



Places to meet Father

Oberhausen



“I don’t want to remove the veil from this event just yet. If we call it a consecration to Mary, we have to add that it was one with a singular character. Historians will later find it easy to establish that in fact the whole of Schoenstatt was already contained in it as in a seed.” (J. Kentenich 1955)

Oberhausen – “Cradle of the whole of Schoenstatt”

12 April 1894 – a decisive date in our founder’s life.

The place

In 1866, the 29-year-old **Fr August Savels**, became the parish priest and rector of St Joseph in Oberhausen-Styrum. His sister, Antonie (30) went with him and was his housekeeper.



Both were distressed at how inadequately the many orphaned and abandoned children in the district were fed and cared for. They did their utmost to build an **orphanage** as soon as possible directly next to the church. It was blessed on 18 November 1882.

Antonie Savels took over the management of the house and gathered a group of helpers with whom she wanted to found a religious community. Mother of them joined

the newly founded community of **Dominicans at Arenberg** in 1889. Antonie Savels received the name Sr Dominka, and worked from 1902 until 1908 as the second Prioress General of the Congregation.

In 1888 Fr Savels was transferred to Cologne, but he was still able to initiate a new building, which was completed in 1894.

To start with the children at the St Vincent Home attended the nearby Market School. However, the town administration forced the Sisters to school ‘their’ children separately in the Home. As a result five classes began their schooling in **St Vincent’s Home** on 1 April 1894.

The Event

A few days later, on **12 April 1894**, a mother brought her child, an eight-year-old boy, to leave him in the hands of the Sisters.

When **Katharina Kentenich** (Gymnich, Strassburg, Cologne) changed jobs, her main worry was about how her son could continue with his schooling. She approached Fr Savels with this problem. By this time he was parish priest of Holy Apostles in Cologne, and Katharina Kentenich's confessor. As he saw it, if something was to become of the boy, he had to have continuity in his schooling. He thought of "his" St Vincent Home in Oberhausen, and more especially on the school that had been opened there a few days earlier, and contacted the superior.

First impressions: the huge buildings were surrounded by walls and a high fence. In the courtyard there were a number of children standing in ranks and supervised by one of the Sisters. Boys and girls played in separate courtyards. They wore no shoes and were poorly clad in uniforms. Only on Sundays and holydays, in winter or when it was raining, were they allowed to wear wooden clogs. Everything was marked by poverty. They ate meat only on Sundays. The courtyards were without trees or flowers, and a high wall separated the children from the life of the other citizens of the town.

The house, however, had a religious atmosphere, which appealed to Joseph Kentenich. It gave their lives a certain quality despite all its constraints. The Dominican Sisters consciously emphasised the religious atmosphere. So their devotion to Mary, which the Arenberg Dominicans fostered in a special way, gave the house a warm and personal note despite all its poverty.

Before she took leave, Katharine made her way with Joseph to the house chapel. At that time it was on the first floor.



She made her way to this statue. In her anguish she turned to Mary. She entrusted to her the person she loved most – her child. She probably prayed out loud, because Joseph had clear memories of this day. He took in what was happening with great, inner alertness. In the midst of the painful leave-taking something happened

that impressed him so deeply that in the years that followed he repeatedly recalled it.

As he himself testified, this **Consecration to Mary on 12 April 1894** was a key experience that made a profound and lasting impression on his soul, and occupied him throughout his life.

Later Fr Kentenich took a stand to the “consecration to Mary” that marked the life of the eight-year-old so deeply and had an effect in the course of the years that followed.

However, the profoundly religious experience of the consecration to Mary did not simply blot out the human pain, the child’s suffering under this separation from his mother. The difference between his home in Gymnich and his new and strange surrounding was too great for that.

We are told that young Joseph twice climbed over the wall. The police caught him and brought him back.



Despite all the austerity described above, which from our present perspective would not be seen as conducive to the sound development of a child, Joseph Kentenich grew in his understanding of the faith to such an extent that on the day of his **First Holy Communion** – 25 April 1897 – he told his mother very emphatically that he wanted to become a priest.

On 24 September 1897 he was **Confirmed** in the Church of the Sacred Heart, an emergency building, in the centre of Oberhausen.

After more than five years Joseph Kentenich left the St.

Vincent Home. Fr Savels had contacted the Missionary Society of the Pallottine Fathers in Ehrenbreitstein, and accompanied Joseph, now almost 14-years-old, to his new home and house of studies on 23 September 1899.

May 2011 Franz Heister

At the moment the St Vincent Home in Oberhausen is being demolished to give place to a modern Home for the Elderly. Will we lose a trace of our Father as a result? It depends on us!

Reference: Dorothea Schlickmann, *The Hidden Years, Fr Joseph Kentenich, Childhood and Youth*. (Photos taken from this book.)