

## Mary Ward, corona, and us

I am often filled with awe that there seems to be nearly no situation that might be unknown to Mary Ward. Of course, she did not know the coronavirus, but she certainly experienced limitations and detention in times of illness and infectuous diseases.



In 1631, after the suppression of Mary Ward's houses, and even though she was quite ill and frail, Mary Ward started her third trip on foot to Rome, to speak to the pope. If you like you can say: a very busy woman was on her way to do business.

Arriving in Bologna, Italy, her journey came to a sudden halt. The plague was raging in Bologna, and everyone who entered the city could not cross the borders under threat of the death penalty. Letters leaving Bologna were incensed and took much longer than usual to get through. In order to move on, she needed a passport that certified her state of health.

She applied for this permit of passage on 26 Nov 1631, and on 18 December the pope gave the orders to issue such a document for Mary Ward and her companions. It was only in early March 1632 that she was able to notify the pope and the cardinals that she had arrived in Rome.

The documents do not tell us what she did in the meantime, locked up in the city of Bologna. I would guess that she offered her teaching skills to local families, as she needed funds to pay for her inconveniently extended stay. Without doubt, however, she went through all the mixed feelings that we discover in ourselves today: Am I safe? What if I have already contracted the illness? What could I do to help others without endangering myself? How are my friends, my family? What is happening with my work while I am sitting here, unable to get anything done? Mary Ward understands our fears and doubts in times of the global corona crisis and all the uncertainties this entails.

Arriving in Rome, she was serious when she wrote to the pope: „offerisco la mia poca persona, e breve vita“ – „I offer my humble self, and short life“. Life is short, and incredibly valuable. Just as we value Mary Ward's life, we should be grateful for the life that we have, be grateful for her guidance in our lives, and pray for a new understanding of our share in Mary Ward's legacy.

Annette Haseneder, 23 March 2020

Sources: Dirmeier 2007 vol. 3, pages 355 and 374f.

Picture: Augsburg, adapted (source unknown)