anything. Everything was very discreet. We didn't hear anything. Mo. Mary Cecilia never complained of her pains.

In my 55 years in Carmel I saw that God is really like that. He has to make you undergo dark nights, very, very dark and in these dark nights He is so near, so near. Through the years I noticed that there was no resentment whatsoever in Mo. Mary Cecilia. Such is a saint."

Mo. Mary Cecilia endured exile from February 27, 1950 to March 14, 1963. Coupled with her own sufferings were the sufferings she saw being weighed on the community she had left behind. We shall not comment anymore but repeat what Holy Mother St. Teresa said that just as other people prize gold and jewels, so real contemplatives prize and desire trials for they know quite well that trials make them rich. No doubt Mother's Soul was enriched all those years. She grew to be that silent and hidden contemplative, the contemplative who never had a word of complaint, of bitterness, of resentment, of grudge amid the painful trials and humiliations.

Thanks to the instrumentality of Mo. Mary Clare Germette, then prioress of Manila Carmel. Mo. Mary Cecilia, together with Mo. Mary Anne who were exiled to Laoag Carmel, were allowed by Rome to return to Lipa Carmel after their thirteen years of exile.

After her exile, her life in Lipa Carmel continued quietly. She was the prioress' "private secretary" as she had a gift for writing letters. The young Sisters were entrusted to her care. Often we would see her peacefully making rosaries in which she was known and acknowledged as an expert. Together with all her interior sufferings known only to God, Mo. Mary Cecilia suffered physically: she had impaired hearing and had the use of only one good eye, having lost one eye after a bad fall. The humid climate of Lipa tried her with almost interminable colds and asthma to the point of almost suffocation. And yet Mother was always exact in all the community exercises whenever she could.

Seven days a week, her siesta hour was spent in either making her rosaries, tending her cactus garden, reading L'Ossevatore Romano or praying in choir. Our dear Sr. Alphonse, her companion from the early years in Gilmore, had this to say: "Her faith and obedience to her Superiors were remarkable. Her charity was such that those who were absent from a conversation could be sure that Mo. Mary Cecilia would never say anything uncharitable about them."

On November 24, 1978 she celebrated her Golden Jubilee, 50 years of faithful, quiet and loving service to the Church. Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen was the main celebrant and she was edified by the simplicity of the celebration. Mother joyously spent the day with her nearest relatives and a few close friends. For the community, it was an occasion for us to show our gratitude to Mo. Mary Cecilia.

In February 1982, we had our community retreat given by Bishop Federico Escaler, S.J., the bishop of Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur. Mo. Mary Cecilia had a private talk with him during which he released her from the ban of silence that had been imposed on her regarding the 1948 apparitions.

Years later, when asked why he had taken such a step, Bishop Escaler replied: "I felt that it was an unjust decree that was foisted on her by Vagnossi. Regarding confidential matters like what happened during that time of the falling of the roses, I felt for the history of Lipa and for all concerned that her side should be given. My own aunt (Mo. Natividad), had told me that they had all been silenced, and the impression I got from what my aunt told me, and later on, when speaking in confidence with Mo. Cecilia, was that really, there was too much haste in pronouncing the judgment. For the sake of history and the correction of whatever had been wrongly done, she should have her side. At first she was very reluctant and asked: 'Will this not be against the ban that was given to me?' Well, I said: I think I can vouch for that. This is confidential matter. I noted that she was very hesitant in the beginning. She said: Well, I'll try to write it down. I'll send you a copy of it. Let me know what you think of it. I did receive her recollections, I think almost two months after the retreat and if I'm not mistaken, I sent it back to her, I said: Thank you. Keep this for your historical records so that your side may be clarified.

She struck me as a very holy nun, completely forgetful of self; her concern was obedience, hoping that it could right whatever wrong may have been done to the Sisters and also for the sake of truth.

A month ago, Mo. Naty called me up and we talked at Gilmore. She recalled what had happened and she said it was painful then. You couldn't say anything, consult anything, etc. but she didn't complain. We obeyed.

And look at it now, it seems that our Lady wants the devotion again propagated.

Mo. Cecilia was a real humble person. She radiated holiness and compliance: O.K., if that is what the Holy Spirit wants, speaking through Rome, were ready to submit. But I assure you, it must have been very painful. I hope that the wrongs that had been done will be undone. Mo. Cecilia will be very happy when she hears that the truth will finally come out.

Mo. Eugene (Jolo Carmel) remembers very clearly what Mo. Gabriel, the foundress of Laoag Carmel, told her: "If ever a saint comes out of the Lipa happenings, it will be Mo. Mary Cecilia."

Bebet Gaston, a niece of Mo. Mary Cecilia, recalls: "She was always saying '*Lo que Dios quiere*' (Whatever God wills). She believed that whatever her Superiors told her came from God. So there was no hassle. She was at peace.

Teresita Castillo, to whom our Lady appeared in 1948, wrote the following lines when asked about Mo. Mary Cecilia:

"The first time I came in contact with Mo. Cecilia was when I wrote to her, applying to enter Carmel. She asked me to see her and in the course of our conversation she found out that I was the daughter of the Governor of Batangas and that my parents were opposed to my entering a religious congregation, particularly a contemplative one. Mo. Cecilia gently advised me to wait until my 21st birthday when I would be able to enter Carmel even without my parents' consent. Meanwhile, I regularly visited Mother and some of the other professed Sisters.

Mother explained the life of a Carmelite to me and one of the things that most impressed me about her was her humility. Knowing that my family was against my vocation, she humbly asked me to pray that she would be able, as my spiritual mother, to help me to be strong and firm in my desire to become a religious.

When I was at last in Carmel, Mother was very strict, but in a very maternal and spiritual way. I learned much from Mother Cecilia in her capacity both as prioress and as mother mistress. She showed me how to draw closer to Mama Mary. Realizing how my parents cared for me, she taught me the value of detachment, without lessening the love I had for my family.

When unusual things started to happen to me in Carmel, Mo. Cecilia must have had misgivings and doubts at the beginning. Yet she always showed compassion and concern for me. Mother used these situations to impress upon me the value of suffering in silence and the importance of a childlike faith in the Lord. She encouraged me to follow the example of my patron saint, St. Therese of Lisieux, and to be constantly in union with Jesus and His Blessed Mother.

Through her words and example I learned to forgive and love the people who were against me. I believe that whatever good there is in me, I owe to God's grace and the influence of Mo. Cecilia. She developed my spirituality and gave me the strength to survive the pain of leaving Carmel and to face life outside its walls.

Whenever I think of the past and present events in Lipa, I am reminded of what she told me when we were confined in UST (University of St. Tomas Hospital), Child, no matter what happens, we must accept it as the Will of God for our purification. We must learn to embrace it and suffer in union with Jesus and Mary.

Some months after Mo. Mary Cecilia's providential meeting with Bishop Escaler, Rev. Fr. Michael Fitzgerald, OCD came for a visit. He was then the Religious Assistant of the Association of Carmels in the Philippines. Mo. Mary Aimee sent Mo. Mary Cecilia to the parlor to speak with him. Fr. Fitzgerald says of that visit: "Yes I did see her shortly before her death. I remember it well. She referred to the "Lipa Phenomenon" and said how painful and difficult it had been and that she had felt she did the right thing in obeying. I endorsed this, which made her very contented. She asked if we could go into some specifics at a later date. I said I would come back to Lipa and see her again two weeks from that day. Again, she was pleased at this, but sadly, she died a few days later."

Mo. Mary Aimee recalls that after the parlor, Mo. Mary Cecilia was so happy. Kneeling before her prioress she simply asked, "Mother, to hasten our Lady's Cause, will you allow me to go?" (She was asking permission to die). Mo. Mary Aimee replied. "Sige, Mother." (Go on, Mother).

A few days later, Mo. Mary Cecilia was suddenly called Home. Her last day dawned on December 13, 1982. As usual that morning, she was ahead of the community in the choir, making the Way of the Cross. She followed all the community exercises until noon recreation. After recreating for some time with Sr. Therese, a Sister from Thailand who was in Lipa to learn English she excused herself to prepare her cell for Our Lady's coming that night. The following day was to be her Advent day of recollection.

Mo. Jacinta recounts: "At about 1:10 P.M. while we in the novitiate were recreating, we heard a big noise from the staircase. This staircase is adjacent to our novitiate, so the sound was very clear. It resembled the fall of a filled box, a box that would not bounce because of its weight. One of the novices rushed out to see what it was, or perhaps, she thought that the Sister out there might need help in picking up her box. What was our frustration and fear when she exclaimed: Si Mo. Mary Cecilia! On the platform that divides the staircase lay Mother, unconscious. We all rushed to her, trying to wake her up and applying first aid. Another novice ran down to ring the domestic bell to summon the professed Sisters who were in the big recreation room. To make sure that they heeded the call, she went to tell them what had happened. They all stood up, Mother being the first to run. When we lifted Mo. Mary Cecilia's head, blood, plenty of it, was already staining her toque and veil as well as the cemented platform."

Mo. Mary Aimee, in a letter written to Mo. Natividad on December 16, gave the following details:

"I'll try to recount to you all that I can say because at present I'm still in my shock spells. It was my first thought to write to your Rev. at once because I know how her going must have affected you. I myself was most affected by it. I miss her terribly, she was my spiritual and moral support!

We were at noon recreation on the 13th. At the start of the recreation I had called for Mo. M. Cecilia to ask for a little advice or rather, I asked her opinion on something. Then she asked to go up. At the end of recreation, a novice came running to tell that Mother fell down the stairs (the stairs near the novitiate). In a second, I was up. There I saw Mother lying on the cement floor, semi-conscious and pale. A novice lifted her head to put it on her lap and blood came out profusely. According to the novice, Mother could still say “painful” three times. We carried her to the infirmary.

In ten minutes Fr. Romy Mendoza arrived, thanks to Benjie Sevilla who happened to be visiting and whose car was used to fetch the priest. Fr. Romy gave Mo. Mary Cecilia the anointing of the sick. A few minutes later, Dr. Celes Dimayuga arrived and when he saw the gravity of her condition, he advised immediate hospitalization at Villa Memorial Hospital. There the doctors sewed or sutured her wound on the head which was three inches long. She was then x-rayed and there was a slight damage in the skull. The bleeding of the head continued and she vomited every now and then. She was unconscious all the time. The treatment was good, but when the hour strikes, natural means are of no avail anymore.

At about 4:45, I called up Carmel and asked that Sr. Mary Teresa be sent to the hospital as Mother’s BP started to rise. This really alarmed me. Fr. Leonardo Villa, Carmel’s chaplain and also the chaplain of Villa Hospital, remained constantly by Mother’s side. We recited the rosary together. At 7:00 or so her Rev. had an attack – a stroke which made her tongueshrink. I thought it was the end. She sighed deeply three times but then she still lingered on for about two hours. Then at about 8:30 her BP went very, very low until she finally succumbed at 8:55, at the Father’s bidding. It was seven hours of purification and then the holocaust was accepted.

Mo. Cecilia had just finished her retreat, went to confession on the 12th and left on the 13th. What a holy soul! She had always lived under the cross, in all humility. She was really full of virtues and after her retreat many of us found her quite different. She still continued to be the thoughtful one, but her heart, soul and whole being was all absorbed in the All for the cause on Mary. She was very convinced that the time would come when She’ll be put up again. She was very enthusiastic about Her. She was all wrapt up in Mary’s cause. But at the same time she said that if it was necessary that she disappears, then she would only be too happy to go. So be it.

She has left us. Mother, I could hardly believe that she’s gone, it’s as if she went only to Manila. Sr. Alphonse felt it also very much. Of course it’s a joy that we have another intercessor in heaven. She was very prepared. We were not. We need her yet! But it’s right time for her to go to God, so His Will be done! With her holiness I hope that her examples of humility, joy, etc. may really have an impact in our life. She suffered much in life and what she suffered for the last seven hours of her exile here on earth was just to fill up what was still lacking to fill it to the brim. She had remained hidden until the end. We buried her the following day, on the 14th after the Mass, at about 5:30 P.M. As I said before, we are still in our shock spells.”

In Carmel we were chanting the Te Deum for St. John of the Cross when we received the painful news that Mo. Mary Cecilia had taken her flight to eternity. Truly mysterious and unsearchable are God’s ways! Mo. Mary Cecilia who had lived a very hidden, unassuming and selfless life, did not give us any chance to serve her, to show her our gratitude for all that she had done and suffered for the Carmel that she had started. She eloped! She stole heaven like the good thief! God must have answered her prayers for a quick death as she did not want to give us any trouble.

We lost a staunch pillar. Mo. Mary Cecilia was so selfless and ever desirous to help and give joy to everybody. She was for us a very remarkable example of how to live and die a true Carmelite, how to bear sufferings patiently and silently like the meek and gentle Lamb. Her very grateful heart never overlooked the least bit of goodness done her. In her great love and observance of poverty, she preferred old things for her use and such was her joy when she was able to help the poor and give her own things to the Sisters. At her age, her fidelity was admirable, to the extent of attending all the community dialogues and sharings, yes, even the song practices when she could have easily excused herself. Her sense of community was very strong. She even joined our once-upon-a-time rondalla, gamely trying to pluck the guitar, one bass note at a time!

Mo. Mary Cecilia showed a wonderful adaptability to both the young and the old. She captured the hearts of the novices who loved to listen to her solid advice, to her stories about the tough beginnings of Lipa Carmel. Our customs became dear to these young ones and above all, she impressed on them a deep love for our Blessed Mother whose maternal touch was so clearly evident all her life. Here are some sharings from the novices:

“Mo. Mary Cecilia was my confidant for quite a long time. I can say that she knew my soul for I was very open to her. She was always available. I mean, whenever I asked her if we could talk, she never put it off for some other time.

Once, I asked her: ‘Mother, how can you love a person whom you most dislike?’ her answer was: ‘Do it as an act of faith. Try to see that God is also in that person no matter how unpleasing she may be to you.

She was a lover of nature. One time, she showed me the flower of one of her cacti and she told me: Look at that beautiful flower, nobody in the desert would notice such beauty! How wonderful is God’s creation! Every time her cacti would bloom she would always show me their flowers and she never failed to praise the Lord for such wonders.

She was very generous. Once, I asked her: Mother, why do you give and give your cacti to others? You have nothing more left to yourself. She answered. You know, the more you give, the more you will receive from God. After some weeks, she called me again and showed me her cacti: Remember what I told you? See, our cacti have many babies already!

“I’m very grateful to Our Lord for having given me the chance to live with Mo. Mary Cecilia, even for just some years. I could see her exemplary life as a Carmelite nun. She was very hidden but I think she was full of virtues. She was very faithful to the Rule and I never saw her speaking in places where we are not supposed to speak.

Another thing that caught my attention was her respect for our Mother. Before giving something to a Sister, she would first ask permission and this fidelity of hers in her old age struck me all the more because I knew she had been a prioress herself.

We novices had lessons under her and I noticed that she never spoke against her neighbor. I admired her because of the love she had for our Lord and his Mother which was shown not only in words but in deeds. One time, I wrote on the blackboard that my scapular pin was lost. When she read this, she went to the statue office where I was working and she removed her scapular pin from her scapular and gave it to me. I was touched by this little thing. It was just a little thing but it left a good impression on me.

I really admired her because she loved our Lady so much.

I was edified by the way Mo. Mary Cecilia loved and respected our priests. I remembered an incident during recreation when I was still a postulant. One Sister commented on the way the priest said Mass and another Sister commented on the way he walked and on his mannerisms. We were very amused but that same afternoon, during our novitiate lesson, Mother Mary Cecilia told us that she was very sad during our recreation. We were surprised and she explained that we should not make undue remarks about God’s anointed. Our mission and our vocation in Carmel is to pray, love and respect our priests. A priest is a priest that he is God’s anointed. I noticed that until her death she never made any remark about our priests. She would just say that we have to pray much and commend them to our Lady.

I cannot forget the way she showed her fidelity, obedience and other virtues when she was confined in the infirmary last Oct. 1981. For every little thing you did for her she had a word or note of thanks and a sweet smile. Her simplicity and respect for the Sisters always radiated in her life.

In those few days that I was with her I learned many lessons. Her life was so holy and simple and I feel that I am very much behind.

Once, I asked Mo. Mary Cecilia, How should one who has consecrated herself to our Lady live? She said: Surrender everything and offer everything to our Lady and then she will do the rest. Have nothing for your own, even those that you will need at your deathbed because she will take care of everything. In praying for others, let her be the one to choose what to give to each soul. For me, I’m not so much for making spiritual

bouquets. Love our Lady as your Mother. Be very close to her, childlike and simple.

There were many things that I admired in her. One was her never-failing smile. During a conference, she may be sleepy and sway back and forth, but she never lost that smile which for me was the reflection of a peaceful and childlike soul.

At recreation, even if the topic was very funny she never laughed aloud. She laughed without sound. I had the tendency to laugh aloud, that was why she said to me: You laugh like thunder.

Six years ago, when I was still an aspirant, the very first thing I noticed when I was being interviewed was a demure, older Sister whom I did not yet then know. Later, she was to become my novice mistress. On the day of my entrance, her selfless generosity amazed me because notwithstanding her old age, she insisted on helping me lift my very big suitcase.

God loves a cheerful giver and all throughout my six years in this monastery this holy cheerfulness of Mo. Mary Cecilia was a real encouragement for me, especially during my dark days. I observed how she lived the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. The first thing she taught me was that in giving oneself totally to God one must sacrifice one's soul in order to save it. One must lose all to gain all for the gift of self is what the Lord expects and exacts of us whom He has called to this life. I had not given much reflection on this before and it's only now that she is gone that I am trying to recall all that she taught and shared with me during her visits which were spent in holy converse. She was a very affectionate and loving Mother and Sister as well. I remember the few times that I got sick here in Carmel. She always had flowers and loving notes to cheer me up. And how she loved our Lady. This love was exemplified in her Mary-like ways and manners, her Mary-like sweetness and her Mary-like obedient and chaste life. Just as our beloved Mother obeyed her own Son. Mo. Mary Cecilia, herself a former prioress, paid reverence and prompt obedience to our Reverend Mother. Full of Our Lady's enthusiasm, she gave herself totally and unreservedly to God till the end of her earthly life through strict observance of our Carmelite Rule and Constitution. Just as the religious state is but 'the perfection of charity in the perfection of sacrifice', Mo. Mary Cecilia attained this in her deathbed. As she often told me: "Sacrifice is an unimaginable love, for love is its beginning, its middle and its end, its crown and its consummation. Why should one sacrifice oneself except because one loves, because one loves, because one wants to love God still more?" Having lived with a fervent, saintly soul like Mo. Mary Cecilia is a great treasure I can never and will and will never forget."

Our dear Sr. Therese from Thailand had this to say about Mo. Mary Cecilia:

"I arrived in Lipa last August and during the 3 ½ months that I got to know Mo. Mary Cecilia, I could see that she lived a holy life and that she really loved the community.

She was a very mortified soul. She woke up earlier than the community. I could hear her pass by my cell at 4:30 and then she would open the choir doors and windows for prayer. I asked her why she did this. She said she wanted the Sisters to rest more because she pitied them as they work the whole day.

In the refectory, I observed that she took the same food as the community, usually choosing the previous day's left-overs. I saw that she was making mortification in her old age. Her life was full of charity towards the community and I am inspired to follow her example.

Mo. Mary Cecilia faced death with a smile: it was just four days after her 11 days retreat and she had gone to confession the day before. Many Sisters noticed a certain change in her after this retreat. She was the picture of serenity and total abandonment. She told our Mother that she felt she did not have long to live and more than ever she sought ways of showing her gratitude. As in the past years, she was busy preparing a little Christmas gifts for the Sisters.

Another thing we found striking was that this year our Community decided to use a statuette of our Lady for our Advent preparation. During the past years we had used the Infant Jesus. This was to be the first time that we would bring our Lady from cell to cell. Mo. Mary Cecilia looked forward with joy and eagerness to her day, December 14, the feast of St. John of the Cross, the saint she loved so much. For it was on his feast (then November 24) that she had made her first vows. On Dec. 13, we were to bring Our Lady to Mo. Mary Cecilia but Mary had other plans. It was on this very night that instead of coming to Mother for her day of recollections,

Our Lady herself lovingly came to fetch her for eternity. Some days before, when Sr. Alphonse had asked her: "Mother, how many days were you in retreat?" Mo. Mary Cecilia had answered: "Eleven, but on the 14th I will be with Our Lady." Truly, Our Lady, seeing the greatness of her desire, made haste to come for her. Throughout her Carmelite life she had practiced the devotion of consecrating the last two hours of her life to Mary. Six months earlier, in a letter to Mo. Natividad she had written: "How beautiful are our Good Jesus and Mama Mary; who cannot but long to be with Them!"

On hearing of her death, Bishop Escaler wrote on Jan. 1, 1983: "Hers was a tragic death but in keeping with what she had prayed for- suffering and a swift and happy death. God only knows how much Mother had suffered. I was particularly struck during last February's retreat in Lipa by her inner peace and honest objectivity in looking back at the painful past. She started writing to me about her memoirs, esp. the apparition events and the consequent hard actions taken by Church authorities which to me did not reflect Our Lord's kind ways. But she and her companions took everything in stride. This may be why God has so blessed your community during these years and also what happened may explain the apparent tenseness which some old-timers may feel when faced with authorities! However, let the past flow under the bridge. If only we can capture a bit of Mother's serenity and peace, we will draw closer to the Lord."

Teresita Castillo wept when the news reached her: "I felt the loss of a second Mother. I cannot deny that Mo. Cecilia meant so much to me because it was to her that I could confide my spiritual problems in a relaxed way. I had no secrets hidden from her. She knew my soul, my trials and crosses, my defects, my worries, be they spiritual or material. I am tortured by the thought that she wanted to see me when she was in Manila for the last time. I was rather physically off-form, and I denied her request. Then she told me by phone that we offer the sacrifice of not seeing each other. She said: Never mind, Teresita, after all life is short and before we know it, we shall all be in heaven.' She also told me that as she aged, her love for Mama Mary became more intense and that she was ready for death anytime."

On June 23, 1970, Mo. Mary Cecilia had written:

"Our Carmel has passed through many trials which will be too long to recount. In retrospect we can only voice our profoundest gratitude to God and to all who have guided and helped us steer our Carmel during this difficult and painful years of growth. God never does anything without a purpose and looking back we, consider our twenty-four years of existence as an ever clearer view of REALITY which, after all, is nothing else but LOVE, and LOVE is the very essence of being, life itself! Lipa Carmel is the Carmel of God's Merciful Love! The years that have happily passed have been the unfolding of God's mystery, the condescension of LOVE and MERCY. The Tremendous Lover has taken our misery and reproach away and has clothed us with His Justice. The mercies of the Lord we will sing forever! Yes, God is the maker of history. Sunlight and shadows show forth His glory. This Carmel will ever symbolize and be a witness to his Merciful Love. Here he has childlike souls whose weakness will make His power manifest. We press on to the goal. With expectant hearts, we look up to our holy Mother St. Teresa, second patroness of our Carmel to renew in us her double spirit so that like her, we may be valiant, generous, zealous and true daughters of the Church!"

After Mo. Mary Cecilia's death in 1982, certain developments took place as attested by Archbishop Mariano Gaviola. In his 1995 REFLECTIONS ON MARY MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACE IN LIPA CARMEL MONASTERY FROM 1948 AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS, he wrote:

"When I was installed as Archbishop of Lipa on August 15, 1981, I, a true "Doubting Thomas", believed that the reported Marian visions and showers of roses at the monastery of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Mediatrix of All Grace in Lipa City, were a "hoax."

...A few months after my installation as Archbishop of Lipa, LIPA CARMEL several individuals and groups approached me, to request that the Image of our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace be brought out for public veneration. I politely refused to do so, explaining that I had no knowledge about the investigation and findings of the commission of Bishops regarding the events that took place at Lipa Carmel in 1948.

I asked for more time to pray over and study the case. From the year 1984 onwards the requests multiplied, and with greater intensity. But for reason I cannot explain, and despite a keen interest to do so at the time, it was only in 1986 or 1987 that I finally launched my own investigation.

...Let me here point out that Mother Cecilia was the Novice Mistress of the Lipa Carmel Monastery from the time of my installation in 1981 until her death in 1982. She was so self-effacing that I was never acquainted with her. I never even knew that she was the very same Prioress of Lipa Carmel when Teresina Castillo entered the monastery and reportedly experienced the visions of our Blessed Mother in 1948. I only learned this after her death in 1982, when I was in Hong Kong for treatment. Nonetheless, it can be gleaned by the biographical sketch that was issued by the Lipa Carmel Monastery after Mother Cecilia's death, that the good Mother led a Holy Life. Clearly, Mother Cecilia could never perpetuate such a flagrant crime as the so-called 'great hoax' of Lipa Carmel in 1948 and thereabouts.

...It is a tribute to the nuns of Lipa Carmel that not one of them had ever approached me with a request that I allow the Image of Our Lady to be put back at their chapel."

On the first Saturday of February 1993, Archbishop Gaviola was the main celebrant at a special Mass in the grounds of Lipa Carmel. This was attended by some 30,000 Marian devotees.

"For the first time, I declared in public that personally, I was fully convinced that the happenings of Lipa Carmel in 1948 and subsequent events related to our Blessed Mother are very much worthy of belief. I added that I am a firm believer of the veracity of the reported events."

Later, to our great joy, Archbishop Gaviola wrote the following lines on our community's Book of Permissions: "As of 16 July 1992, on the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel I, the undersigned, by the grace of God Archbishop of Lipa, made public the grant of permission that the Image of Mary Mediatrix of all Grace may be exposed for public veneration under the usual and sacred tradition of Mother Church.

Dear Mother Mary Cecilia, you are Mary's precious gift to us. We thank our Lady and we thank you. You are still ever present to us in our Lady. "AMPLIUS!...MORE..." was your motto. In AMPLIUS shouts louder now. Now in heaven, you have more: MORE glory and beatitude, and we expect to see this glorious MORE when we are reunited up there where MORE of the secrets of the King will be revealed. AMPLIUS!

(From the book: THE ROOTS OF TERESA'S NUNS IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Sr. Mary Teresa Sideco, O.C.D., published in 1999, pp. 68- 90)

The cover features a large tree with branches extending across the Philippines. Each branch is labeled with a province and the year of the first mission. The roots are labeled 'AVILA SPAIN' with the date 'AUGUST 24, 1562'. A small circular portrait of Sr. Mary Teresa Sideco is positioned to the right of the tree.

THE ROOTS
of TERESA'S NUNS
in the Philippines

Volume 2

Sr. Mary Teresa Sideco, ocd
 Lipa Carmel





**MO. MARY CECILIA OF JESUS, O.C.D
CO-FOUNDRESS**



**CARMEL OF OUR LADY,
MARY MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACE
and
ST. TERESA OF JESUS**

Lipa

Charism: God's Merciful Love

Foundation: May 31, 1946

