September 5

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Sister Maria, who founded the Hermitage of Campello near Assisi, Italy, died in 1961 at the age of eighty-six.
Born in 1875 in Turin, Valeria Paola Pignetti had delicate health but was gifted with inner strength and kindness. From a young age she showed a natural inclination to contemplative solitude and openness towards others.
In 1901 she joined the institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and for eighteen years she accepted the increasingly demanding services that were entrusted to her. At the end of the First World War, during which she had nursed the wounded, she left the institute with her superiors' permission, in search of "room to breathe."
After three years she arrived at Campello sul Clitumno, in Umbria, and began an experience of Christian living that reflected the Gospel with such clarity that it left an indelible mark on twentieth-century spirituality. After a short stay in St. Francis' Refuge, she moved in 1926 to an abandoned Franciscan hermitage above the Clitumno springs. After restoring this ancient hermitage with the sisters who had joined her, Maria lived there until her death. Daily life in the hermitage consisted in nothing more than prayer, work, and hospitality, in an atmosphere in which communion with all creatures was sought with ever greater intensity.
Sister Maria corresponded with Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Friedrich Heiler, Primo Mazzolari, Evelyn Underhill, Giovanni Vanucci and many others. Because of her friendship with the modernist Catholic theologian Ernesto Buonaiuti, and because several Protestant women had become members of her community, she endured many years of hostility from Church authorities. For more than thirty years she was forbidden to host a Eucharistic celebration in the Hermitage of Campello.
By the time the ban was lifted, Maria, in her own words, was beyond it, close to the cosmic communion that had been her lifelong desire. She reached this communion in 1961, at the end of a life that, though full of suffering, was suffused with inner peace.

A READING

Dear Beloved, I must explain to you, as well as I can, my attitude towards the brethren, so that I may be clear to you in this as I want to be clear in everything. Every belief or religious profession of every brother interests me and inspires my respect, not in itself, but because it belongs to the brother, and is a result of his temperament, his experiences, his surroundings, and his era.
As to whether I should remain distant or close to brethren of different beliefs, this has never been a concern of mine. My only concern is the debt of love I owe every brother.

(Sister Maria, from the *Letters to Amy Turton*)

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (30 inisrà/nahasé):
Malachi (5th cent. BCE), prophet (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Katharina Zell (d. 1562), poet at Strasbourg

MARONITES:
Zacharia, father of John the Baptist
Sarbil and Bebaia of Edessa (4th cent.), martyrs

ORTODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Zacharia, prophet, father of the Forerunner