

APRIL 2022 – FIRSTSTATION OF NINE MONTHLY (NOVENA) MEDITATIVE SHORT WALKS

On the first Sunday in Advent 2022 a 'Camino Walk' throughout Mt Schoenstatt will be conducted. To build spiritual appreciation and understanding of that journey we will focus during the year on one spiritual site per month involving a short walk and meditation as well as one particular object in the Shrine. This will culminate in all nine being focal points of the Camino. During April, the first site (here-in 'First Station') is Sr. Bonitas' grave.

AT THESHrine: We pray: Sr. Bonitas' faith, in God and his loving care was made part of her practical everyday life. *"With eager expectation you took in everything which came from the mouth and heart of the Lord and became a master of contemplation, totally given to God in tender intimacy. In this shrine you wish to form an army of prayer in the midst of a barren world leading us to love's highest heights so that in battle we remain loyally at your side. Help me (here today) to learn more and more the spirit of prayer and always lift my heart to the stars of heaven. Let me always look on Christ the Sun, and trust in him in all situations. Glory be given to the Father through Christ with Mary, highly praised in the Holy Spirit full of splendour from the universe now and in all eternity. Amen"* (H'Wards, p.52).

WALK to the gravesite of Sr. Bonitas (FIRST STATION) to spend some time reading and reflecting on her life:

Sr. Bonitas lived in Australia for only a short time, but significantly helped lay the foundation for Schoenstatt as one of the first four Sisters to arrive here and without whom we would not have our Shrine here in Mulgoa.



The youngest of 9 children, Maria Opper was born on 2nd November (All Souls Day) 1912 at Puetzbach, Germany. Maria was popular because, wherever she was, there was laughter and fun. She was only 16 when she first knelt in the Shrine in Schoenstatt, Germany and said, "Oh, if only I could stay here". Three years later she recognised that her vocation was to give her life entirely and forever to the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt and her work. She entered the community of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in 1937 and chose Bonitas as her Sister's name, saying "I would like to express kindness in my name. Kindness is what the world needs". She received the dress of a Sister of Mary from the hands of Father Kentenich and was finally incorporated into the Sister's community in 1946.

In 1950, as a result of an application by the Provincial of the Pallotines here in Australia, for help with their Aboriginal Mission in Tardun, W.A, four sisters including Sr. Bonitas committed to go to Australia. Father Kentenich himself gave them the Mission Cross on the 6th January 1951. After arriving on 6th April 1951 at Fremantle Harbour and after five days in Perth travelled 450kms north across the remote desert to begin their work at the Pallotine Mission Station. There were 80 Aboriginal children who were to be looked after and educated.

Sr. Bonitas described her first impressions of Tardun in the following words:

"Our station lies quite isolated in the middle of the bush which has been partly cultivated and has given way to wheat fields. About 25,000 acres belong to this station.... We have eighty children from 3 years to 16 years...with eighty children, who are wild and rip their clothes and pants every day in the bush, there isn't a shortage of work". As well as being the superior, Sr. Bonitas looked after the laundry, sewing room, chapel and many other things. She soon became the friend of all the children, who loved her because they found in her a kind and understanding mother and she was heard to say "I love these children dearly". She served the plan of the Heavenly Father in selfless motherliness and these outstanding characteristics along with a genuine childlikeness bore fruit.

It was on the very day the Shrine in Melbourne was blessed (11th May, 1952) that Sr. Bonitas took seriously ill. The diagnosis was cancer! She took it calmly. She was focused and happy that the MTA picture which the sisters had brought to Australia found a place in the mission Church at Tardun. She died in St. John of God Hospital, Subiaco on 31st August 1952 and was buried in Fremantle. After having established a cemetery for the Sisters at Mt Schoenstatt, Mulgoa, it was decided on the 25th anniversary of her death, to transfer the remains of Sr. Bonitas from Fremantle to Mt. Schoenstatt, so she could rest near the Shrine for which she offered her life.

Focus now on the symbol of the 'Unity Cross' (particularly the Chalice) on her grave and then walk back to the Shrine and focusing on this Cross there - read on for further reflection on how she lived the spirit of the 'Unity Cross' in her life. Please turn over:

THE UNITY CROSS



IN THE SHRINE:As you complete your First Station in preparation for the full Camino, you now come before the Blessed Sacrament in the Shrine again. Quietly sit before the Lord and share with Him your heart's deepest longings.

As you open your eyes or become more aware of your surroundings, you see the picture of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt. Your eyes meet hers. Sit in silence and speak to your Mother.

Looking further down, you see the **Unity Cross**. It shows the scene where Jesus gave his Mother to us. Even while he suffered on the Cross, he was filled with compassion because of His love for his Mother and His disciples which includes all of us. **We have heard the following words many times, but now reflect on the scene;**

“Seeing Mary and the disciple he loved (try your own name here) standing near her, Jesus said to His Mother “Woman this is your Son”. Then to the disciple (imagine it’s you), He said, “This is your mother”. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.” John 19:26-27.

Now let us reflect further on the **Unity Cross**. Sit and really look at the Cross. What we first notice is the **UNITY** between Jesus and his mother. They are united in the Father's mission, both lovingly fulfilling God's will. The scene is the culmination of both their missions. They were created for this: for the redemption of God's children.

Sit and reflect: Jesus died for me.

Put yourself opposite our Lady under the cross. See yourself in this space: standing under the cross. We see Mary's unswerving strength and her Motherly love, a love that reflects her helplessness at seeing her Son suffer, while in her heart she knew this was God's will. She accepted it unconditionally. Jesus gave us his mother as our own.

Reflect on the closeness of Mary to her son.

Mary is holding a cup under the heart of Jesus, collecting the blood and water from His side. Sit and reflect on the cup. This chalice is collecting the redeeming blood of Christ. The chalice can also represent the baptismal font, the cleansing water of baptism that makes us a child of God and gives us the gift of salvation. The cross is the saving act and we are gifted with this gift of redemption at our baptism.

Reflect on the cup – what is it saying to you?

Remember what Jesus bore because he loves you and, when you can, confess your **sins** and make an effort to change your lifestyle to reflect the love of God. **This is particularly good to do in this Lenten period.** Invite God/Jesus into your striving, accept their love and grace and when it gets hard, offer this up to God for others who are suffering. You can also offer this to our Mother Thrice Admirable for the Capital of grace flowing from this shrine.

Sit and open your heart to the graces offered to you.

The Unity Cross was crafted in 1960 by a Schoenstatt Seminarian (Fr. Angel Vincente Cerro) for the Chilean Schoenstatt family as a sign of unity and healing. In 1960, the Chilean Schoenstatt family gave it to the founder of Schoenstatt, Fr. Joseph Kentenich for his 80th Birthday. The Unity Cross is found in many Schoenstatt Shrines and Home Shrines around the World.

Sr Bonitas did not live to see this cross come into use, but it was in the spirit of the Unity Cross that she took on working for Mary's mission and striving for the Shrine which you are sitting in today. We hope you will continue with the rest of the 'Novena of Stations' in preparation for our 'Advent Camino' around Mt Schoenstatt in December.

MAY'S short walk/reflection (Second Station) will highlight 'The Joseph Engling Stone', and the 'Father Eye Symbol' in the Shrine. We will particularly look at the contribution of the first Schoenstatt Father – Father Boes, to the building of the Schoenstatt Movement here at Mulgoa. Thank you for joining us today. Go in Peace Amen.