

# The Mercy Shield



*The original Mercy Shield is divided into two parts. On the upper part, which is a little less than half the shield, is a white Maltese cross on a field of red; the lower portion contains four red stripes on a background of gold.*

*It seems appropriate that a cross of white, emblematic of virginity, should be placed on a field of red, symbolic of martyrdom. The white cross is that St. Eulalia, a martyr. It was in the church dedicated to her in Barcelona that the Order of Mercy was formally founded on August 10, 1216. Surmounting the shield is a crown of Aragon.*

*The Maltese cross was the symbol of the Crusades. Fashioned by the Knights of St. John, it indicated the special service of the Order of Mercy to the sick in hospitals.*

*The history of the lower portion takes us back to the twelfth century when the Counts of Barcelona, having become kings by a female title, joined Catalonia to Aragon, making Barcelona the capitol and chief residence. One of these counts, Godfrey the Rough, after fighting by the side of Louis the Pious with great courage and success against the Saracens, carried his gilded shield to the king that he might receive permission to have an escutcheon placed on it. It was customary that a knight should obtain an inscription for his shield as a reward for valour. Dipping his fingers in the blood which still flowed from the wounds of the gallant warrior, the king drew them down the gold shield. The four red lines thus traced became the escutcheon of the Counts of Barcelona.*

*James of Aragon, desiring to express his loyalty to Mary and as a tribute to the members of the Mercy, gave this shield to them that wherever they might go the honour and protection of Aragon would be with them. The shield is five red bars mounted with a white cross on a gold background, the red signifying courage, the white purity.*

*Mother Catherine McAuley, founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in 1831. Seeing in its gold background a symbol of God's mercy and noting the similarity in the works to which the thirteenth century monks and the nineteenth century religious women were dedicated, the sisters adopted the shield as their particular standard.*

*Courtesy of Sisters of Mercy Archives*



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