THE WILL OF GOD.

From an early age, Mary's integrity and singleness of purpose became apparent. Despite (or perhaps because of) constant separations from her parents and an unsettled childhood, she learnt to put her trust in God. At first it was a childish desire to be in good favour and occasionally tinged with a rigourousness that owed more to fear than love, but Mary learnt from her mistakes and by the time she was fourteen she had learnt that ‘I will do these things with love and freedom, or leave them alone.’ This free access and trust in God marked all her future and allowed her to risk embarking on a whole new way for women to live and work in the Church – a way that few supported or encouraged at the time. The motivating force in her desire to do the will of God was her love for God – it was not a servile or fearful obedience but rather the free and loving response to the God she loved above everything and with whom she had a relationship of ease and friendship.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

Take a few minutes to read through some of her sayings and notice your reactions to them.

Which ones appeal to you? Do you know why?

Which ones feel strange or uncomfortable – and again can you understand why?

Mary Ward had to learn how to let go of her own control and resolute determination ‘to do the right thing’ and learn how to live comfortably with God, responding simply out of love and trust – In what ways does your following of the will of God need to adapt and deepen?

You might like to take Mary Ward’s prayer ‘O Parent of Parents’ and use it for a few days – adapt it using your own words...

‘My deepest longing in everything I do is that God be content with it.’ Resolutions October 10 1619

‘What does it matter what becomes of me, so long as I do what my Master sent me here for?’ Spa, 1638.

‘How happy a thing it is to love God and serve Him and seek Him da vero.’ Letter to Win. Bedingfield, October 29, 1633.

‘From an early age I have loved the virtue of integrity and therefore it is unnatural or rather impossible for me to act half-heartedly in anything pertaining to the
things of God. The soul is invited to give all, and the response should be an entire surrender of self. I venture to declare that in my experience I see that the above dispositions are gifts from God to any person he chooses, but particularly to us women who seek to walk in the way of the spirit.’ Autobiography 1619

‘I begin with complying with God’s will when I experience things I would rather not face, especially regarding the handicap of ill-health. In this area particularly I still fall short and have much to learn.’ Notes August 1628

Mary Ward’s Prayer

O Parent of parents, and Friend of all friends, without entreaty you took me into your care and by degrees led me from all else that at length I might see and settle my love in You.

What had I ever done to please You? Or what was there in me wherewith to serve You? Much less could I ever deserve to be chosen by You. O happy begun freedom, the beginning of all my good, and more worth to me than the whole world besides.

Had I never hindered Your will and working in me, what degrees of grace should I now have. Yet where as yet am I?

My Jesus, forgive me, remembering what You have done for me and whither You have brought me, and for this excess of goodness and love let me no more hinder Your will in me. Autobiography 1619