Sister Blandina Segale, Servant of God

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Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
Dear Sisters, Associates, and Friends,

Servant of God, Sister Blandina Segale! Who was this woman who is now officially on the path to sainthood? I would like to highlight a few of her special characteristics that we can follow in our own lives. These qualities are evident in the words of her journal, *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail* (page numbers from the 1948 edition in parentheses).

Blandina trusted in God and God’s loving care for us, especially in frightening situations. When she was preparing for her trip to Trinidad, she was warned to avoid cowboys. But on the journey, “Oh, the lonely, fearful feeling! The night was dark. No passengers to allay my turbulent thoughts. Footsteps drew near the stage. My heart was thumping. The driver opened the door and said, ‘You will have a traveling companion for some miles’” (28-29). Many years later, toward the end of her ninety-one years here on earth, she counseled a Sister, “Always keep your chin up, and your eyes on God” (9).

She responded to the needs of whoever asked her for help, regardless of who they were: people living in poverty, needing education, suffering at the hands of human traffickers, belonging to other religions or no religion, immigrants, prisoners, Native Americans all received her respectful attention. For example, when some people needed a room for the night, and the objection was raised that they were not Catholic, she replied, “A bigger reason why we should come to their aid” (217).

She declined offers of preferential treatment, and adopted the lifestyle of those she served. When someone offered her the use of a horse and buggy, she replied, “Were I to ride while the laborers helped me, I would feel wretched. I thank you and your friends but I prefer to walk” (132-33).

These are only a few examples of the heroic virtue Sister Blandina practiced. It is our hope that this woman will inspire you to a life of faith, trust in God, and service to those in need. Servant of God Sister Blandina, pray for us!

Your Sister,

Joan Elizabeth Cook, S.C.

Joan Elizabeth Cook, S.C.
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, President
S. Blandina Segale—courageous and dauntless, understanding and kind, determined and blunt, with common sense and a sense of humor, dedicated and prayerful—became the most recognized name of all Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, especially in the Southwest and in Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as in her own native Cicagna, Italy. Her story began there in the mid-19th century and is still being told in the 21st century.

S. Blandina was born Jan. 23, 1850, in Cicagna, Italy, a small mountain village near Genoa, where her peasant father, Francesco, and her mother, Giovanna Malatesta, a weaver, worked hard to provide and care for their growing family. Following dreams for a better future, the parents with five children immigrated to the United States in 1854 to settle in Cincinnati, where they joined others from their homeland. Adding three more children to their family, they experienced the poverty and struggle of newly arrived immigrants. While her father began with a fruit stand that eventually grew into a produce store, Maria Rosa’s mother saw to their home and the education of the children. The young girl attended schools conducted by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Sisters of Mercy.

When she completed grammar school, Maria Rosa attended Mount St. Vincent Academy where she first met the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati and observed the Sisters’ work among the sick and orphans and as Civil War nurses. When she graduated, at 16, she joined that Community on September 13, 1866, and became known as S. Blandina. Her beloved older sister Maddalena joined her the same year and was known as S. Justina.

After spending several years teaching at schools in Ohio, S. Blandina, 22, was sent, alone, over the Santa Fe Trail in 1872 to Trinidad in the Colorado Territory. Fortified by her deep love of God and her personal motto, “Do what presents itself and never omit anything because of hardship or repugnance,” she was initiated into frontier life with all its adventures and dangers. Her motto again echoed St. Vincent de Paul’s exhortation: “Let us give ourselves to [God] to do whatever he pleases with us.”
Assigned to teach in the public school, she had encounters with Billy the Kid, Geronimo, and “frontier justice.” Stories abound of how she calmed mobs of armed men from taking the law into their own hands, helped criminals seek forgiveness from their victims, and became a defender of Native Americans and “Mexicans.” Besides her adventures being popularized in novels, television programs, newspapers, magazines, and a comic book, she has also been featured in scholarly works, anthologies, histories, poetry, and dramas. In one instance her story of bravery was told in a 1966 CBS series Death Valley Days episode, “The Fastest Nun in the West,” where she faced a lynch mob to save a man by facilitating reconciliation between him and the man he shot before he died.

In 1877 S. Blandina moved south to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where her remarkable activities continued in myriad ways: working in the school, orphanage, and hospital the Sisters operated, building a trade school for Native Americans, women chiefly, and a home for the elderly, as well as direct relief to the poor. She came to be known in every level of society from members of the state legislature to indigent patients at St. Vincent Hospital. She went on begging trips to mining and railroad camps all over the Southwest to raise money to support St. Vincent Hospital, selling insurance to accident-prone workers to be cared for in case of injury.

One issue regarding the care of the indigent was burial costs. She herself helped make the coffins and enlisted handicapped persons to help her carry the dead to a plot given them by the Vicar General near San Miguel College for a dignified burial. For this she was given $8 by the authorities. When she confronted the County Commissioner in his newly equipped office, asking for $15 of the $30 he was allotted, he refused – until she told him that the next body would be at his door. Needless to say, she received the $15.

After spending four years in Santa Fe, she was sent to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where her work continued, teaching and building convents and new schools, including St. Vincent Academy which attracted students from all over the Southwest. In modern parlance she established a homeless shelter, the Wayfarers’ House, and attacked the issue of human trafficking, even facing the
threat of death. Later she returned to Trinidad, and then spent a short time in Pueblo, Colorado.

The intrepid S. Blandina returned to Ohio in 1893, and four years later was sent with S. Justina “to see if they could do anything for the poor Italian [immigrants]” in the inner city of Cincinnati. Going to explore the conditions with only $5, in 1897 these two sisters founded and managed Santa Maria Institute, among the first Catholic settlement houses in the United States.

They enlisted assistance from numerous sources and established services of every description to assist the poor and needy. In the process they visited the jails and charity wards in the hospitals, and S. Blandina again became involved in such issues as human trafficking and juvenile delinquency as a probate officer.

In response to the hardship of some Italian Catholic immigrants traveling to downtown Sacro Cuore (Sacred Heart) Church for Mass, the two Sisters with S. Euphrasia Hartman opened a storefront church, in existence today as beautiful San Antonio Church on Queen City Avenue. Parishioners still claim S. Blandina as their founder.

In 1900 she returned to Albuquerque for a few months to help build St. Joseph Hospital, known today as CHI (Catholic Health Initiatives) St. Joseph’s Children, where poor children continue to receive early childhood services.

In 1931 S. Blandina, 81, traveled to Rome, Italy. Her former students paid for her ticket. Prophetically, Alfred Segal, a Cincinnati Post journalist, wrote: “S. Blandina starts back to Italy Sunday after 77 years. Four years old … when she left her native land; at 81 she returns. She is going to see the Pope about placing Mother Elizabeth Seton among the saints, but people say that S. Blandina is saint enough herself, canonized by 60 years of faithful doing.”

During this trip she had the opportunity to return to Cicagna, her birthplace. She never dreamed that 67 years later, July 11, 1998, the town square would be dedicated to her.

In 1933 S. Blandina, 83, retired to the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse. There she prayed and maintained a lively correspondence and visits with her many friends and acquaintances. Her relatives too continued to visit her and learned from the Sisters the day after she died that they heard quite clearly her last words in Italian, “Gesu … Madre. …”

She died Feb. 23, 1941, just one month after celebrating her 91st birthday. Her spirit of courage and dedication still inspires many today, more than 100 years later.
Novena to
Sister Blandina Segale, SC
Sister of Charity of Cincinnati
Servant of God

Blandina, the servant of God, protector of children, especially immigrant children, caring for their health and education; I come to seek your intercession in my present need:

(State your intention.)

I admire your spirit of sacrifice, recognizing the need and ready to serve. Your healing hand and educating voice moving hearts to forgive, now brings me joy to know your love for Jesus. Teach my heart to trust God as you did and ready my lips to say “Gesu” (Jesus) as to welcome God’s spirit into my heart.

**DAY ONE**  Blandina, hear my cry like an immigrant of this earth waiting to receive my true home of Heaven. Take my intention to the throne of God.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…

**DAY TWO**  Blandina, swift to heal the broken worker who labored for so little pay, take my intention to the throne of God.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…

**DAY THREE**  Blandina, adobe maker, building shelter one brick at a time, build in my heart a place for God’s love. Take my intention to the throne of God.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…

**DAY FOUR**  Blandina, seeker of justice and recognizer of human dignity even in the guilty, lead me to justice, be my defender in front of the Judge. Take my intention to the throne of God.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…

**DAY FIVE**  Blandina, health care worker, bandage my wounded heart with love, removing all hate. Take my intention to the throne of God.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…

**DAY SIX**  Blandina, advocating for the poor before governments, negotiate my release from sin and win me divine love. Take my intention to the throne of Heaven.
(State your intention.)
Our Father…
Process to Canonization

Now that S. Blandina Segale’s cause for canonization has been officially opened, and she has been given the title “Servant of God,” the next step will be for a body of advisers appointed by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to collect documents on her life and ministry and gather testimony from dozens of witnesses who knew of her ministry.

However long the process takes to gather information on her heroic virtues and testimony from witnesses, once it is completed, all of the materials will be sent to Rome, where Church officials will determine if S. Blandina heroically lived the Christian virtues. If so, the Catholic Church will give her the title “venerable.”

The next step would be beatification, which requires verification of a miracle attributed to the venerable person’s intercession. A second miracle is usually needed for canonization.
Prayer for the Canonization of
S. Blandina Segale

Let Us Pray

O God, whose sweet name “Gesu” (Jesus) was the first word to roll off the innocent lips of your servant, Maria Rosa Segale, hear our prayer. The word Jesus rolled off her lips for ninety-one years as she built schools, hospitals, and social institutions, welcoming all and introducing them to your love and hope.

She cared for the immigrant, the innocent children, and the guilty outlaw; always recognizing the dignity of the human being. We beg you that S. Blandina Segale now be counted among the Saints of Holy Mother Church and that our hearts be open to always praise your name as your servant Maria Rosa Segale did unto her last breath. May we do as she on her deathbed; whisper “Gesu,” smile, and die in you.

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