

Life and Death of our  
Sister Firmina (Maria Augusta) Strasser

\*23.10.1911 - +19.02. 2008



Quietly, nearly unnoticed on February 19 at 2:30 p.m. Sr. Firmina hastened away from our midst to the heavenly home, just at the time when our community assembled for Eucharistic adoration in the chapel. In her better days, as long as she was able to take part, she cherished this time of adoration in a special way.

Sr. Firmina was born on October 23, 1911 as the first of three daughters to the couple Georg and Maria Strasser at Dorfen, Archdiocese of München-Freising. Already on the following day she was baptized and received the name Maria Augusta. Mrs. Rosa Huber, her younger sister, was always close to her, and until now they kept in touch; last year she and other relatives visited Sr. Firmina on the occasion of her seventieth anniversary of profession. The youngest sister died already 1918 when still very young. Her father worked as police-sergeant. Sr. Firmina wrote that she grew up in a good and happy family. In this atmosphere she sensed already with 14 years the call to work for God in the Mission. About her choice of the convent in Tutzing Sr. Firmina wrote: *"That the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing cultivated the Divine Office and solemn Liturgy has been one main reason to enter in Tutzing besides my longing to work for the salvation of souls in the Mission."*

After completing further studies and a domestic science course she pursued this goal further by entering the Mission-School in Tutzing on May 31, 1930. There she did a two years course of higher studies, and after her candidacy she was allowed to travel as a postulant to the Philippines on October 17, 1933.

After her arrival in Manila Maria continued with two years of studies for obtaining a Teacher's Diploma. But then it seemed that her hope to work as a mission-teacher in the Philippines could not be realized, as a growth at the root of her tongue had developed. Fearing a Hemorrhage the Doctors in the Philippines did not dare to perform surgery; therefore in May 1935 she was sent home to Germany. Sr. Firmina enjoyed telling during recreation what happened next. As also in Tutzing no possibility for surgery was found, her father took her home and arranged an operation with the famous Professor Lebsche in Munich. Fortunately the growth turned out to be benign; so there was no obstacle for her to return to Tutzing. *"Triumphantly"* and with *"impertinent trust"* (as she wrote) she requested Mother Mathilde Hirsch for permission to be re-admitted in December 1935. This time she spent the whole novitiate in the Motherhouse. On April 23, 1936 she started the canonical novitiate, receiving the name Sister M. Firmina as companion of 63 other novices. On April 24, 1937 she made her first profession, and in September of the same year she traveled a second time to the Philippines, where on June 5, 1940 she surrendered her whole life to God in her final profession. This time she would stay for a total of 43 years in her beloved mission country, only interrupted twice by a home leave due to illness.

During these years Sr. Firmina unfolded a fruitful apostolate as teacher for the Philippine Youths, and besides this was a very zealous missionary. She taught in different schools in many houses of Manila Priory, first as simple teacher, then also as directress, and in addition to this she held the office of local superior several times. Some places of her activities were: Boac, Manila, Sancta

Cruz, Bacolor, Angeles, Legaspi, Bacolod, Guinobatan and Marikina. Everywhere she was highly estimated by her students and of course also by her fellow sisters. This showed especially in her later years at Haus St. Benedikt by her extensive correspondence. No visit of a Philippine sister in Tutzing may have passed without also a visit of Sr. Firmina to share remembrances of former times.

Sr. Firmina longed to serve God with her whole being, especially through the Divine Office. She wrote: *"It was a joy for me that in Manila Gregorian Chant for Liturgical Celebrations was being kept up. For many years I have been a member of the small choir. Practicing paid out. A beautifully performed Vespers was refreshing for body and soul, even on hot and laborious days."*

The hard experiences during Second World War with Japanese occupation were deeply engraved in her memory. Again and again she narrated, that the sisters in December 1941 were brought to an internment camp, and that during the war of liberation they lost nearly their whole belongings through theft and fire.

With her arrival at Haus St. Benedikt in Tutzing on August 26, 1980 a new period of life began for Sr. Firmina. This house had been opened only one month earlier for returning missionaries, therefore much had still to be put in order and prepared to make it comfortable. Here, Sr. Firmina, nearly 70 years old, found a rich field of activity, and with joy she put into action her strength. In those days she wrote: *"I am happy to serve. Often I thank God that through my good training in the domestic science school Marienanstalt I am able to cope with the work, especially in sewing. Oh God, grant me a good health, that I will be able to serve our community still for a long time with a joyful 'ORA' and a cheerful 'LABORA'!"*

God took Sr. Firmina at her word and gave her still for many years the possibility of active service. During the last years her strength left her more and more according to her age, and she had slowly to give up the 'Labora', and the joyful 'Ora' became more and more laborious. Until December 2007 she was still able to attend the Divine Office in the Chapel. Then on December 13 she suffered a stroke, and we feared already at that time that she would leave us. She recovered again a bit, but from this time onward she needed nursing care in the infirmary. Even then it spoke for her unbroken energy that she asked for help to leave her bed for practicing to walk, and to take her meals seated at the table. At times when she was feeling somewhat better, she asked to be taken by wheelchair to the chapel for a short time of adoration.

On the day of her death Sr. Firmina celebrated Holy Mass with the community through the Speaker system and she received Holy Communion. Her answer to the greeting: "Praised be Jesus Christ" was a clear "In Eternity, Amen".

*We are sure that Sr. Firmina will be a great intercessor for us with the Father!*

*May she now praise Jesus for all Eternity!*

R.I.P.

Tutzing, February 25, 2008

Superior and Community of Haus St. Benedikt