



# The Franciscan Sisters of Christ the King

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**She was** the daughter of a wealthy New York family. She enjoyed society life, parties, and travel to interesting places. She exercised a hold on nearly every man with whom she came into contact. Though given to vanity and worldly pleasure, she had a serious side. She became First Lady to our nation's tenth president, and in time she began to search for God, converting to the Catholic Faith. She was as human as anyone else, but once converted, she persevered in her adherence to the Faith until the end. Her story, often misrepresented when not entirely forgotten, can teach us many lessons.

Julia Gardiner possessed a great deal of personality that needed some taming. Her first significant faux-pas occurred shortly before her departure to Europe with her family for the "educational tour" so common with the upper

class. It seems as though she gave her consent to appear in an advertisement for cheap clothing. The image, innocuous in itself, caused a huge scandal and horrified her socialite family because of the cheap manufacturer she represented. They left for Europe earlier than planned.

While in Rome, Julia and her sister Margaret flirted with the Swiss Guard and thereby obtained entrance to St. Peter's basilica. Elsewhere in Italy, they descended into a volcano behind their father while their mother looked down into the gaping crevice disapprovingly. They took music lessons, language lessons, and met many heads of state at many different political functions. They also had an audience with Pope Gregory XVI (Julia's mother was Catholic, though she attended Presbyterian services with her family.)

After Europe, life at home on Gardiner Island near Long Island, New York seemed rather dull to the girls. Mr. Gardiner arranged for a trip to Washington, D.C. to give his daughters a taste of the social and political life there. They took two trips as a family, and biographers record that senators, Supreme Court justices, and finally even the widowed president all lost their hearts to Julia and vied for her attention. The private parlor rented by the family could hardly hold the immense number of callers waiting to see the Gardiner girls, and especially the vivacious Julia. When President John Tyler made his entrance into her life, the others withdrew. He proposed and she had to think about it.

Shortly after the tragic death of her father, Julia grew more serious and decided to accept the president's marriage proposal. Still, a family friend jokingly described the newly wedded couple as a modern-day Antony and Cleopatra. Fortunately, Julia had what Cleopatra did not: a sensible sister who reported the situation to their concerned mother, who in turn wrote blistering letters regarding Julia's duty of state. A chastened Julia amended her ways and stopped playfully distracting her husband from his work.

Julia matured into her role as First Lady, but she never lost her love for a good party. Remembering the pomp and ceremony surrounding the royalty of Europe, she determined to make the trappings of the Presidential

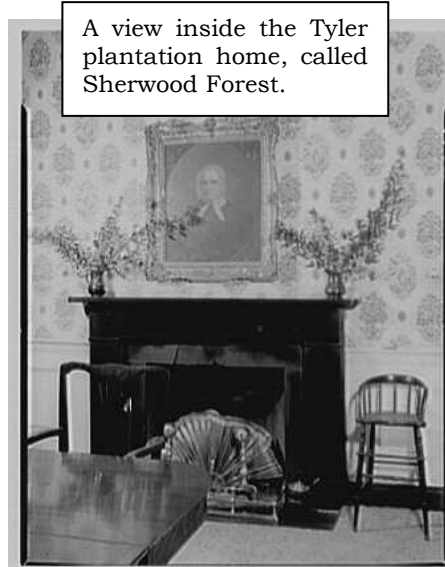
office just as royal. It is because of Julia Gardiner Tyler that to this day, the band plays *Hail to the Chief* when the president enters the room in a formal function. Parties were grand and very crowded, and Julia was at the center of them alongside her husband. With Mr. President's permission, she even introduced the polka to the White House, a new and controversial dance that horrified many society ladies, and at one time also John Tyler. Composers wrote polkas called the *Julia Waltzes* for her.

John Tyler reigned in a highly charged political atmosphere. However, with the help of Julia's charm, he managed the annexation of Texas before deciding to retire from politics and move to his plantation in Virginia. His wife, though disappointed, supported her spouse. They had several children together and Julia took her duties as wife and mother very seriously. She also made every effort to establish a good relationship with the children of Tyler's first marriage.

After failing at negotiations between northern and southern states, John Tyler, a slave owner, joined the new government of the south. He died in 1863, leaving his widow, their children, and the plantation behind. Sadly, the Tylers depended on the slave labor to maintain the wealthy lifestyle they were used to. After the Civil War and subsequent financial collapses in the country, Julia had a moment of grace. Facing financial ruin, her high society plantation life over, her husband, mother, brother, and one daughter dead, her status as former First Lady blotched by her affiliation with the south, her summer home confiscated for government use, she saw the emptiness of the things of the world, and looked

for God. She spoke with and wrote letters to area priests, who did not pressure her, but answered the questions she asked.

The struggling widow sent her daughters to Catholic schools and saw that they were happy. Her positive interactions with the Visitation Sisters in Georgetown and her own private study of the Faith clearly helped her on her way to conversion. Her godfather was a priest, the son of a slave owner and a slave. Only the Church can truly cross racial boundaries.



Julia's conversion did not remain a secret. Many society ladies who heard about it looked into Catholicism and also converted or sought Julia's advice, which she willingly gave. She moved close to the Cathedral in Richmond, and died there on July 10, 1889, having received the last sacraments.

We can see the careful hand of God in the workings of grace throughout Julia's life, as well as the importance of our own

good example to help our neighbor come to the Faith. Even heads of state and their wives receive the grace needed to turn to God, and no one has ever needed to be perfect to receive that grace. It has happened before and it can happen again. What good could be done by a conversion of someone in a high station! Let us pray for it fervently.

Sources: Tyler Family Papers, Special Collections Research Center, William & Mary Libraries

Delaney, Theodore Carter. *Julia Gardiner Tyler: a Nineteenth Century Southern Woman*. 1995. William & Mary, PhD Dissertation.

Seager, Robert. *And Tyler, Too: A Biography of John and Julia Gardiner Tyler*. New York, McGraw Hill, 1963.

Special Thanks to Carolyn Wilson from William & Mary for her assistance



Sr. Marie Louise, our Australian Sister, was able to visit with her sister and one of her brothers in Lourdes, France this summer. Sr. Therese Mary is a member of The Little Servants of St. John the Baptist, who have a house in Lourdes.

We learned an interesting fact about Lourdes. The name Lourdes comes from Lorus, which is the name taken by a Muslim chief who converted there. The Muslims had invaded and fought fiercely with the Christians. Soon, however, they asked for a truce in order to obtain food. The Christian king agreed if the Muslim chief would give honor to the Blessed Virgin Mary. As the Muslims respected Mary, the chief agreed. She obtained for him the grace of conversion, and the chief took the name of Lorus, which later became Lourdes. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for our nation!



Before school started, the Sisters traveled to St. Louis and Dickinson, TX in order to spend a day or two with the girls. Activities included games, arts and crafts, folk dancing, and a sacristy tour.



## Ceremony August 2nd



Sr. Michaela Marie and Sr. Maria Agnes made their first vows, receiving the black veil, profession crucifix and flower crown. Sr. Mary Leona and Sr. Mary Bernard made their perpetual vows, receiving the crown of thorns and profession ring. Our High School girls sang the Mass, which was said by our retreat master Fr. McFarland. In the photograph, below right, are, from left to right, Sr. Mary Leona, Sr. Michaela Marie, Sr. Mary Bernard, and Sr. Maria Agnes.







Our two new pre-postulants are looking over the collection of newsletters dating from 2002 onward.



In September, we spent a day visiting Our Lady of Good Success Academy in nearby Louisiana, MO.



Nine Sisters continue to teach at St. Vincent de Paul Academy.



Congratulations to the SSPX Brothers' Novitiate in Winona, MN, for receiving seven new novices, including the brother of Sr. Maria Agnes, in religion named Br. Philip. We pray that many more generous young men will join the growing community.



The contractor is just finishing up the bid for work on our transept windows, roof, masonry, and gutters. We might have to wait until the spring to complete this job, depending on the weather and how much money we might have to raise. If you can help us pay for this project, we would be very grateful. If you do not have the means to provide us with financial assistance, please pray for us to receive the needed funds!