



A WOMAN OF GOD - MISSIONARY SR. ISABEL MARTIN

Born in Salamanca, Spain on the 7th of Jan 1926, Sister Isabel Martin was the youngest child after seven brothers. A nurse by profession, young Isabel along with 2 other sisters dedicated herself to the care of the paraplegic residents of Cheshire Home. While in Mumbai, she showed interest in visiting the families and organized retreats and recollection days for young girls. Her kind and loving ways, a deep life of prayer and selfless service to others, drew many of us from Bombay and Vasai who are now part of the Missionaries of Christ Jesus, working in different parts of India and abroad.

A pioneer by nature, her enthusiasm and commitment was seen in later years when she was appointed to Damanpur village in Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal where she worked as a nurse among the Adivasis. She also helped out in the relief camp at Kartick during the Chinese aggression in 1962. In the year 1975 she was appointed Novice-mistress, training our young sisters for eight years, always teaching them to love and reach out to the poor and marginalized. She was bold enough to give our young ladies the freedom to make personal decisions and take the plunge.

After her years in formation, Isabel was back in Bombay in 1984 visiting and meeting with the women of the slums. She felt the suffering of the women, uneducated and unemployed. She said that she heard a strong inner voice telling her, "you cannot leave them unattended, do something for them". She dreamed of offering a means of livelihood to these women so that they be self reliant. She gathered the women, taught them to make soft toys which she sold and shared the profits amongst them. Her dream began being realized when she opened small centres for self-employment of women.

Today **Creative Handicrafts, Mumbai, a Fair Trade organisation** is a registered as a Fair Trade organization that commands a lot of respect in the Fair Trade fraternity. Pioneered by Sister Isabel, it runs 13 co-operatives in different slums. These centres are run by the women themselves and over 800 women benefit from her humble efforts. She continued to inspire the opening of more centres, started kindergartens in the slums, initiated sponsorships to educate children and saving and credit programmes for women, all leading towards empowerment of women and children. **Recognizing her herculean efforts in the easing of sufferings of women the Government of Spain bestowed on her second highest civilian award, the "Premio Principe De Vienna de la solidaridad – 2010".**

Till the end Isabel has lived with undiminished vitality. Her fortitude, resilience and compassion has showed her in her true sense – an unusual woman, always for others. Of the multi-pronged gifts, Isabel was blessed with one magnanimous virtue that stands out and which obviously has marked our lives for the better. She was a woman of tremendous FAITH and TRUST in God - a faith that has moved mountains! The gospel words; "Even if you have faith as tiny as a mustard seed you can move mountains" became real. Only a life of deep faith and commitment, given to spreading the values of the Kingdom, could allow Isabel to do what she has done. We have learnt much from her.