

**Venerable Maria Troncatti (1883-1969)**  
*Missionary, giant of love for the least*

*The vocation of an FMA missionary*

On August 25, 1969, in Sucua, Ecuador, the little plane taking Sr. Maria Troncatti to the city crashed shortly after take-off, on the edge of the forest which for almost half a century had been her “homeland of the heart,” where she had given herself unreservedly among the Shuar people. Sr. Maria had made her final take-off—which took her to heaven! She was 86 years of age, a lifetime given to love. She had written, “**Every day I am happier with my missionary religious vocation!**”

She was born in Corteno Golgi (Brescia) on February 16, 1883, and in her large family grew up happy and busy among the fields and looking after her younger siblings, in the warmth and affection of her exemplary parents. Faithful in attending catechism in the parish and to the sacraments, the adolescent Maria developed a deep Christian spirit which opened her to the values of a religious vocation. In obedience to her father and to the pastor, however, she waited until she came of age before asking to be admitted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and made her first profession in 1908 at Nizza Monferrato. From the beginning she took as her **plan of life “charity, at the price, she used to say, of being crushed to pieces.”**

During World War I (1915-18) Sr. Maria took a course in health care in Varazze and worked as a Red Cross nurse in the military hospital. This experience was to prove very valuable in the course of her long missionary life in the Amazon forests of Ecuador. In fact, she left for Ecuador in 1922 **and never returned to her homeland**. She was sent among the Shuar Indians, where with two other sisters she began **the difficult task of evangelization and education**, surrounded by dangers of every kind, not excluding those from the beasts of the forest and the fast-flowing rivers that had to be crossed by wading, on fragile “bridges” made from vines, or on the

shoulders of the Indians. In the equatorial jungle **she proclaimed and bore witness to everyone the love of the Father.** She was the “**little mother,**” always ready to go not only to the sick but to all those who needed help and hope. Macas, Sevilla Don Bosco, Sucua are some of the still flourishing “miracles” of the work of Sr. Maria Troncatti: nurse, surgeon, orthopedist, dentist, anesthetist, etc. But above all, catechist and evangelizer, rich in the wonderful resources of her faith, patience, and sisterly love. Her work for the promotion of Shuar women bore fruit in hundreds of new Christian families, for the first time formed by a free personal choice on the part of the young couple.

“**A look at the crucifix gives me life and the courage to work**”—this was the sure faith that sustained her life and mission. In every activity, sacrifice, or danger she felt supported by the maternal presence of Mary Help of Christians. One of the missionaries of those days, Fr. John Vigna, has left us this personal testimony about Sr. Maria Troncatti: “She is the very incarnation of simplicity and evangelical cunning. With what delicate, motherly ways she conquers hearts! To every problem she finds a solution which in the light of experience always proves to be the best. She never forgets that she is dealing with weak human beings and sinners. I have seen her dealing with human nature in all its forms, including the most miserable; yet she does so with that refinement and kindness which in her were spontaneous and natural. What surprises me is that in everything and always she remained delightfully a woman. I would say, the more the virgin, the more the mother.”