

Life of Fr Francis Jordan

It was Gurtweil, a small place in southwestern Baden, just a few kilometers from the district town of Waldshut, close to the Swiss border, that became the hometown of



Father Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan, founder of the Salvatorians. Father Jordan was born on June 16, 1848, second son to Lawrence and Notburga nee Peter. On the following day he was baptized at the local parish church with the name John Baptist. Being brought up in a poor family, he was not able to realize his dream of becoming a priest, although as a teenager he had already become aware of his vocation at the moment of his First Communion. After finishing primary school he worked as a laborer and painter-decorator, traveling in what was then Germany. He noticed the difficult spiritual situation of his homeland and of the other European countries. The people would turn away from God and leave the faith. The Church was limited in performing its mission by the state (Kulturkampf). All these experiences made Jordan's faith stronger and his conviction of being called to the priesthood clearer. He finally decided to follow his vocation and to begin studies in theology. In 1869 he started private lessons with his priest friends in Waldshut; after that, he studied at the gymnasium in Constance. The time of secondary studies required much effort from Jordan but, at the same time, despite his difficulties with sciences, he developed his talent for languages. For the graduation exam he presented an essay in eight European languages and another one in four other languages.

In 1874 John Baptist began his studies of theology and philology at the Ludwig Albert University in Freiburg in Breisgau. After successfully finishing it, he started his preparation for the priesthood at St. Peter Seminary, close to that town. He used the time of theological studies to deepen his faith and spirituality. He continued receiving the sacraments regularly, which had been his usual practice since childhood,

and he devoted much time to prayer. Also, he began writing his spiritual diary, in which he would note the most important insights until his death. This diary has become an invaluable source of knowledge for his personality and spiritual profile.

On July 21, 1878, Jordan was ordained to the priesthood and later, on the order of his bishop, he left for Rome to begin studies of oriental languages: Syrian, Aramaic, Coptic, Arabic, as well as Hebrew and Greek.

From the time of his theological studies he had a growing conviction that he was being called by God to found a new apostolic work in the Church, in which members would defend the faith and contribute to enlivening it, by proclaiming to all people that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. This conviction became even stronger during a trip to the Middle East in 1880. After returning to Rome he started implementing his idea of founding a community of religious and lay with the above mentioned apostolic purpose. This would be organized into three groups, called "grades": the first one for those who, like the Apostles, leave everything and, living community life, devote themselves entirely to proclaiming the Good News; the second for academics, who spread the Divine truths by publications; and the third for those lay people who, remaining in their families and within the reality of their everyday life, would proclaim the Savior above all through the witness of a good Christian life.

Father Jordan's work received the name Apostolic Teaching Society, and on December 8, 1881, its first grade was officially inaugurated in Rome, at Piazza Farnese 96. A year later the name was changed to the Catholic Teaching Society, and in November, 1882, the growing community with Father Jordan moved to a building in Borgo Vecchio 165, which became their Motherhouse. Several months later the structure was changed into two religious congregations, one of men and one of women. A few years later the community of women separated from Jordan and became the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. In 1893 the men's community received its current name: Society of the Divine Savior.

Father Jordan devoted himself totally to the work of developing his institute as its founder, spiritual guide, and superior general. This multiple role was not easy for him, as it entailed serious effort, especially when he faced different organizational, financial and personnel difficulties. At the same time, however, it gave him a profound internal joy, based on his unshakeable trust in Divine Providence and on his deep conviction that it was the way of putting into life his foundational vocation and a contribution to the salvation of souls.

Thanks to his great determination he founded a second female religious congregation (Sisters of the Divine Savior) in 1888 with Therese von Wuellenweber (Blessed Mary of the Apostles). Another important development was taking over a mission in Assam, as

well as founding new houses of the Society in various countries of Europe and other parts of the world. Through all these experiences Father Jordan matured as a human being, as a religious, and as a priest and founder, developing his personality and growing spiritually. The foundation of this spiritual growth was his deep love of God and neighbor, his perseverance in prayer, his trust in Divine Providence, as well as his humility, love for the Eucharist, courageous acceptance of the cross, and fidelity to the Church. Over the course of time Father Jordan began to be considered as a man who led a holy life, both by the members of his community and by people from outside. At the same time he witnessed the important development of his work both geographically and numerically.

In 1915, because of World War I, the Society leadership, together with Father Jordan, was forced to move from Rome to neutral Switzerland. After withdrawing from the active administration of his institute at the general chapter in 1915, Father Jordan spent the last three years of his life in Fribourg (Switzerland). He died in a small hospice in Tafers near Fribourg on September 8, 1918, and was buried in the local parish church. In 1956 his mortal remains were transferred to the Society Motherhouse in Rome. In 1942 his process for beatification was officially started, and in 2011 the Decree on the Heroicity of Virtues was published.