

**Bernadeta Miliauskaite-Harris**

## Offering Our Pain to Our Blessed Mother Mary

**O**n April 21, 2002, Bernadeta Miliauskaite-Harris published an article in *Our Sunday Visitor* about Adele Dirsyte, one of four Lithuanian women in a Siberian Concentration camp who wrote prayers on scraps of paper bound as a small, 2-inch by 3-inch booklet entitled “Marija Gelbeki Mus!” (Mary, Save Us!).

Not long after, people wrote and called from all over the U.S. asking the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception for a copy of the booklet sitting for years in the convent. Sr. Margaret Bareikaite reported that they sent out about 300 copies.

Here is an excerpt of this article in honor of Our Blessed Mother Mary, whose inspiration spurred many in the Siberian concentration camps to believe, to live, and to fight for the humanity that had been taken away from the many captive Lithuanians.

[The booklet] made it out of the Soviet Union, and hundreds of thousands of copies have been published in seven languages. For Lithuanians who had fled their homeland under Soviet occupation, it became known as the “Siberian Prayer Book”

The heartfelt prayers dramatically drew the world’s attention to the plight of communist-occupied Lithuania and its people — although



*Adele Dirsyte*

Lithuania itself has only recently begun to learn of Adele Dirsyte and her booklet after one of her companions spoke to a Lithuanian magazine in 1997, years after the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Until that time, the author’s identity was a mystery. She and her companions were known

only by their first names and initials mentioned in the introduction, a note dated Feb. 16, 1953: “Pranute, we send this prayer book to you in order that you maybe able better to feel, think, and worship the Lord with us. Lione G. made it, Vale Ber. drew it, Levute Viz. glued it together, and I wrote it. — Ad.”

With the fall of the Soviet Union came the discovery of the women’s identities. The principal author, Adele Dirsyte, was listed in the Vatican’s martyrology of the 20th century, and is now a candidate for canonization.

Dirsyte’s short life of 46 years was a testimony to her strong Catholic faith. A teacher of German who took part in the Lithuanian resistance against the Soviets, she taught religion to her students even though it was banned. She organized Catholic youth

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groups and published religious poetry and articles urging young people to pursue Christian ideals. She also directed efforts to aid the poor.

These activities drew the attention of the communist government resulting in Dirsyte's arrest on March 6, 1946...

...Dirsyte urged her companions to seek strength in prayer and to search for the good in all people.

In each of several subsequent labor camps, she organized fellow prisoners to pray, recite the Rosary, celebrate holy days and do good deeds. But her own "subversive" activities often earned her mistreatments, interrogations, and periods of solitary confinement.

In Magadan, around 1950, scrap paper was more readily available, so Dirsyte made and distributed prayer books, which had to be kept hidden in secret. One copy made its way to the United States, where it was published in Lithuanian in 1959 and translated into English the following year. In a foreword to the English edition, Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston described these prayers as "beautiful in their simplicity and meaningful in their content, revealing the mysteries of love and the power of the soul."

Dirsyte obtained patience and strength by uniting her suffering to that of Christ, as can be seen from her meditations on the Stations of the Cross:

"...Jesus, what do You wish to tell me by this pain? In everything that happens, let me fully understand all You want of me. Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (from her meditation on the second station)."

When spies reported on Dirsyte's activities, she was beaten and locked in a freezing underground cell. In a 1997 interview, one of her surviving companions recalled how Dirsyte had been abused.

"I could see how much she suffered," Le-vute Vizbaraitė told a Lithuanian Catholic magazine. "She always offered her pain to our Blessed Mother Mary for Lithuania. The continual torture weakened her health, and she was

often in pain."

...Dirsyte urged her fellow prisoners to pray for their guards because "they do not know what they are doing."

Last seen in the psychiatric ward of the camp hospital in late 1954, when her friends brought her the traditional Christmas wafer to share, Dirsyte died on Sept. 26, 1955, not long before her scheduled release. The death certificate was sent home from the Chabarovsk region, but her burial place is unknown.

On April 17, 1999, near the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth, a wooden relief sculpture of the Blessed Mother was dedicated as a memorial to Dirsyte in the churchyard of St. Joseph's Church in the city of Kedainiai, where she had attended school as a youth.



The first English edition of "Mary, Save Us!" was translated by Father Kestutis Trimakas and published by Paulist Press in 1960. Three other English editions appeared later, including a large commemorative edition, "The Living Testament of

Faith and Courage," in 1965, to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

In the 1960s, the booklet, was translated into many languages, including German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Polish, Korean, and Chinese. Each included introductions by bishops and cardinals of these nationalities.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Conception have a limited number of copies of the only English edition of "Mary, Save Us!" still in print. They can be contacted at 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, CT 06260, phone (860) 928-7955. ◆