

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**The boldness
of holiness
for a new
missionary
momentum**

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Letter of May 9, 2019

Dear Sisters,

“I desire all of [you] to be filled with a great love which will immerse [you] so sweetly in God and so charitably in the service of the poor...”
(St. Louise, SW, L. 441, p. 75)

S

*Spiritual
Life*

As we remember St. Louise de Marillac with joy and gratitude for all that she bequeathed to us through her words and example, I wish you a happy feast. Our Foundress’ writings show that she shared many of our own hopes, dreams, and concerns. We thus call upon her intercession to help us embrace our reality and walk courageously and boldly toward the future!

On this feast day, several Daughters of Charity around the world are making their vows for the first time. To them, and indeed to all Daughters of Charity, I extend St. Louise’s wish: *“I hope that they are filled with holiness so that they may work usefully at God’s work”* (St. Louise, SW, L. 217, p. 260). In addition, the Motherhouse is currently hosting the International Session for Spiritual and Vincentian Revitalization for Sisters 11-24 years vocation with the theme, “The joy of being a Daughter of Charity”. The 74 participants from all over the world have entered wholeheartedly into it. Today the Sisters are spending time at Saint Nicolas des Champs Church reflecting on St. Louise’s *Lumière*. The day is dedicated to the challenge *“to cultivate our interior life, following the example of*

Jesus who withdrew into silence to pray and seek the Father's will" (IAD, p. 9). This evening they will join the Sisters of the Motherhouse for a special prayer service in our Chapel. You can be sure that you will be present in spirit!

Please allow me to take this opportunity to thank you for your on-going intercession for my health and the success of my treatment for cancer. I have confidence in the competence of the medical personnel who accompany me. I continue to rely on your prayers for healing, as well as for my acceptance of God's will. You so faithfully bring me before the Lord! I can feel the power of your prayers, and I am deeply appreciative.

Affectionately and with the assurance of my prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

Living our faith joyfully according to Saint Vincent

Introduction

S

Is it possible to live our faith joyfully? Does faith bring joy? Does service of those who are poor fulfill us? Does Saint Vincent de Paul have something to say to us about this?

Session for
Sisters
11-24
Years
Vocation

In our days, speaking about joy is not easy. Times are hard. Violence is everywhere, draws considerable attention and produces more and more victims. People suffer constantly; those who are poor seem increasingly abandoned; only people who are rich and successful make the news. Are Christians and consecrated people actually joyful? Do we not rather see around us Christians “*whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,*” as Pope Francis said in *The Joy of the Gospel* (no. 6)?

Entering into the mystery and wisdom of Christian joy is not easy because joy is something spiritual that does not come from outside; it is either within us or does not exist. We can throw parties, but we cannot decree joy (cf. Pope Benedict XVI). Pope Paul VI noted back in 1975, “*Technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual. Money, comfort, hygiene and material security are often not*

lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness unhappily remain the lot of many."¹ Yes, joy is fragile, imperfect and always incomplete. Paradoxically, when we are happy, we can be certain that it is only for a little time.

In more specific terms, allow me to ask you a direct question. Are you happy? Do you feel that you have life in abundance? Or do you have the impression of just getting by or of "putting about"? Does following Christ - the service of those who are poor and life in the spirit of Saint Vincent - produce joy in you? To go further in our reflection, we will first examine Saint Vincent's spiritual experience. We will then try to make a modern interpretation of Saint Vincent's teaching on this subject. Finally, I will offer an exhortation as a conclusion.

I - VINCENT DE PAUL'S SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Since time is limited in this type of session, I would like to go straight to the essential and thus reread with you Vincent de Paul's conference, "**Imitating the virtues of village girls**"² from January 25, 1643.

In 1643, Vincent is a mature man of 63 years. He already has a long experience with charity carried out by the Ladies of Charity. The Congregation of the Mission, founded eighteen years ago, has just become an adult. The Daughters of Charity, founded nine and a half years ago, already have a number of members, most of whom are from the countryside. Some have died; this is the case of Marguerite Naseau. The streets of Paris at this time are the epicenter of worldly discussions. People stop in the streets, dream up plots, grow rich and criticize public institutions. These plots generally exasperate Vincent de Paul. He has no time to lose. There are many poor persons to save.

1. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 8 (1975).

2. CCD IX, 66-77

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The convents of this time are similar. Nuns receive high society and mix with the bourgeoisie and powerful people. Political discussions are commonplace, and conspiracies to gain power are not unusual. Convents are places of influence because full of the daughters of the great French families. The Ladies are as present in convents as in charitable works. Vincent mistrusts all this.³

Several times in this conference to the Daughters of Charity, Vincent de Paul mentions Saint Genevieve, patron saint of Paris, whose feast day is January 3. He begins by telling them, “*I had planned, Sisters, to speak to you on the feast of Saint Genevieve and, since this great saint was a poor woman from the country, it seemed most fitting that I should say something to you about her virtues and those of true village girls, since the Divine Goodness has been pleased to call women from the country, first and foremost, to be members of your Company.*”

Who was Saint Genevieve? This fifth-century young aristocrat became a city official of Paris; she exercised power in favor of the poorest of the poor (today she is patron of Paris and of the national police). Originally from the countryside, she became a political, religious and social authority figure. “*Although she was rich and powerful, she led a life of poverty and prayer, surrounded by other young women who helped her in her responsibilities.*”⁴ She saved Paris from the invasion of the Huns led by Attila, and she saved the poor of Paris from famine and death (at the time, Lutetia was the name for Paris). Those who were poor became a real social body thanks to the assistance and protection of Saint Genevieve. By evoking the figure of Saint Genevieve, Vincent intends to show the Daughters of Charity that someone from the countryside saved Paris with other brave young women. The village girls whom Vincent will describe in his conference are, in a way, the younger sisters of Saint Genevieve. Vincent says, “*I thought [of]... this great saint*

3. I am using the notes of Jean-François Desclaux, CM, on this conference.

4. Cf. https://diocese92.fr/documents/pdf/resume_de_la_vie_de_sainte_genevieve_pour_les_adultes-2.pdf

*now in heaven, who was honored by Kings and all kinds of people on earth, to show us how she made herself pleasing to God by practicing the virtues of true village girls, which she did so perfectly.”⁵ Like Saint Genevieve, the Daughters of Charity should imitate the virtues of “true village girls”. Vincent demonstrates that goodness is found in the countryside. Why specifically in the countryside? In Vincent’s eyes, the countryside is a symbol of creation as God intends it. The virtues there are those of the Beatitudes, those of Jesus Himself, a man of the soil since He grew up in a village. Vincent speaks about the virtues of village girls from experience, not ideology. *“It will be very easy for me to speak to you about the virtues of good village girls because I know them by experience and by nature, since I’m the son of a humble tiller of the soil, and lived in the country until I was fifteen. In addition, for many years now the Priests of the Mission have ministered among country folk, so no one knows them better than we do. There’s nothing to equal persons who really have the spirit of villagers; nowhere do you find deeper faith, greater recourse to God in time of need, nor greater gratitude to Him in times of prosperity.”⁶**

What, then, are the main virtues of village girls according to Vincent? Who are the Daughters of Charity who bring joy to God’s heart, who “*give joy to God*,”⁷ please God and glorify Him?

First of all, simplicity.

It is Vincent’s favorite virtue. He calls it “*my Gospel*,” that is, the Good News. “*The spirit of true village girls*,” Vincent says, “*is extremely simple - no slyness, nor words of double meaning; they’re not opinionated nor obstinate because in their simplicity they believe quite simply what they’re told. Daughters of Charity should be like that, Sisters, and you’ll know that you’re really so*

5. Cf. CCD IX, 67

6. CCD IX, 67-68

7. Conference to the Daughters of Charity on Purity of Intention, CCD IX, 287

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if you're truly simple, not attached to your own ideas, but accepting of those of others; if you're candid in your speech, and if your hearts aren't thinking one thing while your lips say another. I can well believe that of you, dear Sisters! Blessed be God! Blessed be God, Sisters!"⁸

We should note the vocabulary and the gap between the way of speaking in the 17th century and our own. I know, for example, that many cultures today have a negative view of the word "submit" [translated "accepting"]. However, if we try to understand the real meaning of Vincent's words, we can easily understand the richness and strength of his teaching. I will say it in the negative: "*Doesn't lack of humility cause us to lose joy in faith and service?*" We lose our peace when we want to impose our point of view, when a sort of "virtuous bipolarity" dominates us. In other words, we lose it amid an unavowed temptation for self-glorification and a concern primarily for our own reputation in the service of those who are poor as Daughters of Charity. In fact, we forget that gratuity produces joy in service. In short, we suffer and lose joy from lack of simplicity.

Secondly, humility.

This is the second virtue that Vincent puts forward for the Daughters of Charity in their imitation of village girls. "*True country women are noted for their great humility; they don't boast of what they have, don't talk about their relatives, and don't think they're clever, but act in a straightforward manner... they don't put on airs but live just like everyone else.*"⁹ What should we note from this initial explanation by Vincent? I would say unity and fraternity. There is nothing that undermines the spirit desired by Saint Vincent, inspired by the Gospel, more than the spirit of rivalry and domination of others. The "airs" that Vincent mentions are harmful and wound. They do not build up but demolish instead.

8. CCD IX, 68

9. CCD IX, 68

Vincent notes another aspect of this virtue. *“The humility of good country women keeps them from being ambitious. I say ‘good ones,’ Sisters, for I’m well aware that not all of them are so virtuous, and that even in the country there are some who are just as ambitious as those in the towns; but I’m talking about the good ones who haven’t acquired the spirit of the city. They are the ones, dear Sisters, who want only what God has given them; they don’t aspire after more greatness or riches than they have and are satisfied with their food and clothing. Still less do they consider using fine words but are humble in their speech... Their language is truly simple and sincere. Sisters, how we should love this holy virtue of humility, which causes us to be little concerned if we’re despised, and even prompts us to love contempt! ... That’s how Daughters of Charity should look upon themselves, dear Sisters. You’ll know that you’re true Daughters of Charity if you’re really humble, if you’re neither ambitious nor presumptuous, and if you don’t think you’re better than you are nor better than others, either in body or mind, family or possessions - or even in virtue, which would be the most dangerous form of ambition.”*¹⁰ Vincent de Paul is concrete and realistic. He knows people and souls, which is why he speaks as he does. I simply highlight the question of ambition so well singled out by our spiritual father. Nothing divides a community worse than ambition, which goes hand in hand with lack of humility. Ambition engenders sadness and frustration in oneself and in others; rather than producing peace, it causes worry and sadness. Moreover, ambition feeds on envy, jealousy and rivalry.

Don’t you agree that we lose joy in faith and in the service of those who are poor when we fail in simplicity and when ambition takes hold? Do not forget that Christ chose the lowest place, came to serve and not to be served and washed His disciples’ feet while being the Teacher and Lord.

10. CCD IX, 68-69

Thirdly, moderation.

On this point, Vincent is realistic and demanding. Vincent is realistic in his awareness of their need for sufficient food in order to serve those who are poor. To carry the soup pot to those who are poor and carry the heavy sack on their backs, they must have strength and eat well. He invites his Daughters to recognize this. “*Don’t think you’re fed any worse than persons outside. At any given time, there are always some who are fed much worse than you are, and they have to work hard.*”¹¹ How realistic Vincent is, Sisters!

Saint Vincent is also demanding because he expects Daughters of Charity to exercise moderation in their food and clothing. He invites them to be content with little and to think that there is always someone in a worse condition. “*How necessary moderation is for the Daughters of Charity, Sisters! You’ll know that you’re truly abstemious if you maintain the sobriety of country women, especially those who were called from the beginning to serve the poor; for they lived very abstemiously.*”¹² This quote clearly brings out the relationship between moderation and service of those who are poor. Indeed, how can we serve those who are poor joyfully if we do not share their condition in some way? Moderation is a way of sharing the lot of those who are poor, with one difference: we live modestly by a choice inspired by the Gospel; those who are poor do out of necessity. Often in the West, we define poverty in negative terms, saying ‘poor people *are* not and do not *have*.’¹³

11. CCD IX, 70

12. CCD IX, 70

13. I have drawn significant inspiration from the thinking of Federico CARRASQUILLA, priest of the Archdiocese of Medellin, Colombia, who produced a series of reflections on the anthropology of the poor from a Latin American perspective. He wrote a book in which he presents this issue well: *Escuchemos à los pobres. Aportes para una antropología del pobre [Listen to the poor: Contributions for an anthropology of the poor]*, Centro de investigaciones sociales, asesores socio-economocos, Medellin, 1996. You can find the entire work at the following website: <https://jesuitas.lat/uploads/antropologia-del-pobre/FEDERICO%20CARRASQUILLA%20-%201996%20-%20ANTROPOLOGA%20DEL%20POBRE.pdf>. Consulted on April 27, 2019.

Reducing persons who are poor to what they lack is failing in the respect due them and not recognizing their dignity. Even worse, we feed those who are poor the idea that to be happy, you have to be rich, powerful and have more than you need. This definition of those who are poor is negative and improper. According to Vincent de Paul's anthropology and Vincentian thought, we should say that a poor person IS someone and that he HAS a vision of the world, humanity and God. A person can lack something and nonetheless fully be a member of society and contribute to history, right? Lacks can be significant or not. Not having, for example, the latest brand of shoes is not very important. In contrast, not having bread and education is destructive. The meaning of our commitment alongside persons who are poor is two-fold: on the one hand, by sharing in their lives, their values and their lot, we tell them that their way of life interests us and is the choice made by the Son of God who became flesh in a poor and modest being. On the other hand, we fight with our brothers and sisters living in poverty to provide for the things lacking that destroy their dignity as people and children of God.

Vincent de Paul invites his Daughters to love poverty and practice it. He further calls them to maintain modesty in their clothing and relationships. He reminds them as well of the importance of purity. It seems to me that all of this goes together: moderation, poverty, modesty and purity. How can we remain joyful in faith in the service of those who are poor if we instead cultivate excess, ostentation, ambition and indecency? Those whom Christ has called in all freedom should trust Him at every stage of life. Trusting in the Lord, even in the most difficult situations, is part of the joyful adventure of faith.

Fourthly, obedience.

“This virtue is as necessary - or more necessary - for you than any other, Sisters, because you have to do equally both difficult and easy things... Be docile and receptive to the guidance of Divine

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Providence, as a horse is to its rider... There's no greater obedience than that of true village girls... But, Sisters, do you know how such acts of obedience should be carried out? Joyfully, graciously, and charitably, and not for form's sake or negligently, but with such fervor as to show that you don't want to spare your body in the service of God by serving His poor, and paying no attention to the places to which you're sent or to the persons who give you orders, but being as prompt in going from one place as to another, whether it be to Paris or to the country, near or far away. In this way, dear Sisters, you'll be true Daughters of Charity, and you'll be imitating Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin in their obedience..."¹⁴

Obedience lived out well produces joy and freedom. Obedience experienced in a negative way is a source of sadness, anxiety and conflict. Obeying with joy, love and charity: such is our Founder's teaching. Those who exercise authority should act in a similar way. The rest avoid complaining.

II - AN ATTEMPT AT A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL'S THINKING

What lessons can we draw from this conference by Vincent? Why does he speak to his Daughters in this way?

We easily recognize Vincent de Paul's style and way of speaking to his Daughters: respectful, loving and serious. He speaks in a simple and practical way. He uses images, and, more significantly, he creates FIGURES put forth as models to follow, real paradigms. Saint Genevieve, as a girl from the countryside who set off down the path of holiness through serving the poor of Paris and saving them with other young women, becomes a model for the Daughters of Charity to imitate. Genevieve is like an elder sister in her vocation and commitment. She is a reference, a paradigm. If a

14. CCD IX, 75-76

village girl could put her faith in action in the service of those who are poor in the 5th century, this remains possible in the 17th and 21st centuries, on this condition of imitating the virtues of village girls. In addition, Vincent, knowing the vices and deceit of Parisian society of his time, chooses the countryside. For him, it represents the goodness and beauty of creation at the beginning, the world as God intended it. Life in the countryside, with its difficulties and even its violence, is the place where people best live the values desired by the Creator. Nature is on the side of authenticity and what is essential, not the side of appearances and pretense. By preferring the values and virtues of the world of poor people from the countryside (simplicity, humility, moderation, poverty, modesty, purity and obedience), Vincent aligns the Daughters of Charity with the creative act of God, on the side of God who creates and recreates from the chaos of the beginning. The chaos of the 17th century calls for women capable of such a mission! Like Christ and as His disciples, we collaborate in the salvation of all, in the redemption of humanity and in its liberation. This is your primary vocation through which you can find fulfillment as women and as Daughters of Charity, that is, as Daughters of God, Daughters of love. Now, I would like to offer you some reflections as a sort of translation for today.

Vincent de Paul begins by taking seriously the call that the Daughters of Charity received from God. He knows that there is something mysterious in all vocations, something mystical even. How many times does he explain in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity and to the Priests of the Mission that it was not he who thought of creating institutions for the service of those who are poor, but God and God alone who, in His plans, thought of us to fulfill this mission. This is mystical! A mystic is someone who experiences God in him or herself or who “*has an inner experience of the Divine.*”¹⁵ Vincent had this experience, and when the very first Daughter of Charity presented herself to

15. Louis COGNET, *Le crépuscule des mystiques [The twilight of mystics]*, Paris, Desclée, 1991, p. 22.

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him, he took her seriously and immediately discerned God's plan for her. Like Saint Genevieve, Marguerite Naseau is a village girl who brings joy to God's heart because of the intensity with which she responds to His calls. Speaking about her after her death, Vincent de Paul would say, "*Her charity was so great that she died from sharing her bed with a poor plague-stricken girl. Attacked by this illness herself, she said good-bye to the Sister who was with her, as if she had foreseen that she was going to die, and went off to Saint Louis [Hospital], her heart filled with joy and conformity to God's Will.*"¹⁶

*Do we always and still take our own call seriously? We did so a first time when we left everything. However, might we have forgotten this first love? Is the intensity of this inner fire still as strong? Allow me to share a personal conviction. In terms of the vocation to holiness, everything is a question of INTENSITY. The call that God addressed to us is a source of joy and a call to joy. "A yearning for joy lurks within the heart of every man and woman. Far more than immediate and fleeting feelings of satisfaction, our hearts seek a perfect, full and lasting joy capable of giving "flavor" to our existence."*¹⁷

Authentic service of those who are poor and the joy of believing only make sense in freedom. By putting forward the good qualities of village girls and the example of Saint Genevieve, Vincent de Paul wants to give rise to freedom. Loving God is possible, and serving Him in His most abandoned creatures only makes sense if done "willingly". When you are faced with the commitment of your freedom and your entire being at the service of a faith project, you can be more generous, more devoted, and, as a direct result, you can more easily accept contradictions and suffering. Suffering does not uproot the deep joy of a choice made with trust and love. Our Lord Jesus Christ, during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, pleaded, "*Father, if you are willing, take*

16. The Virtues of Marguerite Naseau, July 1642. CCD IX, 66

17. Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day 2012

this cup away from me.” He immediately added, *“Still, not my will but yours be done”* (Lk 22:42). Jesus engaged His freedom once and for all. He is obedient, even to the Cross. Obedience for Him is a passion and not an obligation. The establishment of the Kingdom of God must go through the Cross. Nothing, not even death, turns Him away from His saving and redeeming plan. *“In God Himself, all is joy because all is giving.”*¹⁸ Sisters, recall that God desired to make this covenant with us a first time. We might break this covenant as Simon Peter did in denying his Master at the beginning of His passion. Recall that the risen Lord reestablishes the covenant with Peter, who three times renews his love after denying it as many times. Do not forget, Sisters, that we committed our freedom to a loving plan for God and neighbor because we understood that *“promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings.”*¹⁹

In calling for the virtues of simplicity, humility, moderation, purity and obedience, Vincent is seeking to build fraternity in two ways, among the Sisters and with those who are poor.

First, fraternity among the Sisters.

Fraternal unity is built by communion of feelings and values. Imagine if each Daughter of Charity wanted to serve those who are poor in her own way, without taking into account the virtues mentioned above. What would be the result? Division, jealousy, rivalry, envy, disputes... and in the end, the poor would be neglected. This is the exact opposite of the initial work of creation, consisting of harmony despite differences. There is a single Creator, and everything exists for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. The source of the joy of believing and the joy of serving those who are poor lies in love of God. We are humanly happy, in general and over the long term, if we love as Jesus loved,

18. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 76 (1975)

19. Pope Francis, *The Light of Faith*, no. 52

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in other words, by giving of ourselves, being generous, serving out of love and not out of competition and especially by taking the focus off ourselves. All the virtues brought out by Vincent turn us away from ourselves and make us adopt Jesus' plan, His style, His passion for the Kingdom of God and His values. With Christ, it no longer is a question of being happy for ourselves but of being happy by transcending ourselves and embracing the plan of the Son of God. Benedict XVI said to young people, "*Love gives rise to joy, and joy is a form of love. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta drew on Jesus' words: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35) when she said: 'Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls; God loves a cheerful giver. Whoever gives with joy gives more.'*"²⁰

Finally, the virtues put forward by Vincent tend to keep the first Daughters of Charity (and you as well) in the realm of desire and not obligation.²¹ You see, Vincent de Paul does not emphasize institutional workings, obligations, rights and duties. He highlights the founding spirit, initial enthusiasm, the initial intuition. Faith and service of those who are poor endure thanks to a passion that imbues the Sisters gathered to honor the Son of God through the service of the least among us. Without the strength and intensity of the theological virtues (exercised by the Son of God and the Virgin Mary), the initial enthusiasm, initial desire and initial intuition would fade.

Secondly, fraternity with those who are poor.

The virtues of village girls also make possible fraternity with those who are poor. Without these virtues, it would be very difficult for those who are poor to accept our services and dedication. Without these virtues, those practiced by the Son of God and His Blessed Mother, we easily risk behaving as leaders and bosses, forgetting that persons who are poor are our Lord's and who

20. Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day 2012

21. I continue to refer to notes by Father P. Jean-François Desclaux, CM.

represent for us Jesus Christ, incarnate and suffering. Without the Vincentian virtues, we run the serious risk of “*turning service into power, and power into a commodity in order to gain worldly profit or even greater power,*” as Pope Francis said so well to the Cardinals of the Roman Curia in Clementine Hall on December 22, 2014. Sisters, I would invite you to reread this speech by the Pope on “spiritual diseases,”²² without, of course, implying that you are struck by any of them... Personally, I have made my examination of conscience and accuse myself of having at least thirteen and a half...

III - FINAL EXHORTATION

I will leave the final word to Vincent, our spiritual father, to conclude this reflection. “*In the name of God, Sisters, be very mindful of your obligation to acquire virtue, if you want God to grant you the grace of becoming true Daughters of Charity... Yes, Sisters, I repeat, to be called by God for such a holy ministry and not to acknowledge this grace by fulfilling your obligations would merit tears of blood... What a misfortune it would be for you if through your own fault you were to lose your vocation, or if because of your laxity you didn't take the trouble to acquire the perfection God wants in those who will serve Him in this state!*”²³

Father Roberto GOMEZ, CM

22. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141222_curia-romana.html

23. CCD IX, 76

Living our faith joyfully according to Louise de Marillac

It is always a great pleasure and joy for me to reflect on the writings and biographies of Louise de Marillac. I like to listen in silence, waiting for what she wants to reveal to me. She always surprises me. I like to discover something new, never said before. This is what happened when I asked her about her experience of joy.

Before beginning, I will tell you that the vision that I can offer is limited because the available sources are limited. I only had the letters that she wrote and received from her correspondents, her personal writings and her first biography. To have a fuller picture, we would need additional information. Nonetheless, our study seems interesting and very suggestive to me.

In writing this presentation, I deliberately decided to include many short passages from our Foundress. I think it is best to let her speak for herself. It seems appropriate to reveal her thoughts, experiences and opinions as she herself wrote them. I have the impression that her writings are still little known. They reveal to us her rich personality, her deep spirituality and her vast knowledge; I further believe that they remain relevant.

I intend to explain how Louise experienced joy and the roots from which it developed. I would also like each of us to be able to look at ourselves in her as in a sort of mirror and to find encouragement to walk down a new path such that each one of us might come closer to fullness. I hope that we will be able to see life in its full splendor.

1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD ‘JOY’?

I would like to put forward a short allegory for your consideration.

“It happened in the early hours of a splendid morning. He decided to begin to play with the sand on the banks of a large river. Joyful, enthusiastic, calm and majestic, he felt jovial, full of love, given to delight, creative and magical. His hands, lavishly gentle, took a handful of damp earth and kneaded the mud with infinite care. The scene took place against a backdrop of murmuring water, a touch of light, calm and serenity. Savoring the touch of the sand to his skin, feeling the caress of the humidity, he was enraptured with joy as a beautiful figure took form in his lap. From within flowed love, an expanding and intense love. At length, he looked deeply at the contour of the figure, which seemed very attractive and beautiful to him. He brought it close to him and drew his breath nearer to it, breathed into it, looked at it again... more! more! Oh, what a marvel! It became a living being that reached out to him, sought him and lifted himself up as if he wanted to receive a kiss. It was his creation, his creature. What a delight! On his face appeared a broad, beaming smile that awakened one just like it on his creature. Entranced in a mutual gaze, they realized that they were united in the deepest part of their being, and immense joy overwhelmed them. The first cords of a joyful and mysterious music started. Their feet began to move; their figures began to sway; their arms rose, vibrating. They lost themselves in a marvelous and endless dance. From then on, complete goodness, beauty, joy and happiness were definitively imbued in the creature and remained in it forever.”

The story recalls a priceless page of Christian anthropology, inherited from Hebrew culture, which we all share. It clearly indicates that human beings have their source in God who creates out of love; they know that they have an intimate union with Him, tend toward Him and belong entirely to Him. They are unfinished, in the process of growth to their fullness. They are finite and subject to temptations. They depend on God’s help in this process. Beauty,

care, joy and happiness surround them.

This anthropology is the basis for our definition of the word ‘joy’ in this reflection. My perspective prioritizes reality, the person considered in his or her totality, thus taking into account his essence, his genuine and original relationship with his Creator and the meaning of his life, his rich emotions as well as his irresistible attraction to spirituality.

We typically define joy as a pleasant and intense feeling that, when it appears, brings a special radiance to the face and expresses itself through exterior signs. It is the sensation of contentment produced by something agreeable. It is a passion full of life that overflows with energy and “*joie de vivre*”. This energy drives human beings, awakens what is alive in them and has healing effects on wounds and offenses. It is a state of the soul accompanied by personal well-being. It is a manifestation of the person, creativity, an expression of a full life, of a healthy, self-confident person in a harmonious relationship with God. All people can experience joy, at times with such intensity that they cannot help express it even in their bodies, actions and movements. This gives us the expression, “leap for joy.”¹

Joy is also “*the response of a person to the quest for meaning.*”² It is therefore accessible to all those who try to be themselves and do everything possible to this end. Aware of being in the image of God, they dare to try to bring this image to its fullest possible completion, commit to their growth process and find the response to the questions, “Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?”

1 . A vast body of work on joy exists. See in particular, KAST, Verena, *Joy, Inspiration and Hope*; EHRENREICH, Barbara, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*; GRÜN, Anselm, *The Art of Joy*; CENCINI, Amedeo, *Joy, salt of the Christian life*. See also Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* (1975).

2. CENCINI, Amedeo, *Joy, salt of the Christian life*.

Focusing life on fullness and therefore being able to taste the joy to which we are called, according to the anthropology that inspires us, requires coming to adopt the appropriate stance and the right attitude regarding the beings that we are. We must accept the challenge, “*You must be born from above.*”³ Some people might be content with joys of lesser intensity, “skin deep” joys, avoiding risk, enjoying what is already attained and investing the least amount of effort. Teilhard de Chardin called people “*ardent*” if they, with full awareness of what they are, choose to savor the “happiness of growth,” of transformation. This is because a happy person is someone who “*without any direct search for happiness, inevitably finds joy as an added bonus in the act of forging ahead and attaining the fullness and finality of his own self.*”⁴

Each person, depending on his formation, motivating values and choices, places the meaning of his life in a perspective that can, or not, connect him with his fullness and create, or not, the corresponding joy. Each person also develops a particular sensibility to be able to enjoy and recognize joy. Something that is more important for one person and is central to his interests will draw his attention to notice any detail that makes it present. What has a less central place will easily pass unnoticed. It is important to attend to and develop sensitivity to joy, choose joy and place in the center of our lives something that will allow us to experience the most sublime joy.

Since the title of today’s topic invites us to explore “living our faith joyfully”, we will keep in mind that the Spirit can give life and strength to the emotional dimension of a person if he accepts the challenge of being “born from above.” Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit that orients life toward fullness. It emanates from love and does not fade with problems. Faith in Jesus Christ situates every human person in this perspective, for He is the way, the truth and the life. He, the image of the invisible God, has come so that

3. John 3:7

4. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, Pierre, *On Happiness*. Collins: London, 1973, p. 23.

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all people might “*have life and have it more abundantly.*”⁵ Free and joyful acceptance of His person creates life, a full, eternal life⁶ from which springs a joy that no one can take away.⁷

2. IN PROCESS TO A LIVING FAITH FULL OF TRUST

Louise de Marillac was a woman of faith. She was born into a noble Catholic family that actively participated in the emerging trend of renewal in the Church in France.

She received Baptism soon after her birth and, with it, the gift of faith. In the Royal Monastery of Saint Louis of Poissy, she enjoyed an excellent education. Following the practices of the time, she learned the truths of the Christian faith, which would serve as criteria for the cultural material integrated in the educational curriculum. The different catechisms in use contained all these truths, explained to a greater or lesser degree depending on the intended public. At that time, some very high quality catechisms were in circulation. In addition to knowledge on basic topics of Christian faith, she contemplated in the Royal Monastery illustrations of the value of charity toward those who are poor. Frescos, stained glass windows, statues, books and manuscripts depicted famous people connected with the monastery, such as Saint King Louis IX, Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Siena, bringing assistance to the poor, clothing them, feeding them, washing their feet and kissing their wounds.⁸ Liturgical and devotional experiences completed this formation. Worship in the Gothic church of the convent was impressive and gave her a sense of the transcendent. Sister Elisabeth Charpy tells us that she received “*a thorough religious formation. She learned to know Jesus Christ, to love Him, to pray to Him, and to serve Him by serving the poor.*”⁹

5. John 10:10

6. cf. John 3:15 and 16

7. John 16:22

8. POINSENET, Dominique, *De la angustia a la santidad [From anxiety to holiness]*, Editorial Studium, Madrid, 1963, p. 24-25.

9. CHARPY, Elisabeth, *Louise de Marillac: Come Winds or High Waters*, trans. Clara Orban and Mary Jo Stein, DePaul University Vincentian Stud-

Already as an adolescent, in the boarding house run by a “pious woman”, her choices oriented her toward spirituality, and she felt an ardent desire to enter the Capuchins, a project that the discernment of her first spiritual director, Honoré de Champigny, would block. Then, with the assistance of her uncles, she married.¹⁰ During her life as a wife and mother, she continued to cultivate an intense spiritual life, dedicating herself to reading, asceticism, prayer and charitable works. Her first biographer tells us that this life style made her “joyous.”¹¹

We could say that she lived and developed a learned and enlightened faith with an ensemble of beliefs, moral behavior and religious practice. Many other women in her social circle lived similarly. However, this “inherited” faith, while highly valuable, would undergo a transformation that would put her entire person to the test.

Moved by the longing for fullness that dwelt in the depths of her being, she remained unsatisfied. She was missing a “something more”. She did not sense the joy of living and longed to be happy. All that up to then was sure for her began to waver. She increased her penitential practices, time dedicated to meditation and recollection, introspection. She turned to her director for advice, but she could not calm her soul. She did not enjoy anything. Her family, social and political circumstances were producing a new situation. First, a critical growth stage occurred, testing her beliefs, her securities, her emotional and intellectual structures, her thought patterns, her self-concept and her image of God. Guided unconsciously by the process of self-development, she dove into the crisis rather than avoiding it. This personal identity crisis appeared as a spiritual crisis and a crisis of faith.

She progressed in self-knowledge. She recognized how her entire person tended toward God with strength and love. She felt “a

ies Institute, Chicago, 2018, p. 9.

10. GOBILLON, Nicolas, *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras*, p. 4

11. GOBILLON, Nicolas, *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras*, p. 5

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strong desire to give [herself] to God”¹², and she tried in the way she had learned up to then, but it seemed that God did not answer her. She longed for something else from life and God. She suffered “discouragement.”¹³ Her uncle Michel advised her not “to force God to grant [her] more graces than He wanted.”¹⁴ He wrote her, “It is good to have the experience that God is not attached to our plans and propositions, and those who find Him are those who seek Him in the way that He wants to communicate Himself and not in the way that they imagine being most useful and profitable for them.”¹⁵ She recalled her unfulfilled youthful desire to enter the Capuchins; observing the illness of her husband and the slow development of her son, she interpreted this as having something to do with the fact of not responding to this initial call. She felt incapable of pleasing God despite her ardent desire to do so. Guilt wracked her. Her “night” became more and more obscure.

In the end, unexpectedly, the *Lumière* of Pentecost filled her with light.¹⁶ On June 4, 1623, Louise understood that something new was emerging in her soul, a presence that “freed” her “mind” of all “doubt” and uncertainty. It inspired “assurance” about the choices she had to make and strengthened her understanding that “it was **God who was teaching**” her these things. She deeply experienced God as love giving Himself, a God who answered questions to which no human person had been able to respond and who satisfied desires that no human person could satisfy, a God who spoke to her, who drew near to her, leaving a mark of His presence, a law of love that would never disappear.

12. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 15b, p. 692

13. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 13, p. 691

14. CHARPY, Elisabeth, *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines. Documents* – Doc. no. 827, p. 977

15. CHARPY, Elisabeth, *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines Documents* – Doc. no. 828, p. 978

16. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 2, p. 1-2

From this profound experience would come what Louise would call a “***lively and trusting faith***”¹⁷, a deeply rooted faith, learned yet touched by the experience of the living God. Trust sustained her faith, a trust that sprung up from within her to welcome and say yes to many events, giving her consent to all that would happen. Her lively faith was like a response to an invitation that intensely seduced her while leaving her full freedom to say yes or no.

All this happened, almost symbolically, on the feast of Pentecost. The Spirit gave rise to a sort of ***new birth***. The Spirit inspired the criteria of authenticity for that experience: the firm and lasting adhesion that Louise offered to this same God incarnate in Jesus Christ.¹⁸ This, like any other manifestation of God over the course of human history, caused her to be “***overjoyed***”¹⁹, have “***great joy***”²⁰, and ***joy that is made complete***.²¹

3. WORKING ON JOY

The fact that the *Lumière* experience was so intense and made her **faith** livelier and more **trusting** did not exempt her from active and trusting collaboration in the growth process. She understood that “***despite [her] misery and powerlessness, He will accomplish all that He desires in [her]***” and that she had to “***dispose [herself] to practice all that He asks of [her]***.”²² This is a useful conviction in the spiritual life: **God does nothing in you without you.**

The first steps on the new path were very rich in gratuitous experiences as well as in trials, efforts and commitments. She relied on the closeness, care, help and skill of Vincent de Paul in all this. Important yet fleeting experiences easily fade if they do not fall on

17. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 716

18. TERESA OF AVILA, *The Book of Life*, Chapter 22. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Complete Works*, Book 2, Chapter 22.

19. Matthew 2:10

20. Luke 24:52

21. cf. John 3:29

22. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 8, p. 717

ground that bears fruit, if they are not cared for and developed. Since joy is a passion full of life, energy and *joie de vivre*, it requires work for it to take root in a person. Joy and enthusiasm are necessary to come to a state of mind favorable for overcoming the difficulties that would occur in her intense spiritual and apostolic work.

Vincent de Paul insistently repeated, “*Be quite cheerful.*”²³ “*Above all, remain in good spirits.*”²⁴ “*Be quite cheerful in the disposition of willing everything that God wills.*”²⁵ Louise tried and began to feel peace and tranquility in her heart. She found the appropriate means for this, “*recalling, as possible, the thoughts we received*” at specific moments or remaining in the “*entire confidence*” that she felt in her heart.²⁶ Even more important were the motivations that Vincent presented her to maintain joy. “*Be very cheerful on your trip, since you have good reason to be so in the work in which Our Lord is employing you.*”²⁷ “*Please live peacefully in this assurance, even, I say, in the joy of a heart that desire to conform itself completely to that of Our Lord.*”²⁸ “*Be quite cheerful, I beg you. Oh, what great reason people of good will have to be cheerful!*”²⁹ The Gospel presents specific experiences of the joy that characterized Jesus. Vincent thus said to her, “*Please take care of your health and honor Our Lord’s cheerfulness of heart.*”³⁰ Since the work was arduous and she was busy about many things, her director advised her “*to procure for yourself the holy joy of your heart by all the relaxation you can possibly take.*”³¹ For her part, she committed to

23. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, L. 23 ; cf. L. 24, 36, 48, 50, 61, 67, 71, 98, 109, 132, 138

24. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 146, L. 97

25. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 36, L. 23

26. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, M. 73, p. 825, A. 19, p. 710

27. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 99, L. 61; cf. L. 132 and 138

28. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 69, L. 41; cf. L. 67

29. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 145, L. 95; cf. L. 219

30. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 162, L. 109

31. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 145, L. 96

working “cheerfully”³² whether in her household work, in her work for those who are poor or in her coming and going in the streets. Her friend and director encouraged her, “keep your spirits up and do what you have to do in a cheerful way.”³³

As some everyday situations were pleasant and other less so, she also worked on paying attention to the feelings that they caused in her. “When pleasant things happen to us or when our undertakings succeed as we wish them to, before abandoning ourselves to the joy of the moment, let us glance interiorly toward God and thank Him for His mercy since it is His love alone which affords us this consolation. Therefore, let us accept it in this light by an act of love.”³⁴

Looking inward gave stability to her emotional life so that, when confusion, pain or dryness appeared, she could remain gentle, serene and peaceful; otherwise, joy would lose its authenticity. The action of the Holy Spirit in her reinforced her inner work and enriched her with His fruits: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”³⁵ This led her to the certainty that “peace of the soul... is essential if we are to please God and to accomplish His holy will.”³⁶

4. “I RESOLVED TO FOLLOW JESUS FILLED WITH HAPPINESS”

The meaningful and joyful encounter that Louise de Marillac experienced on Pentecost 1623 set off a restructuring of her entire person in reference to God incarnate in Jesus, accompanied by an openness to joy. For Louise de Marillac, committing to following Jesus implied living an intense, warm, precious and overflowing joy. This is how she expressed it in her writings. “Because Jesus

32. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 1, p. 690

33. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, 147, L. 98

34. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, M. 73, p. 826

35. Galatians 5:22-23

36. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 66, p. 814

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took our misery upon Himself, it is only reasonable that we should follow Him and imitate His holy, human life. This thought absorbed my mind and moved me to resolve to follow Him wholeheartedly, without any reservation. Filled with consolation and happiness at the thought of being accepted by Him to live my entire life as His follower... ”³⁷

To give a new direction to her life, in 1626 she wrote a document that she called her “*Rule of Life in the World*”.³⁸ She put forth in it the principles for her new life project. It is very significant that she begins with the following words. “*May the desire for holy poverty always live in my heart in such a manner that, freed from all bonds, I may follow Jesus Christ and serve my neighbor with great humility and gentleness.*”

We find ourselves before a woman seduced by a person, His message and His call, captivated by His beauty while finding in Him a source of infinite joy. She perceived a highly active inner movement, which she called “*desire*”, as an emotional pull toward something that attracted her. It gave her soul a lively joy as well as intense energy to achieve it. At many moments, she simply received this “*desire*”: it “*does not come from me.*”³⁹ At other times, it was a *thirst*, a need for something that could add fullness to her life and, consequently, joy and delight.

She needed *freedom* so nothing could impede or hinder this discipleship. She had “*found her treasure*” that up to then had been “*hidden*”. Finding it filled her with joy, and she sold all that she had and decided to “be with Him” “remain in His love”, “follow Him”, “serving her neighbor.” Once again, it was a freely received gift that would “*become in [her] a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*”⁴⁰ Yes, a spring that wells up, a joy that overflows, a

37. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 715

38. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 1, p. 689-691

39. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 715; cf. A. 15b, A. 29, A. 8

40. John 4:14

love that does not pass away. Happiness and joy in life began to settle in her heart.

The relationship that she established with Him appeared with a touching simplicity, candor, joy, freedom and reciprocity. She gave herself, and He received her. God and His creature met in the mutual quest to give, to give of self. *“It seemed to me that our good God was asking it of me. Therefore, I gave Him my full consent to operate in me by His power whatever He willed to see accomplished.”*⁴¹ One day, He asked her for her will, and she *“shall do this by entire confidence and abandonment to His most holy will.”*⁴² She felt *“great consolation”* because *“it is by His goodness and His love alone, that He wills to be [her] strength in the painful circumstances.”*⁴³ During communion one morning, she had the following experience. *“My soul was made to understand that my God wanted to come to me. However, He did not wish to come into some temporary dwelling but to a place that was rightly His and which belonged entirely to Him. Therefore, I could not refuse Him entrance.”*⁴⁴

Another day during a retreat, she was surprised to realize she had been *“continuously sustained by the grace of God. In fact, “it seemed to me that all that I am is but grace. I implored God to draw these graces to Himself and thus I would be totally His.”*⁴⁵ On an extremely cold winter day, she had to set off to visit the Confraternities of Charity in various towns. When she rose that morning, she was afraid to get into the coach because she did not feel well; nonetheless, she felt *“strengthened”*. She attended Eucharist before leaving and wrote, *“I was moved to make an act of faith, and this sentiment stayed with me for a long time. It seemed to me that God would grant me health so long as I believed that He could sustain me, despite all appearances, and that He would do*

41. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 12, p. 720

42. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 19, p. 710

43. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 19, p. 710

44. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 17, p. 697-698

45. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 9, p. 702-703

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so if I often reflected on the faith that enabled Saint Peter to walk on the waters. Throughout my trip, I seemed to be acting without any contribution on my part; and I was greatly consoled by the thought that God wished that, despite my unworthiness, I should help my neighbor to know Him.”⁴⁶ Just a few days passed. She had to visit the Confraternity of Charity of another nearby village. With the greatest unobtrusiveness, simplicity and naturalness, she had another special experience during the Eucharist. “It seemed to me that Our Lord inspired me to receive Him as the Spouse of my soul and that this Communion was a manner of espousal. I felt myself more closely united to Him by this consideration which was extraordinary for me. I also felt moved to leave everything to follow my Spouse; to look upon Him as such in the future; and to bear with the difficulties I might encounter as part of the community of His goods.”⁴⁷

Grace made this encounter beautiful, love made it sacred and joy flooded her soul. She knew in the depths of her heart that this spouse “can neither be corrupted nor deceived. Love alone can win Him.”⁴⁸

In this living encounter with Jesus Christ, He had primacy over anything else that affected Louise. “Willingly must I allow Jesus to take possession of my soul and reign there as King. Thus, I shall preserve the joy I experience in realizing that each of us individually may desire and, indeed, has the power to become His well-beloved.”⁴⁹ She allowed Him to have the initiative in her life.⁵⁰ She wanted to take Him as “the only example”⁵¹ for her life. She drew energy from this experience in order to strive to incarnate the attitudes, feelings and behaviors of Jesus in her own life. In this way, she was gradually transformed in His image by the work of the Holy Spirit. She no longer acted out of her own willfulness

46. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 704-705

47. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 705

48. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 7, p. 699

49. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 715

50. cf. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 14, p. 784-785

51. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 19, p. 710

nor spared herself the effort of putting her will to work to further the change that the Spirit was working in her. She wrote, “*I suddenly felt moved by the desire that Our Lord should come to me and communicate His virtues to me.*”⁵² As another example, “*I prayed for a great love for the humanity of Our Lord as a means for moving me to practice His virtues, especially gentleness, humility, forbearance and love of my neighbor.*”⁵³

Frequently during Christocentric meditation with a more contemplative than logical character, joy and happiness flooded her. She was aware of “*the joy which [she] now [feels]*”⁵⁴ concerning the topic on which she was meditating. So her prayer could continue throughout the day, she wished to “*preserve the joy*”⁵⁵ that she experienced in privileged moments. Perhaps the most noteworthy experience is the one she described in a letter written on an afternoon in August to Vincent de Paul, on the feast of Saint Bartholomew, around 1650. “*My heart is still overflowing with joy on account of the understanding which, I believe, our good God has given me of the words, ‘God is my God,’ and the awareness I had of the glory which the blessed render to Him as a consequence of this truth. Therefore, I cannot help communicating with you this evening to ask you to assist me to profit from this excess of joy and to suggest some practice for me.*” Deeply moved, Vincent answered her the following morning in the margins of the same page on which she had written him. “*Blessed be God, Mademoiselle, for the tenderness with which His Divine Majesty honors you! You must receive it respectfully and devoutly... Oh, what a happiness to have such a paternal Providence watching over you! How that should increase your faith and your confidence in God and lead you to love Him more than ever! ... I will share in your consolation as I intend to share in your cross.*”⁵⁶

52. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 18, p. 825; cf. L. 447, A. 39, A.23, M. 72, A. 71, A. 14

53. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 14, p. 785

54. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 7, 699

55. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 715

56. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 369, p. 341-342

5. WITH PLEASURE AND JOY, OUT OF LOVE, IN THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO ARE POOR

When Louise de Marillac outlined her new life plan, she put forward two goals, joined by the coordinating conjunction “and”: “*follow Jesus Christ and serve my neighbor.*” Uniting two similar expressions on a linguistic level reflects Louise’s conviction that the two realities behind those words are intimately and inseparably connected, equal, because of the mystery of Christ’s identification with people: “*you did it to me.*”⁵⁷ The similarity between this expression and the Gospel of Mark, “*He appointed [them] that they might be with Him and he might send them forth to preach,*”⁵⁸ is undeniable. We will never know if she intentionally drew inspiration from it or if the reconfiguration that the Spirit was producing in her life put her in direct contact with the content of the faith found in this Gospel passage.

We have already reflected on the joy that Louise found in her experience of following Jesus, and we have described the effect that it had in her intimately “*being with Him.*” This would be the individual aspect of the Kingdom of God, the action of God in the transformation of a person to the point of reaching his or her fullest potential. We will now venture into discovering the joy that emerged from her experience of “*being sent*” to build the Kingdom in its social aspect. The process of discipleship creates new people who are able to build an alternative to a society based on injustices created by selfishness, the ambition for wealth and the thirst for power and prestige. God’s action in these people committed to the Gospel and anointed by the Spirit contributes to the emergence of a new, more human society.

Imitating Jesus Christ and in the process of making these attitudes her own, Louise also went from village to village, and her presence among the people was always “*good news.*” It all began simply

57. Matthew 25:31-46

58. Mark 3:14

and joyfully. “Do you feel like coming?” Vincent de Paul, who was in Montmirail, asked her. She accepted, and he replied, “Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally, that He may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works.”⁵⁹ This would be the first of countless apostolic travels, initially to the area surrounding Paris and then spreading out until her horizon extended to the most distant areas. She went like Jesus, “teaching and healing the sick”, “teaching how to go about living a [Christian] life”⁶⁰ based on the Gospel. “I was greatly consoled by the thought that God wished that... I should help my neighbor to know Him.”⁶¹ She considered herself “most happy... to be included”⁶² according to her means in the service of those who are poor. She readily attributed the same feeling to others. “What a happy beginning!” she exclaimed when the Sisters were assigned to begin a foundation. “How happy you are.”⁶³

Louise de Marillac lived out her commitment to the Kingdom in community, a broad Christian community connected to the local Church. She began to collaborate with Vincent de Paul and the women of the Confraternities of Charity, first in towns and then with the women of the parishes of Paris and the important Confraternity of Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu later. She felt the same fascination for building Jesus’ Kingdom as she felt for Jesus Himself. Her joyful, determined and enthusiastic attitude was contagious for her collaborators.

59. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, L. 38 and 39, p. 64-65

60. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, cf. L. 124b, L. 196b. See also L. 276, L. 368, A. 84, A. 64

61. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 704-705. This is not the time to explain extensively the social work carried out by Louise de Marillac because our topic is joy. This work has real importance. See FLINTON, Margaret, *Louise de Marillac: Social aspects of her work*.

62. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 49, p. 60

63. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 174, p. 197

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As the service that the Confraternities of Charity offered those who were poor inspired people's admiration, many young women sought her out in order to be with her, learn from her and be sent out to serve them. "*I'd very much like to serve the poor in that way,*"⁶⁴ Marguerite Naseau had said in a very evangelical way. She was the first to show the way to the other Daughters of Charity. "*When I reflect on the happiness that you all enjoy, I praise Divine Providence for having chosen you. Make good use of this gift, and please God by serving your masters and His dear members with devotion, gentleness and humility.*"⁶⁵

From the beginning, joy would be the predominant emotional state of Louise and especially the Sisters because they went to those who were poor "*willingly and joyously for His love.*"⁶⁶ They formed a community driven by a summons: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.*"⁶⁷ They felt happy enjoying, delighting in and shining forth the joy of the Kingdom. The words Sister Andrée pronounced before her death are admirable. "*I have no anxiety, no remorse except for having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor.*" Vincent was with her and asked, "*Eh quoi! Sister, is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?*" She answered, "*No, Monsieur, nothing at all, other than that I had too much satisfaction when I used to go through those villages to see those good people; I used to fly, I was so overjoyed to serve them.*" Vincent related this to the Ladies of Charity and was astonished to see the joy this story caused them. One, "*clapping her hands before all of them, couldn't refrain from exclaiming that she had never heard anyone say something like that.*"⁶⁸

This was evangelical joy, the joy that is the fruit of the Spirit and that Jesus of Nazareth promised to those who would respond to His

64. VINCENT DE PAUL, CCD IX, p. 473. Conference of February 24, 1653

65. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 547, p. 81

66. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 402, p. 450

67. Matthew 6:33

68. VINCENT DE PAUL, CCD IX, p. 537. Conference of May 25, 1654

call, choose to follow Him, adopt His project and clothe themselves with His Spirit. He said that they would be happy. The presence in the Church of France of Louise de Marillac and the community that she led communicated the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. She chose poverty in order to have greater freedom to follow Jesus. Her only desire was to do God's will, the plan that He had for her and for the society in which she lived.

Her relationships with the people, the Sisters, her collaborators and the poor were those of gentleness, compassion and mercy. All of her activity contributed to creating a way of living together that would establish peace in relationships among people through closeness and the assistance she offered. Louise, thanks to her pure heart, saw God in those who were poor and served Him in serving them. In its novelty, this life style and activity proclaimed that Kingdom is for the poor who suffer social exclusion, marginalization, abuse, hunger and illness because of their condition of poverty. They had the experience that God drew close to them to save them, alleviating their pain and consoling them in their sorrow. Louise's dedication to the lowliest people drew her contemporaries' attention to a new earth where God lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. Although many people admired this way of life with its evident joy and love, others were suspicious, jealous, in opposition or rejected them. They laughed at them, and villagers slandered them. One parish priest prevented Louise from remedying problems in the operations of the Confraternity of Charity in his town; a bishop even tried to keep her from going through the villages in his diocese. It is understandable that Louise de Marillac, the Sisters and their collaborators experienced the joy of the Kingdom, rejoicing because their names are written in heaven.⁶⁹

6. "I WRITE IN ORDER TO REJOICE WITH YOU" (L. 182)

The new community in which Louise de Marillac lived, developed

69. Cf. Luke 10:20

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and expressed her faith lived according to the paradigm of the first community of Jesus. She said, “Yes,” to a call of discipleship in community in a place dedicated to helping her neighbor.⁷⁰ Therefore, her relationships, primarily with the Sisters as well as with other people, entered fully into her faith response.

Her correspondence reveals relationships as friendships and a source of rejoicing. We could say that while it is certain that she had a great moral authority with her correspondents and in fact exercised a role of animator, formator or collaborator, the bond that she established with them placed her very naturally at their level. She was very empathetic, and feelings of respect, gratitude, affection, appreciation and joy governed her relationships. Let us now explore how joy appears in her relationships with those closest to her.

We have seen how Vincent de Paul helped her to work on joy. She felt enticed by his entirely Gospel-based, free, committed, joyful and enthusiastic life style. This way of existing, this attraction, began to exercise an irresistible influence on Louise’s spirit. Vincent discovered her values and the potential that she had to share in the principal task of his life: the service of those who are poor. For Louise, being able to turn to Vincent and speak with him was very valuable. He also experienced positive feelings of well-being and joy. He wrote, “*When I have the pleasure of seeing you...*” “*If I come early this evening, I shall have the happiness of a word with you.*”⁷¹ He recognized her qualities, the effort she was making at her conversion and her achievements. “*You are a skillful woman,*”⁷² he told her and encouraged her in difficulties. Joy springs forth from their meeting while a sense of unity comes out clearly. “*We shall have the happiness of seeing you in Montmirail.*” Obviously, these are not superficial feelings; both of them had evolved to the

70. Cf. Mark: To be with Him and to preach. Cf. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 2, p. 1.

71. VINCENT DE PAUL, CCD I, L. 22 and L. 38

72. VINCENT DE PAUL, CCD I, L. 74, p. 114; L. 205

point of remaining focused on what is most sublime in life. With her, he discovered that joy is the inner state that pleases God, and from Vincent she received the strength to increase it in her heart. *“Be quite cheerful,”* he wrote her, *“in the disposition of willing everything that God wills. And because it is His good pleasure that we remain always in the holy joy of His love, let us remain in it and attach ourselves to it inseparable in this world, so that we may be one day but one in Him.”*⁷³

The Abbé de Vaux is another person with whom she had a very close relationship that brought her joy. She fully trusted him to accompany the Sisters in the community of Angers. She felt happy when he informed her that he had recovered from some illness and when she learned how he helped the Sisters overcome difficulties in community life. She rejoiced at what he wrote in his letters about the Daughters of Charity.⁷⁴ She was overjoyed to be able to see him and speak a little with him because they were very much in harmony with each other. *“I cannot tell you how pleased I was to hear that your sister is in Paris.”*⁷⁵

Her letters to the Daughters of Charity spread out in tiny communities across France were also a source of joy. She knew them very well; she knew their excellent qualities, the attitudes with which they faced their service and community life, as well as their weaknesses; we could almost think that she anticipated their mistakes.⁷⁶ When she had the opportunity to share about her state of mind, her way of life and difficulties that arose, she gave herself over to a lively and enriching encounter. Although at times she felt concern, above all joy flowed from her loving heart.

73. VINCENT DE PAUL, *CCD I*, L. 23, p. 36

74. cf. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 15, L. 17, L. 18, L. 20, L. 44, L. 103, L. 106, L. 56b, L. 45, L. 49, L. 55, L. 63, L. 80, L. 84, L. 99, L. 182, L. 494, L. 452

75. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 103, p. 36, cf. L. 106, p. 38: *“She brought me great joy in the hope that we might have the honor of seeing you here this winter.”*

76. cf. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 23

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Merely sitting down at her desk to open the letters brought by messengers or to begin to write caused her great joy.⁷⁷ To bring this out, she used expressions like “*much joy*”, “*great pleasure*”, “*great happiness*,” “*great consolation*”, “*very noticeable consolation*”, “*satisfaction*”, depending on the emotional effect of reading the letter. The letters made her “*grateful*,” and she described them as “*appreciated*”; they “*greatly pleased her*”. Sometimes her emotions were very intense; her heart overflowed, and she was at a loss for words to describe her feelings. “*I cannot tell you how consoled my heart was when I received your last dear letter*” (L. 441).

When the Sisters’ messages freed her of some suffering or informed her of good news, she was wild with joy. “*Your confidence in speaking so affectionately to us brought me more consolation than I can ever express.*”⁷⁸ She rejoiced that the Sisters who eagerly awaited the letters she wrote finally “*have started to receive ours.*”⁷⁹ She further rejoiced that some Sisters served as intermediaries so others would receive her letters despite difficulties in delivery.⁸⁰ She was happy when they sent her “*detailed news.*”⁸¹ Anticipating her future joy as she expected a letter, she wrote, “*I am eager to have more detailed news of you... I am already beginning to rejoice in the consolation I will experience because of the wonderful things she will tell me.*”⁸² “*I had been longing for the consolation of your dear letter and I thank you for it.*”⁸³

She was never happy with the absence of news. She therefore insisted that those reluctant to write her do so, indicating the re-

77. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*. See Letters 36, 441, 153, 154, 227, 320, 219, 132, 252, 293, 306b, 494, 210, 214, 351, 377, 363, 385, 440, 496, 495, 474, 468, 499, 547b, 516, 525, 545b, 546, 577b, 586, 589, 607, 617, 634, 647, 647b, 651

78. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 547b, p. 526

79. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 154, p. 167

80. cf. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 440, L. 496

81. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 377, p. 406, L. 499, L. 586

82. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 586, p. 606

83. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 607, p. 627; cf. L. 152

sulting joy. *“I am sure that Sister Louise would like to write to us. A few words in her own hand would console me.”*⁸⁴ *“It has been a long time since I have had the consolation of receiving letters from you, and just as long since I have written to you. My heart has truly scolded me for it many times.”*⁸⁵ *“But why does Sister Anne not write to me? I would be so glad if she did! No matter how bad her handwriting may be, I beg you, Sister Turgis, to have her write to me.”*⁸⁶ *“However, how is it that you do not write to me, Sister Anne? Oh, I beg you to write to me yourself and to tell me all your secrets.”*⁸⁷

In the joy of a shared, relaxed friendship, the intensity with which she expressed the feeling arising from the sharing brought out the joy experienced. She wrote them *“in order to rejoice with you on account of the graces that His goodness has bestowed on both of you. You have no idea of the consolation that Monsieur Vincent and I had in reading your letter. I hope that you are experiencing the same thing in your hearts, my very dear Sisters.”*⁸⁸ *“Our sisters will receive the consolation of something tangible when they hear read the dear letter your Charity took the time to write to them. I will ask Monsieur Vincent’s permission to read it at the next conference.”*⁸⁹

The health of those dear to her concerned her and brought her joy. *“You may be certain of how happy I will be when I receive reassurances about your health.”*⁹⁰ She was *“delighted”*⁹¹ and had a Mass said *“to thank God”*⁹² for the restored health of a Sister. *“Nothing gives me greater joy than to learn about each one of you,*

84. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 149, p. 160

85. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 166, p. 195

86. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 166, p. 195

87. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 182, p. 206

88. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 182, p. 206

89. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 226, p. 264

90. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 15, p. 23

91. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 223; cf. L. 56b, 229, 214, 582, 594

92. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 223

Finally, the Company and the good that the Sisters did in their various works satisfied her capacity to rejoice. “*This evening I had a thought which warmed my heart: since by the grace of God, they are better now than they were at the beginning, after the few years that I hope to remain on earth, the one whom God will send them will draw upon them even greater blessings by her good example. This is what I desire with all my heart.*”⁹⁴ She rejoiced that the Sisters were happy and overcoming trials and difficulties.⁹⁵ “*O my dear Sisters, it seems to me that you will be living in great union and cordiality because the guidance of Divine Providence has placed you together.*”⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, states that an ongoing call to joy rises from the human heart as a “*presentiment of the divine mystery.*” We should pay attention to this call. “*God disposes the mind and heart of His creature to meet joy, at the same time as truth.*”⁹⁷ This latent call in human hearts runs throughout human history in every culture and religious tradition.

Poets, musicians, artists and simple people have sung the joy that comes from God. I can be no less than overwhelmed when I realize that, responding to this call to sing joy, Johann Sebastian Bach composed his chorale *Jesus bleibet meine Freude* (*Jesus, Joy of Man’s Desiring*), which became the most famous and beloved movement

93. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 468, p. 507; cf. L. 229, L. 582, L. 594

94. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 7b, p. 42

95. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings*, cf. L. 18

96. LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writings* L. 270, p. 321; cf. L. 318, L. 480, L. 551

97. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 5

of all his cantatas.⁹⁸ Ludwig van Beethoven, seduced by this same joy, was inspired by it to produce *An die Freude* (*Ode to Joy*), the melody that best rendered the poem by Friedrich von Schiller.⁹⁹

Perhaps in our times more than in others, people are longing for happiness. When this call is not extinguished, the mind and heart open paths to seek it. Success comes to those who follow their instinct and do not rest until they find the sources from which authentic joy flows, the most sublime joy. The concrete discovery of who we are and the meaning of our lives allows us to enter into the dynamic of joy. Louise de Marillac discovered this call within herself and, guided by it, set off. She discovered the truth for her life: following, imitating and becoming one with Jesus Christ. Joy ran out to meet her until the end of her life when it could be said of her, *“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”*¹⁰⁰

This afternoon, we have the opportunity to hear what Vincent de Paul said to the Sisters who were speaking about the virtues of their Foundress. *“I ask you, beginning right now, Sisters, to renew the resolution you’ve made to give yourselves to God once more. If you’re faithful to God and faithful to the observance of the Rule, Sisters, what joy you’ll give to Mlle Le Gras.”*¹⁰¹

Sister Carmen URRIZBURU
Daughter of Charity

98. The words of the cantata are: *“Jesus shall remain my joy, my heart’s comfort and balm. Jesus will defend me from all suffering. He is the strength of my life, the joy and the light of my eyes, the treasure and the delight of my soul. Therefore, I do not want to let Jesus out of my heart and my sight.”*

99. The song concludes: *“Brothers, above the starry canopy there must dwell a loving father: Do you fall in worship, you millions? World, do you know your creator? Seek Him in the heavens; above the stars must he dwell!”*

100. Galatians 2:20

101. VINCENT DE PAUL, CCD X, p. 596-597. Conference of August 27, 1660

Youth ministry seen from
the perspective of vocation:

“Called to freedom and the quest for vocation”

CHRIST IS ALIVE

Pope Francis’ first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), contains an important principle: time is superior to space. *“Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces”* (EG 223). The long journey of the Synod and of the publication of *Christus Vivit* (CV) is an example of openness to a process that will change us and that cannot stop. Placing young people at the center of the discourse means opening up to novelty and newness and bringing different generations into dialogue with each other, a dialogue that changes both those who speak and those who listen.

“Dear young people, my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or fearful... The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us” (CV 299). The final words of the Apostolic Exhortation, the long letter that Pope Francis addresses to young people, gives us a key for reading it. They stress the Church’s esteem for young people, the need for their presence and purity, the joy of seeing them go before us and the request for their patience if we adults sometimes go forward slowly. The Pope’s text speaks to young people but also to the entire People of God since his reflection on young people challenges all of us. He speaks to young people with the language of youth but without claiming to be young in order to help everyone be on the same wavelength and look at young people with God’s eyes.

He reminds us that we are sometimes tempted to make a long list of the shortcomings of young people today, and while we may be applauded for that, the result is an ever-greater distance. Personally, the phrase that I hear most frequently at meetings and various occasions when we speak about young people is, “Well, there are also good things.” In an overwhelmingly negative reading – they are fickle, weak, undisciplined, they cut corners, they are incapable of assuming responsibilities, etc. – we admit some positive signs. There is some good, and often this “good” is what is most similar to our customs and values.

In contrast, the regard of someone who is father, mother and guide is able “*to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognize potential where others see only peril... to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young*” (CV 67). We hear an echo of the words of Saint John Bosco, widely considered the father and teacher of youth. “*In every young person... a point of goodness is accessible, and it is the primary duty of the educator to discover that spot, that sensitive chord of the heart.*”

It is only with this positive and empathetic perspective on young people that we can enter into the spirit of the exhortation and be comfortable with language that may seem unusual in an official document. For example, “*As members of the Church, we should not stand apart from others*” (CV 36); Mary is “*the ‘influencer’ of God*” (CV 44); “*Life is not a salvation up ‘in the cloud’ and waiting to be downloaded*” (CV 252), etc.

1. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SYNOD

The Apostolic Exhortation comes to us as the final piece, which specifically impels us to act, at the end of a long process begun in 2016 when Pope Francis chose the theme for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment”. Since then, there have been many documents, questionnaires, meetings and study sessions in which

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young people and adults, Christians and non-Christians from all over the world have participated. The Synodal Assembly in October 2018 was an important piece of a process that had already begun and that will continue in the action and commitment of each of us.

Christus Vivit quotes many passages from the Final Document of the Synod and invites a serious reading of it. At the same time, *Christus Vivit* is its own original script and speaks passionately to young people.

In order to understand the spirit behind the process that led to the Apostolic Exhortation, I think that it is useful to take some time to examine the experience of the Synodal Assembly and its distinctive features.

The shepherds and their hearts

At the beginning of the Synod in October, the hall was full, with about three hundred bishops and auditors, representatives of the whole world gathered in a single room! Many people thought that the bishops do not know young people and are distant, and perhaps I thought so as well. However, all it took was for them to start talking, and the room immediately warmed up. It began to quiver with life. The bishops whom we heard over the long and intense days of listening love young people and bear witness to a Church that wants to be a mother and a sister, is engaged, wants to measure up to youth and is not afraid of being disturbed and moved by them. Throughout the Synod, we listened attentively and respectfully to each other. I would also say we listened with cordiality and kindness, making sure to have times of silence between speakers to allow the words to resonate in hearts and to integrate them. We savored the beauty of being Church. Moments of frank discussion and expression of divergent ideas were not lacking. The entire assembly grew on certain questions thanks to the contrasts. Personally, I feel I made progress and changed some convictions that I had prior to coming to the Synod.

The most beautiful experience of the Synod was to contemplate the work of the Holy Spirit and see how certain motions took form. A word would resonate in one or more people, silence would allow it to settle, one or more responses would follow, even after a certain time, those marked by experiences or provocations. A path that seemed blocked in the Assembly would regain life in the groups or vice-versa. Several times, Pope Francis advised us to listen more carefully to what we felt was further from our personal opinion, and perhaps that non-judgmental listening created the space needed for seeds of newness to sprout.

The young people

Young people are our sacred ground. I often hear this phrase, and Pope Francis mentions it in no. 67 of the Exhortation as well. “*Each young person’s heart should thus be considered ‘holy ground’, a bearer of seeds of divine life.*” It was only during the Synod, I think, that I really understood the meaning of this expression, especially when we, the Sisters, invited young people to have lunch with us. In the Synod hall, we were seated alongside each other, but it is difficult to really get to know each other in the midst of the work. We thus decided to begin sharing at table. In this way, the young people became encounters, histories and stories for us.

Safa comes from Iraq. He spoke to God for the first time when he was kidnapped and almost killed. He does not want to leave his country and wants to bring the love of God to other young people. Oksana experiences the reality of belonging to a minority Church in Russia. Yadira in Chicago helps single mothers who have immigrated to the United States.

Other young people told stories of violence in their families as well as of reconciliation. They strive to prevent it in future generations. I listened to them with admiration: their lives are spaces of salvation, and their faith is a call to conversion. Meeting them is entering into a sacred space and having an experience of God.

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These young people made a critical contribution to the work of the Synod. Their presence was fundamental. They made their voice heard. Above all, they asked us to be there, to take time for them, to be with them in informal ways. They wanted people who listened to them, and not organizers busy elsewhere. They did not want answers; they knew well that they had to look for answers within themselves. They asked us to help them to bring out their questions and name their concerns. They wanted us to walk a part of the road with them. They also reminded us that we all mature and grow in a community. What kind of community do they want? An open, joyful, united missionary community where it is clear that we love one another, where everyone can be him or herself and know that he or she has a place in the other person's heart. They made us understand that they are fully capable of assuming responsibility. Indeed, their ideas are sometimes clearer than ours, but they do not want to act alone; they need us. Pope Francis quotes a proverb in his Exhortation. "*If the young had knowledge and the old strength, there would be nothing they could not accomplish*" (CV 191). In light of my experience and encounter with the young people, I realize that sometimes even the opposite is true: young people see clearly, but they do not have the possibility to act and to make a difference.

The Final Document and the Exhortation

The Final Document is the fruit of listening, comparison, discernment and prayer. It is divided into three parts. The first concerns the reality and condition of young people today, the second attempts to interpret that reality in the light of the Gospel and the faith and the third brings out possible paths forward for a young Church adapted to youth. It is a very rich document that tried to bring together petitions and requests and summarize the road traveled during the long journey of the Synod, from the announcement of the theme up to October 27, 2018. The particularity and richness of the synodal discussions are evident and easily understandable by comparing the Final Document with the *Instrumentum Labo-*

ris, the document on which we worked during October. In fact, a comparative reading of the two documents brings out what the Synod adopted from earlier work as well as new things, the result of dialogue and communal discernment. The Apostolic Exhortation continually quotes the Final Document, highlighting certain intuitions throughout it and inviting a deeper reading for a fuller context, enriched by the voice of all those who contributed to the process, including non-Catholic young people, who brought out new questions. Pope Francis thus wishes to address his personal and direct message to young people, leaving everyone the task of going more deeply into what emerged from the Synod in its totality.

2. ASPECTS OF THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

The nine chapters that make up the Exhortation offer a logical development that begins with young people: what the Word of God has to say about young people, Jesus ever young and youth today as the “now” of God. It then moves on to proclaiming the Gospel message, paths of youth, intergenerational relationships and pastoral ministry to come to the theme of vocation and discernment. Now, we will take up some ideas that summarize the Exhortation’s message.

What kind of Church?

The theme of a stronger presence of women in the Church, in line with greater reciprocity, arose during the work of the Synod, not always in a peaceful way, such that during a festive evening of thanksgiving, the young people present at the Synod addressed the women participating as auditors, calling them the “Synod Mothers”. Their greeting made everyone smile, breaking the tension. The Final Document invites us to reflect on how fruitful male-female reciprocity could be in all areas. *“The relation between man and woman is understood in terms of a vocation to live together in reciprocity and in dialogue, in communion and in fruitfulness (cf. Gen 1:27-29; 2:21-25) in every area of human experience: life as*

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a couple, work, education and so on. God has entrusted the earth to their covenant” (Final Document, FD 13). The final statement is startling: the earth is not entrusted to men, understood to refer to human beings, but to the covenant between men and women. A young Church always has “open doors” (CV 234) for everyone because “All the young, without exception, are in God’s heart and thus in the Church’s heart” (CV 235).

What kind of pastoral ministry?

Pope Francis indicates the model for youth ministry, which is inevitably vocational (CV 254), by the icon chosen during the Synod, that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

We read in the Final Document, *“Jesus walks with these two disciples who have not grasped the meaning of what happened to him, while they are moving away from Jerusalem and from the community. So as to be in their company, He walks alongside them. He asks them questions and He listens patiently to their version of events, so as to help them recognize what they are experiencing. Then, with affection and energy, He proclaims the Word to them, leading them to interpret the events they have experienced in the light of the Scriptures” (FD 4). Walk with young people, journey with them, even if they are going in the wrong direction, ask questions, question them, listen to them and then proclaim. Proclaim what? Proclaim the three fundamental points of which chapter four reminds us: God is love, Christ saves us, He is alive, and He is here with us. “Because He lives, there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life and that all our struggles will prove worthwhile” (CV 127).*

“Youth ministry” we read in the Exhortation, “has to be synodal; it should involve a ‘journeying together’” (CV 206), where no one is excluded or excludes himself. “Synodality” was a feature present throughout the process of the Synod, as a renewed understanding of the Church about itself.

Indeed, the young people awakened the participants' awareness of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church. A missionary synodality makes it possible to value all the charisms given by the Spirit and calls for co-responsibility. *"We recognize in this experience a fruit of the Spirit which continually renews the Church and calls her to practice synodality as a way of being and acting, promoting the participation of all the baptized and of people of good will, each according to his age, state of life and vocation"* (FD 119). As an expression of a synodal Church, youth ministry necessarily must take this form. Among the courses of action suggested by Pope Francis are outreach, the ways for proclaiming the Gospel, and *"growth, the way to help those who have already had that experience to mature in it"* (CV 209). As far as outreach is concerned, clearly young people are capable of finding ways, and they need the space to find the most appropriate paths. In terms of growth, it is important not to confuse it with indoctrination. *"Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life"* (CV 212).

In the complexity of today's world, maturation to become adult Christians requires growth in fraternal love, offering young people an experience of being "at home" in communities that are *"joyful, free, fraternal and committed"* (CV 220). Becoming adult lay Christians in the faith does not mean "doing" things or having roles in the Church, but being witnesses of the risen Lord wherever we live and work. In the Final Document, the Synod offers a valuable insight about extended life in common that offers *"prolonged detachment from habitual environments and relationships, and it should be built around at least three indispensable elements: an experience of fraternal life shared with older formators that is essential, simple and respectful of the common home; an apostolic proposal that is strong and significant, to be lived together; an offer of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life"* (FD 161). By such living in common, fraternal love can grow and the soil can mature for informed life choices governed by the logic

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of gift of self, even in the highest form of charity, represented by a social and political involvement. “*The lay vocation is directed above all to charity within the family and to social and political charity*” (CV 168).

Vocation and discernment

During the Synod, discussions on the topics of vocation and accompaniment were very lively. The scope was quite vast. We went from those who described vocation as God’s plan that He has dreamed for each person from all eternity and which each person is called to accept, to those who affirmed that the only call is the call to holiness. The Assembly rejected the idea of thinking of vocation as a pre-written script, a prepackaged task, as well as that of an unscripted theatrical improvisation. “*Since God calls us to be friends and not servants (cf. Jn 15:13), our choices make a real contribution to the historical unfolding of his loving plan*” (FD 78).

Pope Francis dedicates an entire chapter of the Exhortation to the topic of vocation. Before this chapter, he repeatedly stresses the unique and special contribution that each one of us can offer through his or her life on this earth. “*Your life ought to be a prophetic stimulus to others and leave a mark on this world, the unique mark that only you can leave. Whereas if you simply copy someone else, you will deprive this earth, and heaven too, of something that no one else can offer*” (CV 162). Life is a fundamental and exclusive contribution in its participation in God’s work of creation. It is in the relationship with God, who interweaves His love story with our personal stories (cf. CV 252), that our uniqueness emerges.

In this sense as well, the vocation of a profession takes on its full importance. In the Exhortation, we find very beautiful passages on the meaning of work (CV 268-273) as a continuation of the creating work of God, a participation in a great project of transforming the world. At the same time, it recognizes current difficulties and reaffirms that, even in changes made or to come, the dignity of

those who work should always be at the center of political and economic choices.

3. WHAT NOW?

The synodal process seems to have concluded, sealed by the Apostolic Exhortation. One phase has ended, of course, that of listening, research, study, dialogue and discernment. A new phase is opening, the reason for the Synod and for which the Church reveals itself fundamentally and truly synodal: moving forward together to give life to the words of *Christus Vivit* and all that went before it. It is not a matter of organizing meetings and in-depth studies, even if this could be useful, but of accepting to be touched and understanding what God, young people and our times are asking of us as well as what we have to offer and ask of young people.

During his reflection at Lateranense Pontifical University on March 26, 2019, Pope Francis invited everyone to interpret “*three harmonious languages: the language of the mind, the language of the heart, and the language of the hands so that we think what we feel and do, we feel what we think and do, and we do what we feel and think.*” This is fundamentally what happened during the Synodal Assembly as the most beautiful ideas were born of reflections (mind) on accounts of practical experiences (hands) perceived in an emotional way that moved others (heart). This is the path that awaits us. We must move and act, connecting the head and the heart.

On this path, closeness is essential; otherwise, we limit ourselves to principles that, out of context, can distance us. Psalm 145 has a verse that is often used in education: “*One generation praises your deeds to the next*” (Ps 145:4). This psalm is interpreted in the sense of passing on wisdom, content, traditions, accomplishments and dreams from a prior generation to one that follows it. Here, however, I would venture a different interpretation. Even the new generation should tell the works of God to the generation that came before it. We should be capable of reading with the eyes of

Called to freedom and the quest for vocation

wisdom, not just in sociological ways, and read in a way that does not limit us to the here and now but projects us forward in history, in the succession of generations that is the mystery of God's love for humankind.

If creation is a perfect work because it is not finished, if the Spirit makes all things new and leads us little by little to the fullness of truth, if God does not stop speaking, then there is something for younger generations to tell us in this sense. In that way, narration and listening become reciprocal, symbols of this covenant between men and women, young people and adults, to whom the earth has been entrusted.

Sister Alessandra SMERILLI
Daughter of Mary-Auxiliatrice

*Session for English-speaking Sisters
at the Motherhouse,
January 13-25, 2019*

The Joy of Being Vincentian: Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment



Let us dare generously:

- *to strengthen a vocation culture through our attractive and evangelizing witness;*
- *to open up our local communities to young people in order to offer opportunities for sharing, for prayer and for concrete service of persons who are poor; to accompany them and to reflect with them on their experiences of faith and service;*
- *to take a more active part in ministry to young people and families within parishes and faith groups, etc;*
- *to participate in the New Evangelization through pastoral ministry and the service of charity, which proclaims God's love for persons who are poor (IAD, page 24).*

*News
from the
Provinces*

To respond to the call from the Inter-Assemblies Document to take responsibility for being involved in vocation and young adult ministry, General Councillor Sister Marie Raw invited the Visitatrixes of the Provinces of Ireland, Australia, Great Britain, Elizabeth Ann Seton and St. Louise-USA to name

Sisters' Testimonies

Sisters to participate in a two-week session entitled “The Joy of Being Vincentian: Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment.” Twenty-eight Sisters gathered at the Motherhouse on January 13, 2019, to pray about and process a variety of topics related to young adults and vocational discernment. Ten high-quality presenters stimulated our reflection.

The first presenter, Sister Lynne Barron, FCJ (Faithful Companions of Jesus), focused on the importance of discernment, providing an excellent foundation based on the dynamic of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: God is present and active in the lives of all people, and people have the capacity to sense God’s actions. Sister Lynne reminded us that God is in the facts: opportunities, talents, relationships, dreams, family circumstances, etc. Using these facts and listening to God’s voice, we are able to make decisions, and decisions free us. We should constantly ask ourselves:

- Do I want what God wants?
- Do I want God to want what I want?

We know that doing the will of God was a preoccupation of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. The more intimate they became with Jesus, the more important it was that every decision they made conformed to what they believed God wanted.

The final section of Sister Lynne’s presentation was on desolation and consolation. She urged us to look for consolation in discerning God’s will; when our hearts are open, God can encourage, comfort and enlighten us. This leads to an increase in faith, hope and love, allowing us to discern what is life-giving and how we can give life to others.

In the second presentation, Mr. Gerard Gallagher challenged us to learn the language of young adults in order to understand it and invite young people to come to know Christ. After providing a short history of the characteristics of young adults from the 1960s through our day, he encouraged us to discern how best we

could accompany young people, who are often on the periphery of our Church. We need to assist them in stepping forward so that together we can decide how to best move into our future Church. Mr. Gallagher described how Pope Francis, like Pope John Paul II, reaches out to the young by expressing confidence in them and encouraging them not to be afraid to allow Christ into all areas of their lives. His final challenge to us: “*Be present! Hang out! Listen! Be non-judgmental! Encourage the young to take action.*”

Our third speaker, Leonard J. DeLorenzo, doctor in theology, used the Scripture passages of the Annunciation and the Road to Emmaus as springboards to help us understand how to “Empower young Catholics for life’s big decisions.” His presentation was divided into four parts:

**Hear the Word of God* through silence and reflection, memory and narrativity *and act on it* through discipline and mercy, freedom and sacrifice.

**Reasons why is it so hard to hear and act today.* Streaming time; Twitter and Tinder; power browsing instead of reading; multi-tasking; burnout and loneliness...

**Forming young people to hear the Word.* This requires discovering the values of deceleration, patience, and “immersive attention”, which makes it possible to look from within and contemplate.

**Empowering young people to act on God’s Word.* This requires practice and patience, which will lead to holiness.

Doctor DeLorenzo’s presentation was enhanced by practical examples from his interaction with students at the University of Notre Dame and his references to holy historic figures like Saints Thérèse of Lisieux, Maximilian Kolbe and Mother Teresa.

In his very entertaining presentation, Mr. David Wells reminded us that no one is attracted to misery and that the world needs the

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joy of the Daughters of Charity. He referred to Robert McGee's book *The Search for Significance* on the need to see our true value through the eyes of Christ. McGee believes that young people live with four "lies" that cause them to believe:

- that they must achieve and prove their worth before they can be valuable;
- that their achievement must be recognized by others in order for it to be real;
- that their failures evidence their true value;
- that they are what they are and cannot change.

Our call as Church is to help dispute these "lies" and accompany young people to become who God created them to become. Mr. Wells cautioned us to just love young people and not to look for the finished product.

Mrs. Sarah Burrows, a young woman who attended the Vatican Pre-Synod Gathering and our fifth speaker, shared that the keyword for the Synod was "listening". The Bishops' Conferences chose 300 people from all over the world to gather in Rome to have deep, meaningful conversations about young people. Sarah Burrows was touched by the honesty and the courage of young people who spoke from their hearts about building a new culture in the Church that would provide the very diverse population of our world a sense of being "at-home" there. Participants in the Synod expressed the importance of Catholics going where young people are, getting to know them, meeting them where they are and forming relationships with them. The young people who joined us for this presentation - Colm O'Rourke, Martin Byrne, Eoghan Geoghegan, Roy Colaco, Dervila McMorro and Jennifer Raw - affirmed the beliefs of the Synod participants and greatly enriched the sharing in our small groups, bringing a fresh perspective to the information the group was processing.

Our sixth speaker, Bishop Ralph Heskett, CSSR (Redemptorist), provided us with "an inside view" of the Synod itself by explaining

the two-year process that Pope Francis had used to obtain first-hand information from young people, those who minister to young people and Church leaders from throughout the world. These contributions were collated into a working document, which the Synod participants worked through paragraph by paragraph. Bishop Heskett remarked that his English-speaking group (one of four) included young people from Nigeria, Russia, Australia and Belgium. Following the group work, there were fourteen ten-minute presentations that contributed to the drafting of a document incorporating suggested revisions for the bishops to peruse. In addition to the group work, fifty young adults from across the globe made four-minute interventions, which Bishop Heskett found to be a powerful experience. He was touched by the deep faith of the young people as well as by their desire to find a home in the Catholic Church. When asked how we could move forward with young people, Bishop Heskett responded that we must place Jesus Christ at the center and remember that the Synod was only the beginning. We must continue to accompany young adults and risk intergenerational conversations. His hope is that episcopal conferences will take the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* and make it concrete in their part of the world. Bishop Heskett remained with us for the evening dialogue with the six young people and even accompanied us to the church of Clichy.

Father Eugene Curran, CM, had been with us all week listening to the presentations, presiding at the Eucharist and interacting with us in our group work. He gave the seventh presentation on “The Joy of Being Vincentian” and reminded us that God is in each moment, so we are called to recognize God in that moment. He encouraged us to find Vincentian joy both in what we do and in who we are.

The last presentations were given by the Daughters in attendance at this session: exploration of the use of technology and descriptions of programs in the Provinces for young people - Junior Ladies of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth, Mini Vinnies, Youth Society

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of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Service Corps, Vincentian Volunteers, Vincentian Mission Corps, St. Vincent de Paul Young Adult Center, Vincentian Lay Missionaries, Vincentian campus ministry in secondary schools and at universities, MISEVI USA, parish and diocesan evangelization. The vocation ministers in the group provided some strategies for accompanying those in discernment with the Daughters of Charity. We also viewed two videos of younger members discussing elements that were important to them in their discernment.

On the last day of the session, we discussed how we might continue to stay connected, collaborate and share ideas with one another. Sisters met in Province groups and discussed what would be done in their Province as well as how they would collaborate across Provincial lines. We thanked Sister Marie and her committee for the outstanding content of the program as well as for the opportunity to pray and reflect together. We continue in a spirit of joy and hope, asking God to bless our accompaniment of young adults as well as our walking with those in discernment.

Sister Mary Beth KUBERA
Daughter of Charity

Sister Cécilia Charrin
The Sister of the Poor
France 1890 – Guatemala 1973

Born on February 17, 1890, in the Castle of Néty in Saint Etienne de Oullières, a village in the Beaujolais region of France, Cécilia was baptized on May 1, 1890. Her parents were Maurice Charrin and Gabrielle Deverchère. She would have two younger sisters, Gabrielle and Isabelle.

H

History
of the
Company

She lived through the horrors of the First World War (1914-1918), which left her family's property in ruins. Her father had already died, so Cécilia, 23 years old and the eldest, dealt with all the necessary repairs. She responsibly took on the challenges of life and capably made necessary decisions.

The birth of her vocation

She describes it herself. *“My uncle, Ernest Plati, whose background was Italian, was aide-de-camp for the Principality of Monaco and often invited me to go to the theater with him, where we sat in the personal balcony of Prince Albert. During one of these trips, I met the Daughters of Charity, who had a large hospital with different services, and I really liked the cornette... After the war, my dream to become a Daughter of Charity came true even though my mother was totally opposed to religious life and told me, ‘If you enter the Community, I will personally set the convent on fire.’”*

Sister Cécilia Charrin

Christ and persons who are poor insistently called her. She had made her decision. “*Even if the convent were to catch fire, grace would put it out,*” she reasoned. Once you place your hand to the plow, there is no use looking backward. However, we can imagine her struggle and the firmness necessary to respond to the call of God that impelled her to serve those who are poor, leaving behind material riches and temporal goods that could hold her back, and to resist her mother’s threats that intended to snuff out this divine voice and the cry of those who are poor.

She gave up the security of a life of luxury and the warmth of her family relationships to knock at the door of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, entering the Company in 1923. This is how she described it. “*I made my Postulancy in La Villette, in Paris. The Sister who received me warned me that when someone enters the Company, she never returns home. I answered her, ‘This is why I am coming here. I want my sacrifice to be complete.’*” These words sprang from a heart beginning its vocation journey and sanctification process.

Mature in her faith, decision-making, work ethic and sense of responsibility, she directed her life to Christological love embracing the Cross in order to love and serve those who are poor exclusively.

She made her Seminary at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris and received the habit. From then on, her name was “Sister Cécilia”. This was no longer just a dream. The white cornette that she had seen in Monaco in her childhood and youth was now part of her new identity, and she proudly wore it as sign of her consecration and new way of life. She no longer belonged to herself. Now, she belonged to the Company of the Daughters of Charity; she belonged to persons who are poor because the Company is for those who are poor. A short time later, she was sent to Chalon-sur-Saône, where she stayed seven years and made her vows for the first time on May 1, 1928.

One day, someone asked her why she had chosen the Daughters of Charity. She answered, “*First, because it is dedicated to the service of those who are poor; who are Our Lord’s chosen ones, and because I liked the Sisters’ cornettes since they looked like white doves. This fascinated me. I thus suffered when we changed the habit of the Company to modernize it, doing away with the cornette.*”

From the beginning to the very end, Sister Cécilia’s life was a continual offering of sacrifice. Speaking of her life in Community in France, she said, “*I entered the Community to make a sacrifice, and in this house I was too happy. I never suffered; instead, I had more and more happiness, so I asked to go to a foreign country.*”

Sister Cécilia’s reason for asking to go to serve those who are poor in a foreign country was that she was too happy as a Daughter of Charity in her home country of France. For her, going abroad meant a path open to the world, but also to the unknown, across the ocean. God’s plan for her would take her to Guatemala.

The date of her departure for Guatemala, during the centenary of the apparitions of the Miraculous Medal in the Motherhouse in Paris, allowed her to travel along with a group of Daughters of Charity and Children of Mary who had participated in the celebrations. Sister Cécilia arrived in Guatemala City on August 30, 1930. The Central House became her new castle.

Because of her refinement, virtue and formation, they wanted to appoint her Seminary Directress or nurse, but Sister Cécilia did not accept because she wanted to serve those who are poor directly, assisting them and especially developing works to help them live in a more dignified way. She was attentive to their human and Christian development. With her gift of persuasion, she awakened the generosity of many collaborators and obtained many donations. The measure of love is to love without measure. This was the standard for her faith. Her vision for the good of those who are poor was to create centers for holistic formation, workshops

Sister Cécilia Charrin

and scholarships in order to make them actors in their own lives. Perfect sacrifice leads to perfect charity: charity towards God and charity towards our neighbor.

If the streets of Guatemala City could speak, they would tell us that they saw a noble woman “coming and going”, transformed into a servant of the poor, clothed in a demeanor of profound simplicity and humility, with her eyes cast down as an expression of her modesty and with her blue sack tucked under her arm.

The challenge that she accepted in helping Christ in the person of the poor was a response to her Christian faith and her mission as a Daughter of Charity. It required a life of prayer, courage, patience, humility and perseverance, virtues that she practiced heroically, for if a bronze door is hard to open, the human heart is even more so.

She often met disagreeable people, some by nature and others because of their situation, who welcomed her with insults and crude words, but she remained untroubled. With her characteristic humility, she continued with the “arms” of a Christian: forgiveness, trust, simplicity, etc. She would say, **“Sir, what you said is for me. Now, please give me something for the poor.”** Many were touched, answering, *“Excuse me, Sister; come as often as you need something for the poor.”* She would respond, *“Thank you, sir; may the good Lord bless you.”* According to several testimonies, she often had this type of experience with merchants and families of whom she asked assistance. Her humility turned some of them into real partners, but others rejected her completely. Many people avoided meeting Sister Cécilia in the street so this voice of charity would not call upon them to do something for her works or give something for her poor.

To support her works, she established the Louise de Marillac Association. The Ladies of Charity and Daughters of Charity in the Central House prepared soup, had a clothing bank and gave medications for the sick. Sister Cécilia made home visits, gave families a

small statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, organized the Week of the Poor and invited parents of schoolchildren to contribute to the charitable collection during that week.

Sister Cécilia regularly went to the market for donations of vegetables, fruit and meat. Then, with her boundless goodness, she prepared meals for those who are poor. Her enthusiasm for asking alms in the streets was contagious. *“Oh, my good lady!”* she would say with a smile. Sister Cécilia did not live for herself but for those who are poor in Guatemala. She left no poor person unassisted. She said, *“The last time the Mother General visited, she asked me to go to France, but I asked her if I would return to Guatemala. Told ‘no’, I decided to remain. I gave my word when I entered the Company, and I want to make good on that sacrifice.”*

When Sister Cecelia died, all the poor wept bitterly because they had lost their “mother”.

Those who knew her describe her as 5 feet, 2 inches tall, thin, with light grey eyes and an always-smiling face that inspired trust. Sister Cécilia was concerned with the evangelization of all those who came to her. She also trained catechists so that they could announce the Good News of Jesus Christ. No child had to give up on making First Communion for lack of white clothes. No poor future bride went without a wedding gown. No poor young man went to graduation without dignified clothes. She assisted poor people to appear for work dressed appropriately.

Similarly, she managed to obtain building materials for men who wanted to build their homes. She had unconditional trust in Divine Providence, sure that it would always help her so that those who are poor, God’s beloved children, would experience God’s love for them.

Sister Cécilia believed that praying the rosary was a way to evangelize and invite others to prayer. She always walked with her rosary

Sister Cécilia Charrin

in her hand and could be heard murmuring the Our Father, Hail Mary or another prayer. She always strove to encourage authentic Marian devotion. When people saw her humble and modest attitude, they could think of the face of the Virgin Mary.

Sister Cécilia established 127 catechetical centers in the capital and the rest of the country. Their men and women catechists have nurtured the first seeds of the faith in the hearts of generations of children and youth.

All of her work consisted in action (cf. CCD XI, 33), making love effective in the streets of the city and in the houses of the sick and poor. On her knees in the chapel in personal and communal daily prayer, she heard Saint Vincent's call, "Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows" (CCD XI, 32).

Loving God means loving those who are poor. There is no room for personal considerations, comfort, inertia, coldness or impatience. *"Her feet! Oh, her feet!"* a woman testified. *"One day, on her return to the Central House after going through the city to ask for assistance for her poor, she was limping, and, traces of blood from her feet marked her footsteps. Her shoes no longer had any soles; they were worn down, and along the path the heat from the ground burnt her feet to the point of bleeding, yet she did not complain or show any sign of pain. The only remedy was the attention of the Sisters of her local community who obliged her to take a few days of rest. She thus changed her bedroom into a command center and charitable collection point so as not to neglect the care of persons who are poor."*

Her collaborators said that she never ate anything between meals. When some families would offer her coffee or a cold drink, she accepted, but only for the people who accompanied her; for herself, she would ask for just a glass of water.

The light of simplicity and the gift of self for persons who are poor colored Sister Cécilia's fruitful work. She suffered considerably out of love for those who are poor: insults, spitting, humiliation, misunderstandings, but also rain, sun, fatigue and all the troubles of life. Rather than growing discouraged, she felt strengthened, living what Saint Louise said to the first Sisters.

“Oh, what a happiness, if, without offending God, the Company could be employed only in the service of those who are destitute in all things!” (Spiritual Writings, p. 833, A. 100)

She was always in a good mood, kind and friendly; *“Oh, my good sister,”* was her greeting. Her smile broke down walls. Poor in her personal possessions, her time belonged to persons who are poor, her assigned services and care for her Sisters in community.

With her lay collaborators and the Daughters of Charity of the Central House, she organized the distribution of milk and cookies for the schoolchildren and soup and rice for people who are poor.

Authentic humility characterized her in her everyday life. She did not worry about what people might say. She was simple, well mannered, respectful and cordial toward all. People saw in her a Daughter of Charity with charitable hands and a spiritual heart, which inspired super-human confidence.

Christians had recourse to her prayer.

“Please, Sister Cécilia, pray to Jesus and His Blessed Mother for my son who has been expelled.”

“Sister Cécilia, pray for my brother who was injured in a traffic accident.”

“Sister Cécilia, pray for my wife who is still sick.”

“Sister Cécilia, storm heaven for my friend in prison.”

Sister Cécilia Charrin

Modest, she never flaunted her personal merits although they were many and well known. Quite the contrary, she hid them behind a meek smile whenever she performed a humanitarian action on behalf of those who are poor. Sister Cécilia was well able to distinguish between true charity and philanthropy as a simple action. She knew well the difference between having nothing and being able to receive. She was able to live, as Saint Paul said, in abundance and in poverty... this made her free.

A striking event took place in Sister Cécilia's life, and while the date is unknown, the *vox populi* (the voice of the people) recounts that a police officer in the city was not pleased that this Sister was going out to beg in the streets. It was against the law since a decree was promulgated forbidding begging during the presidency of General Jorge Ubico. Empowered by this law, the officer brought her to his chief at the police station as a law-breaker. Sister Cécilia offered no resistance. The chief, not sure what to do, kept her for several hours, seated on the bench of those accused of crimes. What happened? A Central House employee tells the story. *"I saw her every day in the street asking money for her poor. I couldn't tell you the date, but I remember that it was at 25 Bolivar Avenue, where there used to be a police station, that she was arrested because begging was forbidden in Guatemala. Someone alerted the superior of the Central House, and we went to the police station to testify that Sister Cécilia was a Daughter of Charity from the Central House. She was calm, peaceful, and greeted us as usual. The police chief, quite embarrassed, said, 'Sister, you are free,' and she returned home with us."*

Her Sisters in Community never saw in her anything that was not in accordance with the Community horarium, from the time of rising to going to bed. Her fidelity and fervor for spiritual exercises and her personal prayer were extraordinary. She was always exemplary. *"Her spiritual life and humility went together,"* a Sister from her local Community said.

Imbued with the Gospel and the Vincentian charism, she found Christ in persons who are poor. Contemplation and prayer sustained her faith convictions.

We can simply list the works she established in Guatemala.

- On March 15, 1937, she founded the Louise de Marillac Association.
- On March 15, 1941, she and her collaborators began a work providing care for 100 abandoned elderly people.
- In the same year, she established a day care center for orphaned children and victims of a virulent intestinal epidemic that caused high infant mortality.
- On February 1, 1943, she opened a doctor's office that would become Hermano Pedro de Betancourt Hospital a year later.
- On May 15, 1944, with eight teachers, she founded Miraculous Medal School for 250 students.
- On September 1, 1946, she opened the doors of Saint Vincent's Workshop to train unemployed mothers in arts and crafts, which allowed them to obtain a good income and even open small businesses.
- She then oversaw "El Amparo de Patojo" (protection of the child) Shelter to house and raise twenty-five young children.
- She collaborated in building Saint Vincent de Paul Primary School in Tecpán, dedicated to educating primarily indigenous children.
- All this, not to mention the establishment of 127 catechetical centers as well as a youth residence to house and instruct girls with limited resources.

This is an overview of the works founded and supported by Sister Cécilia during her 42 years of missionary life. Her only goal was caring for those who are poor. Sister Cécilia never felt flattered by the many honors or other tributes received for her work on behalf of those who are poor. Nothing clouded the purity of her heart. Her happiness was to be, not on the podium receiving an honor,

Sister Cécilia Charrin

but on the routes of the poor and with them. Her only desire was to serve them and to serve them well.

All these works did not arise by chance. We know that as soon as she arrived at the Central House, she was chosen to collaborate in the formation of the Seminary Sisters. After seeing that she did not have the requisite skills, superiors had her begin nursing studies, but this was not her domain either. This is why Sister Geneviève Chardin said, *“She was made for the poor, and she was for the poor.”*

One day, a woman asked her simply, *“Madame, with all these honors, are you going to change?”* She assured her, *“Don’t worry; I will always be the Sister Cécilia of the poor.”*

At age 83, she continued going out to ask for alms. *“In the morning, I feel 15 years old, and I go from door to door to ask for help for the construction of the school that Sister Leclercq is building in Tecpán, but in the afternoon, I am beat, and my feet hurt... Oh, how sad old age is!”*

April 6, 1973, her Golden Jubilee, was a great event. The Children of Mary celebrated it a week later. She received a certificate signed by all the participants. At the end of the Mass, she thanked them and added, *“My greatest desire is to continue singing in heaven, but I have to wait for the closing song.”*

Three months later, the closing song was intoned. *“Now you may let your servant go in peace.”* Sister Cécilia began her journey toward the Father on the morning of June 26, 1973. Following a stroke, she was immediately admitted to Hermano Pedro Hospital. Her state worsened on the morning of July 13, and at 8:30 am, she closed her eyes forever to go to her heavenly Father.

They say that the chapel of the Central House was too small for the large number of pilgrims who lined up to bid farewell to the “Sister of the Poor”. Everyone wanted to bear witness on behalf

of Sister Cécilia for her many services rendered.

Mr. Alvarez, who worked in the government statistics department, told how he had helped Sister Cécilia financially. One day, he was accused of communism and lost his job. He was unable to find another job despite Sister Cécilia's recommendation. He went through great financial hardship such that he had to sell his meager belongings. Sister Cécilia helped him, and ultimately he was able to open a store that he called "my last refuge". He later managed to open a printing shop even as he continued his studies, ultimately earning a law degree.

From the time of the death of Sister Cécilia, the "Sister of the Poor", in Guatemala City on July 13, 1973, her reputation for holiness and her works on behalf of those who are poor have remained strong up to our day. The works have expanded, and the entrepreneurial and charitable spirit of Sister Cécilia continues to live on.

The newspapers of that time dedicated many pages to announcing her death. "*A light has gone out on the earth with the death of Sister Cécilia,*" they wrote, and, "*The death of Sister Cécilia is a great loss for the country.*"

Now that she is in heaven, her collaborators implore her intercession to assure the continuation of the works she began. "*Sister Cécilia, this work belongs to you. Please help us; we need you, and the poor need you, too. Help us!*" The works have not lost their original spirit and remain very active on behalf of persons living in poverty. Thanks to these works, those who are poor always have the possibility of finding the warmth of a home and bread to sustain them. In the different activities, we can observe great love for those who are poor, as passed on by Sister Cécilia.

Given these works for those who are poor that endure three decades after her death, the Committee of Friends of Sister Cécilia Charrin was established during a visit of Superiors from France,

Sister Cécilia Charrin

who encouraged us to begin the process for her beatification and canonization.

On March 6, 2006, we presented the request for permission to begin the process to Archbishop Rodolfo Cardinal Quezada Toruño. After administrative procedures in Rome, the opening of the process was approved.

The process of beatification and canonization of Sister Cécilia Charrin began on March 15, 2006.

On November 29, 2006, Sister Cécilia's remains were exhumed and transferred to the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal in the Central House of the Daughters of Charity in Guatemala City. The Committee pursues the long process. ***“I am here because God sent me.”*** After thirty years of absence, Sister Cécilia “returned” and now rests in her dear Central House.

The primary objective of the Friends of Sister Cécilia Charrin Foundation is promoting this process of beatification in order to be able to carry out activities in favor of those who are poor and perpetuate her work.

Friends of Sister Cécilia Charrin Foundation
(Guatemala)

References: Book by Father José Francisco Ramos, CM, Postulator of the cause in the diocesan phase, and the archives in the Sister Cécilia Charrin Museum.

We look to you, Mary:

you always took the initiative;
you always went ahead of
the Church and humanity.

Connected to Christ's very life,
you went before Him on earth,
becoming His mother.

You went before us
to the foot of the Cross where
the Church was born
from the pierced Heart of your Son.

Finally, you went before us to heaven where,
seeing your blessed destiny,
we discover our own destiny.

You are the prototype, the model
of the Church of tomorrow.

You are the advance image, the wondrous icon
of reconciled humanity.

You epitomize
the full trajectory of the world
from creation
until the last judgment. Amen.

Cardinal Roger ETCHEGARAY

on the 50th anniversary of his episcopal consecration, May 27, 2019

