



Sister Caroline Arrives in New York City

Mother Caroline Friess was born in 1824 in Paris of a French mother and a German father and given the name Josephine. When she was four years old, the family moved to Bavaria to take over the family leather business. During the school months she lived as an only child with her Bavarian grandmother and priest uncle in his rectory (eventually the cathedral rectory) in the city; during vacations she lived with her parents and siblings in their town. She spoke both French and German. Having entered the convent of School Sisters of Notre Dame, she was chosen to be one of the first missionaries to America. She was 22 years old.

In a letter dated June 18, 1850, to the Bavarian Court Chaplain, the Very Rev. Joseph Ferdinand Mueller, Caroline describes in vivid detail the voyage made by Mother Mary Theresa of Jesus, four other sisters, and herself to America. She writes that she, all of the sisters, and nearly everyone on the steamship, “fell victim to the distressing seasickness,” especially Mother Theresa, who had to remain in bed for the entire voyage. Most of the passengers recovered after a few days, however, and “there was very much socializing and merrymaking. Almost every evening we had music and dancing,...and no one ever seemed to give prayer a thought, though we were often in grave danger from most unfavorable winds and occasional storms.”¹

After about eleven days on the Atlantic Ocean, the missionaries arrived on July 31, 1847. Caroline writes “The *Washington* reached its destination after a long and perilous trip. Under waving flags and a gun salute our ship entered the port of New York....How charming, how romantic was the view! What an interchange of delightful mountains, and valleys, handsome villas and forest and blooming meadows. Also, how strange everything seemed to us!...

“Several hundred steamships, the spread sails on the other ships, the brisk, active motions of the sailors on duty in the harbor and the simple red brick houses occupied by more than 500,000 living in the port of New York; the noise and the din, the crowds in the really well laid out streets. The large variety of different nationalities—people from every part of the world—Americans, Negroes, Indians, Mongolians, Greeks, Turks, Spanish, French, etc. –American versions of animal and plant life in the markets and the stores; tables heavily laden with fish lying in brine or countless crabs; wagons filled with oysters; watermelons and cantaloupes sold by the pound as the only relief on the hot summer days;--so much for only a few cents! New habits and strange customs! Pigs on

¹ Excerpts are from Letter #10, *The Letters of Mother Caroline Friess*, ed. Barbara Brumleve, 1991.

the street, chickens in front of people's houses, women smoking tobacco, Moors walking about with unfastened white dresses, peculiar and uniform patterns of women's hats and bonnets; women wearing hats and veils driving vehicles—carriages, bicycles, etc.—cleaning the streets, riding horses; Negroes shouting lustily to announce their sales of ice cream, matches, brandy! Almost constant reproving of children who had been lost—public auctions on the streets illuminated by gas—heating by hot air pipes—very frequent fire alarms, etc., etc.

“Filled with gratitude—and yet amused—we reflected on all these things, which we also met in Philadelphia and Baltimore.”

Questions for reflection and sharing:

1. What in Caroline's account of the sisters' arrival in New York is most striking to you?
2. What do we learn about her?
3. When we look at our own ministerial setting or neighborhood, for what do we feel gratitude and amusement? Is there something we can learn from Caroline?

Prayer

Prayer response: Loving God, hear our prayer.

Loving God, with confidence, we offer these petitions:

- ❖ In gratitude for Caroline's (*Participants can fill in words or phrases that occur to them*)...we pray to the Lord...
- ❖ That each of us will be filled with wonder and open to new people and to new experience we pray to the Lord....
- ❖ That we and those we work with will be blessed with courage to undertake new and challenging ventures...we pray to the Lord....
- ❖ *Please add your own prayers....* we pray to the Lord....

Concluding Prayer:

Glory to you, Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.