

GOOD NEWS! CONCEPCION CABRERA: LAYWOMAN



It is always encouraging to receive good news, and it marks our life. Whenever we receive a beautiful notice we are marked in such a way that we remember the place, time and other details of the experience. The good news we want to share with you is that on May 4th, 2019 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Concepcion Cabrera – who we fondly refer to as “Conchita” – will be the first Mexican lay woman to be beatified. This means that the Universal Church recognizes her as a person that lived in accordance with the Gospel, that she is in heaven and that she intercedes for us. This announcement tells about God’s presence and action in our history, through a person that is close to us because she is from the neighboring land of Mexico.

So you can better appreciate this announcement as well as participate in the joy of having this Mexican woman as a new Blessed, we invite you to discover this “walking woman”, an extraordinarily ordinary woman, wife and mother.

Let us begin from our own experience

Take a snap shot of any ordinary day in your life. Take note of the places you go to, the people you encounter, your activities, the feelings you experiment, the thoughts that come to your mind...

Share this with a partner or small group and identify:

- What does everything I do say about me?
- What is it that I like the most about my daily life? What aspects are the most difficult for me?
- What are my major joys and worries?

Concepcion Cabrera de Armida, her story

Conchita was born on December 8th, 1862 in San Luis Potosi, Mexico. Her parents were Octaviano Cabrera and Clara Arias. She was the seventh of twelve children: 8 sons and 4 daughters. The Mexican Constitution of 1857 – which included laws that went against the Church - was promulgated a few years before she was born.

She received her first Holy Communion in 1872 when she was 10 years old. From her mother she learned to love the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist, as well as house chores. Her family owned estates so she also learned about ranching and farming. Her parents taught her to tend to the sick and dying. She travelled between the city and the haciendas until the age of 18. She liked horses very much and learned to ride from an early age. These first years of her life went by during a hectic period of Mexican history between the governments of Juárez and Lerdo.

When she was 14 years old, she meets Francisco Armida García, her future husband, who was then 17 years old. They met at a dance, because Conchita participated in the social life of her time -dances, visits, theaters, gatherings. And although jewels and dresses were never her interest, over time she will discover that these activities of the social life were part of the path that God had chosen for her, because she realizes that Jesus always her to be with Him, to love Him where no one remembers Him.



Her courtship with Francisco Armida lasted 9 years, she said: "I have to thank Pancho who never abused my simplicity, he was a very correct and respectful boyfriend." The wedding was on November 8, 1884 at the Church of Our Lady of Carmel. That day she asked Pancho for two things: to let her go to receive communion every day and not to be jealous. Things that Pancho always did, even though not being jealous was difficult for him.

Concha and Pancho had nine kids. The Lord gave two of them a religious vocation. Their third son, Manuel, was a Jesuit priest, and Concepcion (the fourth) was a Sister of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Four of her sons, Francisco, Ignacio, Salvador and Guadalupe, got married and formed Christian families. Conchita gave the Lord, with deep sorrow, three of her children: Carlos, Pablo and Pedrito.

In 1889 she attended spiritual exercises for the first time, preached by Fr. Antonio Plancarte y Labastida. Concha was 27 years old and being married and with having a family, she had to come and go from her house to the retreat throughout the day. At the end of these exercises she herself remembers: "One day as I prepared with all my soul for what the Lord wanted from me, there was a moment when I heard very clearly in the depths of my soul and without doubt, words that amazed me: "Your mission is to save souls." I did not

understand how I could do this. It seemed so strange and so impossible!" A few days later she had to go to the Hacienda of Jesus Maria. While being there, she preached to the women the same spiritual exercises that she had received, she was anxious to communicate to other hearts the fire she felt in hers.

In 1893, moved by the desire to "learn to pray", she begins her spiritual direction with Fr. Alberto Mir. It is then that she begins writing her spiritual diary. The love of Christ was beating more and more in her heart, she passionately loved her husband and her children and, as she herself says, she felt them "as if wrapped in that same love of Christ".

During her childhood, Concha had seen how cattle were branded with the name of their owner with a red, hot iron. She also dreamed of bearing in her flesh the seal of Christ as her Owner. Therefore, on January 14th of 1894, she marked her chest with the monogram JHS. A few days later while at the Church of the Society of Jesus in San Luis Potosi, she received the vision of the Cross of the Apostolate. On May 3rd of the same year, the first Cross of the Apostolate was implanted in Jesus Maria, San Luis Potosi.

Wanting to share the love of God that was flooding her and having her sight centered on crucified Christ, in 1895 she begins the Apostleship of the Cross as a means to spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart and extend the reign of the Holy Spirit. In September of that same year she moved with her family to Mexico City. On May 3rd, 1897, she founded the Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a congregation for women dedicated to share in the feelings of the Heart of Jesus and in praying for the sanctification of the world, especially priests.

In September of 1901 her husband Pancho dies. "On the 17th, at 6:55 pm, the Lord took my husband, who He had given me on earth for 16 years, 10 months and 9 days. The Lord gave him to me, and the Lord took him from me, blessed be his Holy Name!" A couple of years later, in February of 1903, she met Fr. Felix Rougier, who would become a new spiritual support for her life and with whom she founded the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in 1914, in the midst of the Mexican revolution.

Meanwhile, as Conchita continues her life as a widow and as head of the household, her spiritual journey does not rest. In 1906 when she was 44 years old Jesus tells her: "I take possession of your heart, I reincarnate mystically in it ... never to separate ...". With this new presence of God in her life she feels called to live every hour of her life making a Chain of Love and virtues, offering herself together with Jesus to the Father. Another consequence of this grace will be God's call that her relationship with Jesus be one of maternal love, relating to him as a mother in the manner of Mary.

As a result of her apostolate, on November 3rd, 1909, she establishes the Covenant of Love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a work for lay people. Some years later, in 1912, she establishes the Apostolic League or Fraternity of Christ the Priest, a work for diocesan priests.

In the last part of Concha's life, Mexico experienced a very dramatic period of its history. First the Revolution and then the religious persecution in the 1920's hit the Church hard. Precisely during those years (1928-1930), Conchita writes her "Confidences to priests", words that she receives from Jesus intended for ordained ministers who seek to renew their life and ministry. In addition, she is called by God to relate to them as a spiritual mother, praying and sacrificing for their sanctification.

On March 3, 1937, at 12:20am, she dies a holy death surrounded by her children in her house in Altavista, Mexico City, with the help of her spiritual director Monsignor Luis María Martínez, by Father Félix Rougier and some of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A woman extraordinary in the ordinary

Although Conchita lived in a different age from ours, if the Church is declaring her blessed in 2019 it is because she is proposed as a model of human and Christian fulfillment for our time. The important thing about knowing her story is that you can connect her experience with what you are living. Perhaps the language that Conchita uses in her writings has her personality and the style of her time, but behind the words there is a living experience. She was a woman of

flesh and blood, she had a normal life like you and me, with a house and a family, with jobs and chores, she cooked for her family, played with her children ... And in that daily life she lived a deep life of prayer and a passionate friendship with God.

As we have already mentioned, all of Conchita's spiritual and apostolic life happens in the ordinary of her life. One day, for example, she wrote in her spiritual diary: "I have a lot to sew and what I do is to give myself over and over in acts of abandonment to the divine will, I don't know any different, I can't do any different. Blessed be the Lord for everything!" On another occasion, she recounts: "Today, halfway through prayer, my Jesus began pouring out: we were going here and there, He was talking and I was writing, when I ran out of paper. I had to make bread, clean up the house, and He was so kind that he waited for me." In April 1918 she wrote: "What goodness of my Jesus! He told me recently: 'I want you closer to Me, even in your ordinary occupations. Do not lose sight of me, my child, and love me, tell me often that you love me.'"

What does Concha tell you today?

After having a glimpse of this "short film" about Conchita's life, let's identify and share:

- What attracted my attention the most?
- How does Conchita's life resemble mine?
- What are the most noteworthy differences?

Today we have approached this "walking woman" who lived a life like ours. It was precisely there where she found God and responded with love. This allows us to see that we can sanctify ourselves through our daily life just like Conchita did, who was extraordinary in her ordinary roles as a woman, a wife and a mother.

- How can I live my ordinary life in an extraordinary way?
- What can I learn from Conchita's story for my life?



Praying with Concha

Let us pray together and give thanks to God for our lives, and for the different moments, encounters, places, people, activities that make it up...

Thank you, Lord, for your presence and participation in our history ...

We ask you to continue accompanying us and we place our diverse needs in your hands...

Let us end with Conchita's words, written in October of 1893:

I imagine that my chest is a Tabernacle where Jesus is continually sheltered ... and how pleasant it is for me to open from time to time that hidden door, and contemplate Him enraptured, yes, ecstatic facing His immense beauty. Why should I not say it?

How many times do I suspend my sewing or occupations because it seems to me that He calls me ... or maybe it is my vehement desire to be with Him, yes, and telling Him how much I love Him...!

When I am with people or in the midst of the world, if I cannot open wide that secret door whose key I have, I just open it slightly, so from time to time my eyes can seek Him who I love so much; my sighs and aspirations reach his ears and settle in his Divine Heart; and this pleases Jesus ... ah! He is so good and gets very happy...and He smiles...and fills my whole being with torrents of sweetness ...

O, and how good, how beautiful, how sweet is the God of my heart!

Books for further reading:

"Yo soy Conchita Armida" by Joaquín Antonio Peñalosa
"A Mother's Spiritual Diary" by Marie-Michel Phillipon
(<http://www.apcross.org/conchita/ConchitaDiary-English.pdf>)
"Conchita, Cuéntanos tu Vida" by AA.VV.

Summary of her life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-H9iNyhdmA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEgTCEzWOgU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oclgMiGHKQ>

Beatification of Concepción Cabrera:

Saturday May 4, 2019 at 12pm EST - Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico City)
Website: concepcioncabrera.mx