Saint Marianne Cope, Virgin

(1838-1918)

Born in Germany, Barbara Koob was brought to the United States by her parents before the age of one. The immigrant family settled in Utica, New York, and joined Saint Joseph Parish where Barbara later attended grade school. After grade school, Barbara began working in a textile factory to support the family after her father became too ill to work. Despite her longing to enter religious life, Barbara continued to financially support her family for the next nine years.

In 1862, at the age of twenty-four, Barbara finally realized her desire for religious life by entering the Sisters of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. Upon receiving the religious habit, she took the name Sister Marianne. For the next twenty-one years, she served as a teacher, principal, mother superior, provincial superior, hospital founder, and administrator. She was a trailblazer who specialized in caring for the outcasts of society with love and affection. Although this caused some to look down on her, Barbara's care for society's outcasts also won her much love and admiration from the German-speaking Catholics of central New York.

In 1883, now the Mother Provincial of her order, Mother Marianne's life would change forever. She received a request from the government in Hawaii asking her to send sisters to care for those suffering from the dreaded disease of leprosy. With joy and enthusiasm that would have delighted Saint Francis, her order's founder, she responded "Yes!" "I am hungry for the work…" Her heart was flooded with desire as she saw the great privilege of leaving home and family to care for these poor souls who suffered so greatly. At that time, more than fifty religious orders had already turned down the same request out of fear of their members contracting the disease. Mother Marianne responded in haste, going herself with six of her sisters. Though she did not realize it at the time, she would never return to New York. Instead, she spent the next thirty-five years exercising the great privilege of caring for the bodies, minds, and souls of God's precious outcasts with Hansen's Disease (leprosy).

Upon arriving in Hawaii, Mother Marianne and her sisters went right to work, cooperating with the Church and the government to better the lives of these poor ones of God. Mother Marianne and her sisters helped those with leprosy, despite their fatal condition, to live dignified lives—teaching them, having fun with them, praying with them, and caring for their physical needs. Mother Marianne's administrative skills were of great use when she was called upon to open new homes, establish a residence and school for the children of those with leprosy, correct government abuses of her poor ones, and consolidate facilities as needed.

In 1884, Mother Marianne met the future Saint Damien de Veuster who devoted his life to the care of those with leprosy on the isolated island of Molokai. Two years after their meeting, Father Damien contracted leprosy himself. In 1888, Mother Marianne went to Molokai to care for him during his last year of life, since he was now an outcast too. She pledged to continue his good work, and with his passing, took over the home for boys he had established.

For twenty-seven more years after Father Damien's death, Mother Marianne cared for the outcasts and their families. She often said to her sisters that it was their duty and privilege "to make life as pleasant

and as comfortable as possible for those of our fellow creatures whom God has chosen to afflict with this terrible disease…" Mother Marianne died of natural causes at the age of eighty, never contracting the disease herself.

Two days after her death, one Honolulu newspaper wrote, "Throughout the Islands, the memory of Mother Marianne is revered, particularly among the Hawaiians in whose cause she has shown such martyr-like devotion…she was a woman of splendid accomplishments, and had fine executive ability. She impressed everyone as a real 'mother' to those who stood so sorely in need of 'mothering.'"

As we honor Saint Marianne Cope, consider the quality of your affection and sincere concern toward society's "outcasts." The alcoholic, addict, criminal, impoverished, foreigner, and sinner are all images of Jesus waiting for your love. Allow this holy woman to inspire you to always see it as a privilege to love those most in need.

Prayer: *Saint Marianne, you were a martyr in spirit, laying down your life for those in need of your love and affection. You embraced the outcast wholeheartedly with joy and gratitude. Please pray for me, that I may also seek out the outcasts in our world and help them come to know the love and mercy of our glorious God. Saint Marianne, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*

Patron Saint of lepers, outcasts, those with HIV/AIDS, Hawaii

Canonized October 21, 2012, by Pope Benedict XVI

Liturgical Color: White