



St. Laura Montoya Upegui

Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us to go out to the margins and live the Gospel. How appropriate it is, then, that he canonized St. Laura Montoya Upegui in 2013. We see in Colombia's first saint an example of what it means to be present to those who are forgotten and marginalized. She challenges us to reflect on our own prejudices and listen to the needs of others.

Laura knew what it was to be poor—both materially and spiritually. Her father was killed when she was only 2 years old and, although Laura remembered her mother as a woman of great strength and forgiveness, economic hardships forced her to send Laura to live with her grandmother. This was a time of great loneliness for the little girl, and at times she felt abandoned. But a growing reliance on God—especially in the Eucharist and Scripture—sustained her.

At the age of 16, Laura's mother asked her to become an elementary school teacher to help support the family. Though she had never gone to school, Laura became an outstanding teacher, passing along Gospel values to all her students. Yet, her ultimate calling was to enter religious life—and to serve the native communities of her homeland, communities that were looked down upon and ostracized by most Colombians.

With four other young women by her side, Laura bravely set off from her home in Medellín, Colombia, for the community of Dabeiba. She desired “to become an Indian with the Indians,” to live like and in solidarity with those in the community. With the assistance of a local bishop, the women formed the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and St. Catherine of Siena.

Though she and her fellow missionaries were ridiculed by many, Laura always emphasized the centrality of love—in her missionary work and in how she acted in community. It was love, she knew, that was at the heart of Christ's mission—and so it would be at the heart of hers.

In our own lives, we are called to respond to this same challenge. Who lives at the margins of our lives, and how are we able to best respond in love? What holds us back? And how might God be working within us?