

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**Fraternal love
for a new
missionary
momentum**

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Letter of May 9, 2021

Dear Sisters,

*The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ
be with us forever!*

In 1870, Saint Joseph was declared patron of the Universal Church, and this year, encouraged by Pope Francis, we devotedly celebrate this 150th anniversary and pray to him:

“May we, following your example, know how to discover and accept the will of God for us. Help us to go forward in confidence, despite difficulties, so that in our life, we may unite our contemplation and our service” (Prayers of the Daughters of Charity, page 78).

Saint Louise scarcely mentioned Saint Joseph except when she alluded to the Holy Family: “... imitate the inaction of the Son of God. During His stay upon earth, He did not always work to the full extent of His powers. His labor in the family of Saint Joseph reveals this. You perhaps frequently admired this before He placed you in a situation where you are called upon to imitate it” (L. 575 to Sister Anne Hardemont at Ussel, c. 1659, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 654).

Nonetheless, we could note in Saint Louise some virtues that might connect with those of Saint Joseph, virtues revealed primarily in the account of his

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dreams. Let us then go from Saint Joseph's dreams to the *lumière* of Pentecost.

“Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins’” (Mt 1:19-21).

Saint Louise hesitated in 1623:

“I was very disturbed because of the doubt I had as to whether I should leave my husband, as I greatly wanted to do, in order to make good my first vow, and to have greater liberty to serve God and my neighbor...

*On the Feast of Pentecost, during holy Mass or while I was praying in the church, my mind was instantly freed of all doubt. I was advised that I should remain with my husband and that a time would come when I would be in a position to make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and that I would be in a small community where others would do the same” (Lumière of Pentecost, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 1).*

Saint Joseph's spiritual experience and that of Saint Louise followed basically the same trajectory: a personal plan, an encounter with the Lord, a radical change of life.

Joseph had planned to divorce Mary quietly so that her reputation would not be harmed. Saint Louise considered leaving her husband so that she could serve God and her neighbor. Both of them had good intentions, yet such was not the path that God had in mind.

“He [Joseph] teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture” (Pope Francis, Patris corde, 2).

We have all experienced God’s surprises in relation to our plans, our good ideas, our choices. This frustrates us, destabilizes us and sometimes causes incomprehension. However, as soon as we place ourselves simply and sincerely before the tabernacle and accept to harmonize our perspective with that of God and thus to modify our initial thinking, an inner space is freed up. This act of faith and the process of taking the focus off ourselves make it possible to go out into the deep with the Lord, freed from doubts, bitterness or other feelings that impede our progress. The Lord is at our side and guides us.

This “yes” to God does not remove all difficulties for undertaking the mission entrusted to us or any other form of change: of local community, in stages of life, in health. Several times, Joseph had to let go of his will and security. With the strength of those who trust in the Word, he heard, *“Do not fear,”* and each time, *“he rose”* to go where God was sending him.

Saint Louise followed this course. She placed her trust in God, constantly sought His will and demonstrated an amazing missionary boldness. Because she adapted to God’s desire and not to her own initial project, all her “yeses” enabled her to dare to come out of herself, to overcome her human weaknesses and to put her concerns in perspective in order to focus entirely on others.

She was not spared trials, either, and we could imagine her sleepless nights! Nevertheless, she too “rose” each time a challenge came to meet her, called the Sisters to do the same and invites us to this still today: *“Let us often give ourselves to God so as to obtain from His goodness the generosity needed to advance His glory by fulfilling His designs on the Company”*

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(L. 651 to Sister Marguerite Chétif, January 10, 1660, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 673).

Is this not a call to return with greater conviction to the Word of God, to have deeper confidence in God, to put aside what we think we possess (strengths, ability to control time, works, health, decisions)? Like Saint Joseph and Saint Louise, let us consent to putting our certainties in their place in order to listen better to the Lord. Today, perhaps He is asking something else of us? to see differently?

God is waiting for us; He knows our plans and welcomes them kindly. Let us listen to Him because He may imagine them differently or make them materialize in another way. Let us take the time to question ourselves.

The Church puts forward Saint Joseph and Saint Louise as two models of holiness. Speaking of saints, Pope Francis reminds us in his apostolic letter *Patris corde*, “*Their lives are concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice.*”

It is possible to put the Gospel into practice! What encouraging words as the world experiences suffering, loss of trust in the future and even in anyone! Quite often, we feel powerless before situations that we cannot control. Saint Joseph and Saint Louise show us that God could do great things through their human condition. They gave themselves to a mission that, objectively speaking, seemed beyond them: Joseph to the service of salvation by accompanying and protecting Jesus and Mary, Saint Louise to the service of her suffering brothers and sisters by founding the Company.

Let us contemplate Saint Joseph in his dreams, let us contemplate Saint Louise at Pentecost 1623: both point out the path of faith and charity, for “*it is possible to put the Gospel into practice.*”

The Daughters of Charity throughout the world have this desire to put the Gospel into practice and are enthusiastic in their charity. Again, here are some pieces of news that show us this and impel us to fulfill God's plans for the Company.

Three Sisters are currently preparing for the mission *Ad Gentes* at the International Missionary Center: one Sister from Vietnam, one Sister from South Korea (Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia) and one Sister from Slovakia. One or two more should be arriving soon.

Sister Neghesti Michaël, General Councillor, returned from a longer-than-expected stay in Eritrea and Ethiopia, where the vagaries of the Covid-19 pandemic detained her for several weeks in this currently very unstable region. She took advantage to go to two of the local communities in Tigray. The two others were inaccessible because of their location in the armed conflict zone. This war has serious consequences for these two Provinces. The Sisters experience the danger and serve the population suffering from a lack of food, safety and housing.

The kidnapping of several priests, religious and lay people in Haiti has again brought to light the violent atmosphere that reigns in this country. Twenty Daughters of Charity in five local communities work to assist the Haitian people and relieve their suffering. We pray for the Sisters' strength and courage to continue the mission despite insecurity and fear.

On March 8 in Spain, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the government of the Autonomous Community of Madrid gave an award to the Daughters of Charity of the two Provinces of Madrid-Santa Luisa and Madrid-San Vicente in recognition of their commitment to the most vulnerable people of Madrid through social works and to sick people during the pandemic. This is a good witness of the generosity and creativity of our charism, still very alive.

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On March 11, the Province of Rosalie Rendu (Great Britain and Australia) celebrated its first anniversary! A virtual gathering brought together almost all the Sisters, and they were thus able to celebrate the Eucharist, give thanks together at a distance and... drink tea! For some of them, it was 9 o'clock in the morning and for others, 8 o'clock in the evening.

The Province of Mexico recently opened a local community in Ensenada, Baja California. Three Sisters are at the service of migrants and people who are homeless. *“El albergue San Vicente, un oasis para el migrante.”* This is what the people call this center, “Saint Vincent’s inn, an oasis for migrants.”

The Covid-19 pandemic remains a constant concern for the Company. Every Province faces urgent needs. One example comes from the Province of Curitiba, Brazil, from where the Sisters write to us, *“Our hospital is at maximum capacity, and we had to expand, adding 10 beds in intensive care. They were equipped thanks to individuals’ generosity. We then had to transform 10 emergency room beds into intensive care... The Sisters support and console families.”*

Since January 1, several fully-active Sisters were infected and died suddenly. We continue to pray for suffering Provinces that must face the pain of losing a Sister and the consequences for the different mission sites. On April 28, Sister Zaida, a young Peruvian Sister, 39 years old and 9 years vocation, passed away. She served young people and was the national advisor for VMY. Let us pray for her local community and her Province.

We can also entrust to God Sisters’ families, likewise harshly affected. Some have lost several of their relatives: parents, brothers, sisters, nephews or nieces. The suffering is great. Let us pray for each other.

Saint Louise would surely invite us to intensify the communion among us in order to support each other, to remain alert, to serve,

to pray and, above all, not to give up hope. Let us conclude this short time we have spent together with her words: “*During these times of affliction... our Sisters... never stopped serving the sick poor. In Paris you would not believe the amount of alms given to the poor who had no bread. I believe that this has drawn down God’s mercy upon us so that we might have peace*” (L. 244 to Sister Jeanne Lepintre, April 6, 1649, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 279).

Have a wonderful feast of Saint Louise de Marillac! Through her intercession, may the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph accompany us and help us to fulfill God’s plans for the Company.

Affectionately and with the assurance of my prayer,

Sister Françoise PETIT
Daughter of Charity

Praying with Saint Joseph

In this year of Saint Joseph, all of us have seen and spoken prayers that embrace the father of Jesus. At the very end of the apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, which has sparked the current emphasis on Joseph, we find a prayer composed by Pope Francis.

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.
Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.*

Recognizing the holiness and seeking the intercession of Saint Joseph with such words lifts every Christian heart.

The Gospels do not offer us any prayers that Joseph himself composed or said. Mary shares with us her Magnificat, but Joseph remains characteristically silent. However, we know with certainty some prayers that drove the devotion of Saint Joseph: the psalms.

For 2,000 years, the psalms have rested near the center of Christian worship. (For our Jewish siblings, add another thousand years.) Every early disciple of Jesus would have prayed the psalms as part of his/her daily turning to the Holy One. Moreover, Jesus Himself gives evidence of His familiarity with these ancient

prayers of Israel. We can imagine the Holy Family joining minds and spirits in the proclamation of these words that expressed and strengthened their faith. Thus, if we want to pray with Joseph, we can do so with confidence in these hymns.

As I have prayed the psalms this year, I have allowed myself to wonder how these words would have resonated within this holy man. That notion has given direction to my reflections and resolutions. I will offer five psalms that Joseph would have prayed and consider briefly the ways in which they might have captured his imagination. I pray them alongside Joseph, this model of faith, and this touches my Vincentian heart since for all the members of the Vincentian Family, the psalms constitute a central and intimate part of our prayer life.

PSALM 1: THE JUST MAN

This psalm opens the Psalter and points us immediately to the importance of meditation and reflection. It holds pride of place in the Psalter because it sets the direction for the entire book, just as Psalm 150 sets its destination. After describing in the first verse what a good person does not do, the psalm continues:

“Rather, the law of the Lord is his [the just person’s] joy; and on His law he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:2).

The “law of the Lord” demands our attention. “Law” here does not mean some circumscribed written code, but the will of God, God’s desire for humankind. This “law” lives in a dynamic and positive manner. The just person delights in the way of the Lord and meditates on God’s teaching “*day and night*,” which is to say regularly and faithfully, for it applies to the whole of one’s life. Discovering and following the will of God were key to Joseph’s thinking and acting. Pope John Paul II writes in his apostolic exhortation on Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos*, “[*The Gospels*] allow us to discover in his “actions” — shrouded in silence as they are — an aura of deep contemplation” (25). Joseph was a

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thoughtful man, and the psalms support and contribute to such a disposition. The first psalm sets the tone.

Do you hear the way in which the opening lines of the Psalter apply to Joseph? Can you see how he employs them in the story of his “annunciation”?

“Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a just man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly” (Mt 1:18-19).

Joseph knew and respected the law of his people. He believed that it articulated the teaching of the Holy One. However, he also knew that one could not interpret the law in a way that hurt people, so he chose to act with compassion in relation to his beloved Mary. His meditation on the law led him along this path. This response coincides with the teaching of Pope Francis, who places the person above the principle without denying the importance of the principle. In *Patris Corde*, he writes, *“The nobility of Joseph’s heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity”* (4).

Psalm 1 continues:

*“He is like a tree
planted near streams of water,
that yields its fruit in season;
Its leaves never wither;
whatever he does prospers”* (Ps 1:3).

This psalm describes the tree as something deeply planted, something that draws its nourishment from the Lord. The tree provides fruit for those who hunger, healing and shade through its leaves and branches, timber and tinder.

We can imagine Joseph praying that he might be the kind of graced person who delights in and studies the law faithfully. This kind of person stands like a tree that gives life-giving presence and presents to a people. This person is solid, deeply rooted and a source of support. That sounds like Joseph.

Psalm 1 introduces the Psalter because it sets the stage by promoting the teaching that will characterize the rest of the writing: first, seek the will of God and delight in its essence; then, be a blessing for yourself and for all in your community. From that beginning, when Joseph discovered the will of God in this life, he responded faithfully and completely. His love and respect for the law remained firm and guided his entire life. He shared this gift with Jesus, who also insisted, *“Not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place”* (Mt 5:18).

We can assert that Joseph prayed this psalm. We can imagine how he asked the Lord for the grace to attend to the divine instruction in his life and for the perseverance to be a blessed, solid, fruitful “tree” for others. We know how that prayer was answered.

Let us thus begin our prayer alongside Joseph with a desire to seek and meditate on the ways of the Lord as they become known to us through the Bible, the Church and our daily living. With Joseph, let us seek to know the way to respond properly in our discernment of what God expects of us. Let us be sources of nourishment, healing and comfort for our sisters and brothers.

PSALM 137: YEARNING FOR HOME

The Babylonians destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem in 587 BC and took most of the people of Israel into captivity, moving them from their ancestral home to foreign lands. Psalm 137 engages the feelings of those displaced persons.

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*“By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat weeping
when we remembered Zion” (Ps 137:1).*

The exiles poured out their desolation at the separation from their homes but especially from the center of the faith of their forebearers. They resolved never to forget from where they came or to whom they belonged:

*“If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget.
May my tongue stick to my palate
if I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
beyond all my delights” (Ps 137:5-6).*

Some 500 years later, we find Mary and Joseph with the holy child in arms, setting off to Egypt to flee Herod. We can hear Mary join with Joseph in singing this psalm with increased and personal fervor.

Remembering Jerusalem with its Holy Temple and its rich history would sustain Joseph and Mary in their exile and help them to be faithful to the God who had acted on behalf of His people. That place of God’s dwelling and revelation could never fade from their hearts. [When they returned home, they would make the journey to Jerusalem yearly (Cf. Lk 2:41).] Thanks to this psalm and their remembrance of the Lord’s deliverance of a chosen people from the Babylonian exile, Joseph and Mary could find comfort in God’s care for their ancestors in reestablishing them in their homeland. They believed that He would do the same for them. The Gospel-writer Matthew emphasizes this in his recalling of the story of the Exodus as he repeats the words of Hosea 11:1, *“Out of Egypt I have called my son”* (Mt 2:15).

At the Annunciation, Gabriel presents himself to Mary with the greeting, *“Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you”* (Lk 1:28),

which highlights the faith of Mary. In Joseph's "annunciation" story, he is described as "*a righteous man*" (Mt 1:19), and an angel greets him in a dream, "*Joseph, son of David*" (Mt 1:20), highlighting his ancestry and his commitment to the Law given to his people by the Lord God. Joseph and Mary are committed to their God and to their shared heritage.

Think of Joseph in Egypt. As he strove to provide for and protect his family, he would have found comfort in the words of Psalm 137. When Joseph and Mary reflected on the history of their nation, this psalm would have had particular meaning: yes, the Lord brings His people home; He gives strength and power to the waiting. Joseph and Mary were united in a resolve never to forget God's presence among God's faithful people.

When we pray this psalm with Joseph, we can think about the places and practices that have provided a "homeland" for our faith. We may allow ourselves to ponder how we have separated ourselves from those experiences that marked the foundation and strength for our beliefs. Though not in a foreign land with an alien tongue, we may abide among a people who speak a language untouched by the Gospel. We need to yearn to go home and to make the efforts that bring us back. We feel the strength of these words as we pray them with Saint Joseph for the sake of ourselves as well as those whom we cherish.

PSALM 127: BUILDING A HOME

The idea of building a house attracts me when I think of Joseph. Clearly, in his time and place, stone and mud rather than wood and nails constituted the central elements for this construction, but I can see Joseph contributing whatever skills that the project required. The image of erecting a house also translates into creating a home and summoning the skills that such an effort requires. Joseph knew well that to build both house and home, it is necessary to seek the Lord's strength and guidance.

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Israel prayed some psalms at given times, for example, the Song of Ascents, also called the Pilgrim Songs, a grouping of fifteen psalms. Psalms 120-134 were intended to be sung on the journey to the Holy City of Jerusalem. These songs constitute a path of devotion and reflection based on spiritual lessons of Kings David and Solomon.

I have pondered how Joseph's heart might have felt so engaged as he prayed Psalm 127 with his family.

*“Unless the Lord build the house,
they labor in vain who build.
Unless the Lord guard the city,
in vain does the guard keep watch.
It is vain for you to rise early and put off
your rest at night,
To eat bread earned by hard toil—
all this **God gives to his beloved in sleep**” (Ps 127:1-2).*

The last line strikes me in relation to Joseph, who recognized its truth in his experience: “*God gives to his beloved in sleep.*” Matthew's Gospel gives us indications of how he discerned God's will in his dreams (Cf. Mt 1:20-24; 2:13, 19-20, 22). Joseph could certainly witness to this mode of receiving the Lord's guidance in that quiet space within oneself. A people of faith can appreciate the varied ways in which God chooses to communicate His will.

The context of the psalmist's affirmation that the Lord “*gives to his beloved in sleep*” is dependence upon the Lord. As a community of faith builds a house, the Lord works with them. His presence enables the laborers to succeed because of their trust in Him. [Think of the house built on rock (Cf. Mt 7:24-27).] When people guard a city, their confidence in the God who abides with them provides hope and protection. Israel undertakes all its actions with the Lord's affection and attention. That is what the holy name of God (YHWH) means, “the God

who is present.” Human endeavor in the development of faith yields nothing without divine care.

Jesus speaks about this kind of trust in the Lord (Cf. Mt 7:11; Lk 12:22-34) and the uselessness of worry (Cf. Lk 12:25; Jn 15:5). I envision Him praying Psalm 127 with Mary and Joseph on their way to Jerusalem. Perhaps they shared with Jesus their hopes and dreams about the home that they built together and explained to Him its meaning and application in their lives. Later, when Jesus traveled to the Holy City with His disciples, He may have prayed and discussed it together with them. In any case, it is certain that the craftsman Joseph would find in this prayer an encouragement to depend upon the Lord in his ministry, and he offers us that support as we pray this psalm with him today.

PSALM 27: DWELLING IN THE LORD’S HOUSE

A verse of Psalm 27 captures my imagination as I pray the psalms with Saint Joseph:

*“One thing I ask of the Lord;
this I seek:
To dwell in the Lord’s house
all the days of my life,
To gaze on the Lord’s beauty,
to visit his temple” (Ps 27:4).*

How might Joseph have prayed and reflected on this psalm? He knew what the angel had told him about Jesus. He had undoubtedly spoken with Mary on this matter numerous times. Although no human mind can grasp the absolute truth of Jesus, Joseph knew that, in some way, the Holy One was present in his home.

Praying with Saint Joseph

- Joseph “*dwelt in the Lord’s house*” all the days of his life with Jesus and Mary.
- He “*gazed on the Lord’s beauty*” each of those days.
- He “*visited the Lord’s temple*” whenever he talked or walked or sat with Jesus.

Joseph could not help but rejoice in the truth and realization of this psalm in his life. He experienced the realization of the promise of this petition.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to spend years in some of the great cities of the world: New York (my home), Washington, Rome and Paris. The wonderful and eye-catching elements of these cities illustrate the reason why many people would visit them. They were certainly impressive to me at first; however, I got too familiar with them, and I could pass through places without even looking up or to the side. (Now, I would love to see them again!) Moreover, this does not happen simply with structures, but also with people. My familiarity with seeing and hearing some individuals rose to the point that I did not give them the attention that they deserve. In this, I acknowledge my error and my fault. This is why I think it is probably a blessing that I do not see my grandnephews as often as I would like since, when I do see them, their beauty lifts me up and their interests fascinate me, and they capture my attention for hours.

This point leads me to ask: what was it like for Mary and Joseph to live with Jesus every day? What a blessing was it for them to love and live with Him? How ordinary (in the best sense of the word) was it for them? [Doesn’t Mary’s expectant remark to Jesus at the Wedding Feast of Cana reflect a mother’s normal confidence that her son will be attentive to what she says (Cf. Jn 2:3-5)?] I believe that Psalm 27 became a regular part of the prayer of Joseph and Mary. They knew its hope, and they praised the Lord for its realization in their midst.

Joseph's way of praying this psalm can encourage us to seek and find a closer relationship to the Lord and allow Him to dwell in our midst, not solely during our worship in church, but also by acknowledging the Lord's presence in the beauty of the created world as well as of other people. Our local communities can become places of that special presence. Those with whom we work and serve can also invite us to recognize God's presence in them and in our common task. Psalm 27 directs our attention to this important desire and hope of living in the Lord's presence. That happens when we open our eyes and ears, not to mention our hands and hearts. Joseph knew and experienced that truth.

PSALM 95: IF TODAY YOU HEAR GOD'S VOICE

One of my favorite teachings (and one I need most) is found in Psalm 95. The psalm starts with a wonderful summons to the people to praise.

*“Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord;
cry out to the rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with a song of praise,
joyfully sing out our psalms”* (Ps 95:1-2).

The next verses invite the people both literally and figuratively to enter into God's presence for worship as it exalts the Creator of all. The people proclaim the reason for their joyful praise:

*“For He is our God,
we are the people He shepherds,
the sheep in His hands”* (Ps 95:7a).

Then comes the line that captures my attention in a particular way:

*“Oh, that today you would hear His voice:
Do not harden your hearts...”* (Ps 95:7b-8a).

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I find a double edge to the verse, for first, one must listen to the voice, but that is not enough; one must also not resist. In this year of Saint Joseph, the summons receives added impact and application.

The opening phrase, “*Oh, that today you would hear His voice,*” flows from the preceding image of the shepherd and sheep. Jesus employs that image to describe His followers as the people who listen to the voice of their shepherd (Cf. Jn 10:3-5). The second phrase, “*Do not harden your hearts,*” leads into a remembrance of Israel’s testing the Lord in the desert (Cf. Ex 17:7) in the following verses. Several times, Jesus emphasizes the “hardness of heart” of His listeners (Cf. Mk 3:5; 10:5; Mt 13:15; 19:8) and His disciples (Cf. Mk 6:51-52; 8:17).

Four times in Matthew’s Gospel, God’s voice rose up within Joseph’s ears through the message of an angel, and four times, Joseph opened his heart and responded immediately (Cf. Mt 1:20-21, 24; 2:13-14; 2:19-21; 2:22-23). In the first story, Joseph’s respect for the Law was moving him towards a difficult decision with regard to Mary. However, as soon as he learned what the Lord wanted, he did not harden his heart and stick to his own thinking but responded with vigor and obedience. He took Mary into his home immediately and permanently. We see the suppleness of his innermost spirit.

We can easily imagine Joseph reflecting upon Psalm 95 before his introduction to his special part in God’s plan as well as afterwards.

Yet Joseph also heard God’s voice in another way. He attended to the divine words as communicated to him by a heavenly figure in a dream, but he also responded to them as they emerged more concretely from the lips of Jesus. Every word and action of Jesus carried God’s voice, for He was the “*Word made flesh.*” Joseph heard God laugh and cry, tell stories and seek assistance. When Jesus hugged him, Joseph heard God express His love for

him. How often Joseph uniquely heard God's voice in his role as father to Jesus! Every morning and evening, Psalm 95 must have made him think of the impact of "today."

The model of Joseph as responsive to the voice of God in his life stands out powerfully for us in his story. Parents might reflect on the way in which God speaks to them through their children and how these treasured words summon us to love and virtue. For us as well, the people whom we serve speak with God's voice in numerous and sometimes demanding ways.

We might ask ourselves how well we listen to the Gospel proclaimed in our midst and make an examination of conscience on the way that we harden our hearts.

Today, let us adapt and adopt the words of the psalmist as we seek the intercession of Joseph to respond faithfully:

*"Oh, that today I would hear God's voice:
Let me not harden my heart..."*

CONCLUSION

This last reflection on the psalms in Joseph's life recalls an instruction of Vincent regarding the call to pray the psalms. He offered these words to his confreres and thus to the Sisters and all members of the Vincentian Family as well:

"Since this [praying the office] is one of the most important means for our sanctification, we'll give ourselves to God to use it. Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis ["If today you hear his voice"]. Since you hear the voice of God knocking at your hearts, saying that it's the custom of the entire Company to pray the Office in common, let's give ourselves to Him from now on to witness to Him our desire to render Him this honor. Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis ["If today you hear his voice"]. Let's delay no longer.

Praying with Saint Joseph

Let's remember to have that in capite, in spiritu [in head and in spirit], that the priest is bound to pray the praises of God” (CCD XII, 275).

The celebration of the Year of Saint Joseph has brought many blessings to the Christian community. Prayers, books, conferences and homilies have proliferated in exultating and bringing to the fore this good and holy man. The other two members of the Holy Family might be astonished to learn that Joseph does not hold the place in our life that he did in theirs.

We can assure ourselves that Joseph was a man of prayer and that the psalms comprised a genuine part of his reflection and worship. As we offer these expressions of our Judeo-Christian heritage, we can join with Joseph in making them our own and a path for discerning the divine will.

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, CM

**Designation of Visitatrixes
and Appointment of
Provincial Directors**

DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

PROVINCE OF EQUADOR: Sister Ana Maria MALDONADO AGUILAR was re-designated Visitatrix on December 23, 2020.

*News from
the Provinces*

PROVINCE OF CONGO: Sister Brigitte LIYOMBI MBOLI LOSAMBE was designated Visitatrix on January 6, 2021.

PROVINCE OF SOUTH INDIA: Sister Rose CHIRAYIL was re-designated Visitatrix on January 6, 2021.

PROVINCE OF RECIFE: Sister Patricia Regina Calaça de ALMEIDA was designated Visitatrix on January 20, 2021.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Sister Luisa Kristiana INDRAYANTI was re-designated Visitatrix on January 20, 2021.

PROVINCE OF PERU: Sister Rosmery MORENO VERA was designated Visitatrix on February 17, 2021.

Designations and Appointments

PROVINCE OF RIO DE JANEIRO: Sister Selma Aparecida dos SANTOS was designated Visitatrix on March 17, 2021.

PROVINCE OF CALI: Sister Gloria Cecilia SALAZAR BOTERO was designated Visitatrix on March 31, 2021.

APPOINTMENT OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS

PROVINCE OF CONGO: Father Jean Rufin Nkee MOKELO-MO-EYALI was appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on January 19, 2021.

PROVINCE OF SLOVAKIA: Father Jozef MROCEK was appointed Provincial Director for a six-year term on February 26, 2021.

PROVINCE OF MADAGASCAR: Father Césaire RANDRIANANTENAINA was appointed Provincial Director for a six-year term on March 30, 2021.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Father Willibrordus MURDANI was re-appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on April 16, 2021.

PROVINCE OF COLOGNE-NETHERLANDS: Father Mathieu Van KNIPPENBERG was re-appointed Provincial Sub-Director for a three-year term on May 7, 2021.

PROVINCE OF ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON: Father Bernard QUINN was re-appointed Provincial Director for a three-year term on May 7, 2021.

Province of Peru

In community, we strengthen one another with a view to mission (Cf. C. 9)

Peru is a country in South America covering part of the Amazon rainforest. It is home to Machu Picchu, an ancient Incan city at a high altitude in the Andes. But there is much more. This country rich in contrasts is ranked third in the world for its biodiversity. It is divided into three geographic and climatic regions, offering a wide variety of often very impressive landscapes. Despite valuable natural resources including rare minerals, poverty nonetheless remains high. Among the 28 million inhabitants, nearly two million children aged 6-17 work on farms, as domestic employees or recycling trash, etc.

People are simple and hospitable. The Province of the Daughters of Charity numbers 122 Sisters in twenty-one local communities and one annex, located along the coast as well as in the mountains or the jungle.

In all simplicity, we will share with you the experience of the Sisters in two local communities, one located in the center of the capital city of Lima, Virgen de Lourdes Pastoral Center, and the other, an annex of the Provincial House in the province of Purús, a scarcely populated rural area between the Andes Mountains and the Amazon Rainforest, San Vicente de Paul Missionary Center, which is very difficult to reach.

Sisters' Testimonies

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF VIRGEN DE LOURDES PASTORAL CENTER

“The cries of those who are poor are stronger than our fears.”

In the center of the capital, Virgen de Lourdes Pastoral Center is an oasis in the middle of the agitation of traffic and the bustle of city life. This little shrine of the Virgin Mary, “Virgen de Lourdes,” dates to 1858, the year our Sisters first arrived in Peru.

The local community currently numbers four Sisters. We provide quite varied services in collaboration with the Vincentian Family and government and private institutions.

The pandemic revealed to us how vulnerable we can be while leading us to unsettle ourselves to respond to new needs of those who are poor. At the beginning of this pandemic, we hesitated: should we remain at home and take care of ourselves or dare to take risks. We chose the second option because the cries of those who are poor were stronger than our fears, and we heard the Lord’s call to be servants. This commitment would not have been possible without drawing from the source in prayer. Trusting in Divine Providence, we could try to restore a little life to others despite the risk of infection, knowing we are responsible for keeping the wonderful charism that we have inherited relevant today. This pandemic period also allowed us to renew our community life because we live our days with great intensity, and this taught us to know each other better, to appreciate each other and to support each other for the construction of the Kingdom of God.

A positive aspect of this pandemic has been that it has awakened solidarity. Known and unknown people generously helped us to keep the soup kitchen running, a sign of Divine Providence.

After having read in the *Echoes of the Company* the witness of Sister Gabriella Borgarino, whose love and trust in Divine

Providence are well known, we often pray throughout the day this short prayer, “***Divine Providence of the heart of Jesus, watch over us.***” We could observe how God came to our assistance so that we could continue to serve our brothers and sisters who are migrants, elderly and homeless. We share some of their comments. An 82-year-old man told us, “*Thank you for allowing us to feel like people.*” A migrant woman said, “*Thank you: here in Peru, you are our family.*”

We hope that this place honoring Our Lady of Lourdes will always be an oasis of peace and hope for our brothers and sisters and that they will feel at home and at ease in the Church. We try to take up the challenge of always showing the face of a close, merciful and servant Church, living the process of Ephata and caring for all forms of poverty.

What follows is a testimony of the rehabilitation of one of our poor brothers, a true reason for joy, hope and encounter.

Luis Alberto Arca Rojas, better known as Juan, who lives on the streets, became very close to the Sisters of Virgen de Lourdes Pastoral Center. Afflicted with a neurological deficit, Juan wandered the streets. It seemed that his life would end in the cold streets of Lima, but God allowed us to save him from the great indifference crippling society. We had tried several times to help Juan to get off the streets, but he said that it was his choice and always refused. One day, he agreed to change his life style; unfortunately, it did not last, and he returned quickly to the streets.

During the mandatory lockdown, a man knocked on our door to bring a coat and a change of clothes for Juan. We thanked this man for his solidarity. A few days later, this man returned to our house to tell us that his name was Alvaro and that Juan was his blood-brother. He had already tried once to help him and had offered to open his home to him, but Juan did not want to change his life style; it seems that he had never gotten used to

Sisters' Testimonies

living with his family.

Our encounter with Alvaro motivated us to do everything possible to reintegrate Juan in society. After two failed attempts, Juan finally agreed. Meanwhile, Alvaro had found a residence for people with health issues. He asked us to speak about it with Juan, who was open to the idea. Thanks to Alvaro's help and the support of the local community, Juan now lives with dignity in a good facility. Of course, much remains to be done, but it is wonderful to know that we are working with others to build up the Kingdom of God. This requires our constant open attitude to discern God's calls, interpret them and strive to respond to the needs of those who are poor.

We are grateful to God for His constant accompaniment, especially during this pandemic, and for giving us the faith to have great trust in His love and to recognize His presence at work in the life of people and in events. Today, health restrictions are less harsh; however, we should always continue to open ourselves to new calls and dare to take new initiatives. As Pope Francis says, "*I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security*" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 49).

SAN VICENTE DE PAUL MISSIONARY CENTER IN THE REGION OF UCAYALI

Living a borderless mission

The San Vicente de Paul Missionary Center is located in eastern Peru in the department of Ucayali. The center is better known as the *Misión Purús* because of the Purús River, a tributary of the Amazon that flows from north to south through its territory. The department of Ucayali, which is one of the twenty-four regions of Peru, is divided into four provinces: Atalaya, Coronel Portillo, Padre Abad and Purús.

At the request of the Vicar of Puerto Maldonado, we began a mission in the isolated province of Purús in 2018. For the past year, four Sisters have lived here in a very simple house thousands of kilometers from the capital, totally cut off from the rest of the world. The only way to get to Purús is to take a small plane operated by the government's civil action project, with flights scheduled two weeks ahead of time.

The province of Purús, with its tropical climate, is home to an exceptional biodiversity and native peoples with very little contact with the outside world. From sunrise to sunset, we live with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, who have an impressive confidence in God and await everything from Him: rain so they can set off down the river on a boat, or sun so that the planes can resume their flights and bring the medicine that they need, but also for the Purús River to go down so they can clear their ancestral lands and sow their seeds to have staple foods to harvest...

We are responsible for Santa Rosa del Purús Parish, and our missionary work is to accompany our brothers and sisters in their faith. We also support the diocesan service for Catholic education and reach out to the forty-five Indigenous communities of the province thanks to a team of religious education teachers, using the parish radio station. This radio station (Hope 95.3 FM: *Connect your life to Christ*) was revived last year thanks to the assistance of several benefactors whom God placed on our path. During the pandemic, the program "I learn at home" allowed children and youth who live in the most remote Indigenous communities to continue their schooling. The radio also allows us to offer means of evangelization and information for Indigenous communities whom we cannot physically reach.

It was a real challenge for us to learn to use the material in order to reach listeners while respecting the health measures imposed because of the pandemic, which unfortunately spreads at a dizzying speed in the region. We also work in a secondary

Sisters' Testimonies

school for Indigenous and mixed-race youth, offering them technical and professional training so they can become agents of change in their province. We make home visits and start small projects for the promotion of Indigenous women.

We are evangelized by the inhabitants' simplicity, smiles and generosity for sharing despite the little they have. They all know what it is to be hungry, but they hope against hope. We bless God each day for His presence and Providence. We are a local community in progress. Even if we are diminishing in numbers, we are growing for God and for those who are poor. The pandemic allowed us to look at others more favorably, to understand our need for conversion in order to live in the spirit of Ephata, to break through our personal gates and live a borderless mission.

Each day, in personal and communal prayer, we present our intentions to God and try to let ourselves be challenged in this mission land. Shared prayer on the Word of God and our Constitutions, community monthly retreats, mutual correction and times of recreation support our community life. We give thanks to God for our collaborators who teach us the art of caring for animals (chicken, bees, etc.) and of cultivating the land (vegetable garden, fruit trees, etc.) and for the possibility to share with the people.

As an annex of the Provincial House, we are happy to communicate with our Sister Servant when we have an internet connection. It is good to be able to rely on our Sisters' prayer and to feel fully members of the Provincial House, which, despite physical distance, is close to us.

Conclusion

We make Pope Francis' dream our own: *“I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features”* (*Querida Amazonia*, 7).

May the Lord continue to teach us to become part of this people who call us “Sisters, little Sisters” and who know that “together and in God” we can face their many needs. The support of the Province as well as many benefactors allows us to pursue this path with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Our life is for God, and we owe everything to Him. He calls us to follow Him and serve Him together in our brothers and sisters who are poor. May Mary, the faithful guardian of our vocation, intercede for each Daughter of Charity in particular. May our desire to open ourselves always more to God, to our Sisters and to persons who are poor become a reality that gives joy and hope even amid difficulties.

Sisters of the Province

Province del Caribe

“Justice and peace will kiss” (Ps 85:11)

“... when we, as individuals and communities, learn to look beyond ourselves and our particular interests, then understanding and mutual commitment bear fruit in a setting where conflicts, tensions and even groups once considered inimical can attain a multifaceted unity that gives rise to new life” (Fratelli tutti, 245).

Cité Soleil is a municipality in Haiti, located in the department of the West on the outskirts of the capital of Port-au-Prince. With approximately 300,000 inhabitants, the municipality is one of the largest slums in the country. Its residents live in wretched poverty with deplorable hygiene conditions and constant insecurity; they suffer from all sorts of scourges, both economic and health-related.

The Daughters of Charity have been here since 1975. Our house and our works are located in one of the neighborhoods called Brooklyn because of the violence experienced daily here. Well-armed criminal gangs sow terror in Cité Soleil.

On March 17, 2020, an unprecedented war broke out between these gangs from the neighborhoods of Boston, Brooklyn, Bellecourt, Projet Drouillard and Village des Repatriés. All these neighborhoods are within the boundaries of Immaculate Conception Parish where we live. Each gang controls its territory and uses harsh violence to protect it. They lay down the law and terrorize the population.

We experience this reality on a daily basis, with an unending exchange of gunfire between armed groups, especially at night. This violence paralyzed all activity in these neighborhoods and even sometimes Americanos Street, the main artery through Cité Soleil. Public transportation operated with great difficulty and vehicles, motorcycles and even pedestrians could not go through the neighborhoods of Boston and Brooklyn. This resulted in a closure of schools and markets as well as an atmosphere of fear throughout the parish. In this chaotic environment, many families were obliged to leave their shacks and look for a shelter elsewhere, leaving behind the little that they possessed.

Gun battles between the different armed groups in the area began at the same time as the Covid-19 pandemic and health restrictions imposed by the government. This caused even more problems. How could we respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters in this neighborhood who were already suffering from all sorts of difficulties, to which were added violence and the pandemic?

From March to August 2020, with the VMY group, support staff and some teachers from the area, we tried to resume some academic activities for the intermediary school students. During the lockdown, the school administration sought a means to assure that the students could complete the academic year and do their schoolwork at home. As most students have little or no electricity at home, they could not have access to the internet nor an on-line connection for remote learning.

All throughout this period of the pandemic when children could not go to school, we distributed meal kits to school children and staff because all of them had difficulty getting enough to eat.

In June 2020, we were able to reopen the health center for the child nutrition program. At the end of August 2020, we slowly resumed doctors' appointments thanks to the support of our collaborators who live in the area, but people were still too afraid to come here.

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In the local community, united with all the people driven to extreme poverty, we intensified our prayer life, presenting all these situations to the Lord. We also strengthened our community life by sharing among ourselves and receiving the support of other local communities of the Province.

At the end of June 2020, Father Tom, an American priest, managed to get the different gangs in the neighborhood to agree to a sort of truce in order to reopen school for the children. From there, priests and lay leaders in the parish organized meetings with the different leaders of these armed groups with the goal of shoring up this very fragile truce. We, the Daughters of Charity, also participated in the organization and running of these meetings aiming for the peace so desired by neighborhood residents.

During these meetings, we spoke with Gabriel, the gang leader of Brooklyn, Iscar, the gang leader of Bellecourt and an ally of Mathias, the gang leader of Boston. We showed them the importance of peace for the population in general, for resumption of activities and for the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, patron of the parish, December 8.

We asked Mathias to give back to the Salesians the school occupied by his gang during the armed confrontations, which allowed for resumption of classes, some normalcy and the free circulation of the inhabitants across the different parts of the neighborhood.

Notwithstanding the socio-political and economic factors created by this violence in the neighborhood, these meetings made it possible to limit some ills and prevent others. Despite a certain distrust on the part of gang leaders, these meetings made it possible to hold, among other events, the procession for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, setting off from the Wharf District, passing through Brooklyn and ending in Boston. All the parishioners and pilgrims from elsewhere were able to gather in a peaceful atmosphere and participate in the different celebrations.

These meetings also allowed for gunfire-free Christmas and New Year as we celebrated the Prince of Peace.

The difficulties that must be overcome to achieve peace are huge because there is so much personal interest, pride, hypocrisy and even fear. We give thanks to God for helping us to participate, in our limited way, and to turn to a peace process for the good of academic and parish life.

“There is no end to the building of a country’s social peace; rather, it is an open-ended endeavor, a never-ending task that demands the commitment of everyone and challenges us to work tirelessly to build the unity of the nation. Despite obstacles, differences... this task summons us to persevere in the struggle to promote a ‘culture of encounter’. This requires us to place at the center of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good” (Fratelli tutti, 232).

We believe that this path has only just begun... The Lord’s voice continues to call us to be peacemakers in this divided world. Every day, we ask the Lord that our life and our presence as Church might witness to His peace and that we might always strive to create bridges of fraternity and reconciliation in our neighborhood in Cité Soleil.

Sisters of the Nuestra Señora de la Providencia local community

Province of Central America
(Panama)
The experience of being “sisters”

Introduction

“Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God” (Rom 8:39).

In our time and for our time, it is necessary to relearn each day the “divine-human” work of living as sisters, both among ourselves as consecrated women and with those who are poor whom we serve and with collaborators with whom we share a mission.

Fraternity is a gift to receive but also a task to accomplish daily; it is an art and an experience after the example of Jesus and in the manner of our Founders. It is important for each one of us to delight in being sisters, to recognize that we need each other and to offer each other our gifts and talents despite differences and difficulties.

Fraternity is a call to have the courage to overcome conflict in our relationships so as to avoid falling into the trap of being distant, indifferent, violent or discouraged to the point of focusing on ourselves and going it alone.

Community relationships are the privileged place where we live the Gospel. Much more than simply respecting a community

schedule, it involves being free to love others, making ourselves close to them and caring for them, having enough trust to ask for assistance or spiritual charity and overcoming temptations or difficulties, all of which comes from a deep desire of our heart (Cf. C. 32a). May nothing separate us from the love of God (Cf. Rom 8:39). The Sisters and persons who are poor are presents offered by God to help us to become true disciples of Christ in the spirit of the Vincentian charism.

Our experience of community life in Miraculous Medal Residence

We live in San José de David, a medium-sized city in southwestern Panama, close to the Pan-American Highway. It is the third largest urban area in Panama and the capital of the province of Chiriqui.

Our local community is made up of Sisters from Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala; its richness lies in this internationality. As Saint Vincent said, God accomplishes His work through the Company, He “*who willed this Company of Sisters from different regions and wanted all of them to be of one heart*” (CCD IX, 195).

Our diversity in age and stage in formation also enriches our community life. The youngest Sister is 30 years old and three years of vocation; the oldest is 82 years old and 60 years of vocation and, despite the limits due to her age and health, a model Daughter of Charity. When she caught Covid-19, she pulled through, and it was beautiful to see all the Sisters of the local community caring for her.

Our community life is a mystery of faith based on the conviction of being called by the same Father. It is God who brings us together and makes us Sisters to accomplish a shared mission. This implies the total gift of self of each Sister, with her strengths and weaknesses, and the certainty that this is God’s will.

Sisters' Testimonies

Just as in any human relationship, we experience positive and negative moments, but, thanks to a deep spiritual life, we manage to overcome difficulties. By practicing our three virtues of humility, simplicity and charity and open and sincere dialogue, community life is not seen as a burden to bear that could become intolerable at times but as an opportunity to learn, grow and develop our capacity for gratitude. Of course, at certain points, we experience periods that are more difficult for various reasons, but if we are able to open our heart to listen to each other sincerely, the community becomes a source of healing; it is like a mother that dries the tears of the child who falls or makes a mistake.

The two works of the local community are Miraculous Medal Residence and Miraculous Medal School. These two works operate separately, but their mission is the same: house and educate very poor and at-risk Indigenous girls. Most of these children come from the region of Ngäbe-Buglé. We work with lay people; it would be impossible to take on this mission alone without them. This shows us the importance of delegating responsibilities to lay people while supporting them and forming them in the Vincentian charism.

We also collaborate with the Vincentian Family in Panama. One Sister is the National Advisor to the Association of the Miraculous Medal, another National Sister Advisor to the Vincentian Marian Youth and a third the National Advisor to MISEVI. We also work with the branches of the Vincentian Family present in our city, AMM and SSVP. Sharing our experiences in these different activities also builds our community life.

A local community under the protection of the only Mother of the Company

The local community, as well as its two works, is placed under the protection of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. We have the joy of developing devotion to the Virgin Mary with local

residents who already have great love for her. In November 2020, the pandemic did not stop us from “coming to the foot of the altar.” While observing health measures put in place by the government, we were able to celebrate, in person and on-line, the Novena for the Solemnity of the Miraculous Medal. It was very moving to be able to gather once again in the chapel with the faithful. To strengthen our fraternal bonds, we continue to work for Marian pastoral ministry.

The local community, the primary place of belonging

In order to continue the work of Miraculous Medal Residence, we moved to a new building in San Carlitos, located 6.5 kilometers (4 miles) from the school, which remained in the old building in the Bolivar neighborhood. The fact that the residence and the school are no longer on the same site meant that we had to reexamine our way of living in community because several of us must accompany the children to school each day.

To conclude, we realize that fraternity is impossible without humility and that the service of those who are poor is impossible without an authentic community life. This requires our personal conversion each day in order to develop genuine attitudes of listening, dialogue, pardon and reconciliation. *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13:35).

Sisters of Miraculous Medal Residence local community

Province of Fortaleza
At the height of the pandemic,
living our community relationships well

Like many sectors of society, the local community of Daughters of Charity serving in Immaculate Conception School in Fortaleza (capital of the state of Ceara, in the Nordeste region of Brazil) had to reinvent itself during this pandemic. Of course, it was not strictly speaking a “reinvention” because fraternity has existed since the Jesus’ coming to earth, He who showed us the fraternal face of the Father. It has existed in the Company since its foundation by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

However, the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the heavy atmosphere of worry that resulted from it had the effect of exhausting us and weakening our enthusiasm. We needed to put some spice back in our life, especially our community gatherings. We wondered what we could do to make recreation more dynamic, enjoyable, lively and participative. The Sister Servant and the young Sisters tried to involve the other Sisters of the Community so that no one was left out and everyone could enjoy herself.

We organized fun games like bowling and ball games such as basketball. Since we kept score, no one wanted to be in last place! We have to admit that the older Sisters played better than the younger ones! Other times, it was bingo or a raffle with objects received over the course of the year or those that someone was willing to give up. One day, we played with empty

bags, but the handmade bags were so pretty. Everything became an excuse for gathering and having fun, all the more so because each recreation ended with a little treat (popsicles, chocolates, popcorn, etc.).

We also celebrated some seasonal holidays. Since we could not celebrate Saint John the Baptist Day with the school children, we held the festival among ourselves in our garden: costumes, music, dances, decorations, games, etc. For Christmas, we had our traditional “secret Santa,” but in the weeks before Christmas, each Sister sent messages and small gifts to the Sister for whom she was the secret Santa in order to heighten her curiosity. Around Mardi Gras, we had karaoke, games, a fashion show, lucky dip game, etc. Each Sister who won received a notebook with “Fratelli Tutti” inscribed on the cover.

Sisters’ birthday cakes were each decorated with a special theme, which called forth the creativity of the whole local community.

We give thanks to God for allowing us to experience these privileged times that helped us to grow in fraternity, attention to each individual Sister and a wonderful collaboration among us all.

Sisters of Immaculate Conception School local community

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Consoling Grace

H

*History of
the Company*

Consoling Grace¹

As a young woman, Elizabeth Bayley Seton overcame adversity, broke through gates and went forward. Divine Grace empowered her to become increasingly open and responsive to encounters with God.

This article presents an overview of life-changing events for Elizabeth Ann Seton from 1793 to 1805 and how she broke through the gates as a wife and mother as well as when, once widowed, she converted to the Catholic faith.

Courtship of Elizabeth and William

Elizabeth Ann Bayley, 19, met William Magee Seton, 26, of Manhattan, a young mercantile executive. Once they met, mutual affection soon bonded them. In her letters, Elizabeth referred to him as “*my dearest Will*” and herself as “*your Eliza*.”²

William Magee Seton was the oldest of five children born to William Francis Seton, a native of Edinburg,

1. 2.8, To Rebecca Seton, 3 January 1804, *CW*, 1:280

2. William Magee Seton (1768-1803), son of Rebecca Becker Curzon and William F. Seton, Sr.

Scotland, and Rebecca Becker Curzon Seton (1749-1775) of New York. When William was seven years old, his mother died from tuberculosis. The next year, his father married Anna Maria Curzon (1759-1792), the sister of his first wife. William grew up in lower Manhattan in a blended family, like Elizabeth.

William received a continental education by visiting counting houses at major European ports. A counting house, like a bank, provided business services, particularly accounting, for commercial enterprises. William also did an apprenticeship with the F. & A. Filicchi Company of Leghorn. There he met Filippo and Antonio Filicchi, whose genuine friendship would later be pivotal for his wife.³ William Magee was socially prominent and, with his father and others, a co-founder of Seton, Maitland and Company.

Elizabeth, wife and mother

During the early nineteenth century in New York, society was organized around professions and trades. Although her closest relatives were physicians (father, uncle and brother-in-law), Elizabeth married into a mercantile family.⁴ Elizabeth opened the gate of nineteenth-century social conventions and married William Magee Seton for love, not prestige, on January 25, 1794.⁵ She went forward in life as a wife and soon, a mother.

The art of mothering came naturally to Elizabeth. From her own experience, she realized that “*tenderness... is the language children best understand.*”⁶ According to Pope Francis, motherhood demands “*perseverance, patience and meekness,*” which are signs of holiness in today’s world.⁷ Elizabeth

3. Filippo Filicchi (1763-1816) and Antonio Filicchi (1764-1847)

4. Dr. Richard Bayley, Dr. John Charlton and Dr. Wright Post.

5. Mary Bayley married Dr. Wright Post on 10 June 1790.

6. 6.70, To Catherine Duplex, CW, 2:173.

7. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate*, 112-121

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Consoling Grace

exemplified those virtues and also believed in self-care, like having an “*hour of leisure.*”

“I am restless and dissatisfied until I can procure an hour of leisure — that indeed is but seldom, for I am constant Nurse to my infant and when he is out of my arms, the two paddlers [toddlers] are always after me praying [asking] to go in the Garden, the Woods, or the Bread and Butter closet, so you may imagine I am well occupied and happy.”⁸

The couple had five children but enjoyed less than ten years together as a married couple.

* Anna Maria (Annina) (1795-1812) died at age 16 in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

* William (1796-1868) died at age 72 in New York City.

* Richard Bayley (1798-1823) died off the coast of Monrovia, Liberia.

*Catherine Charlton (1800-1891) died at age 91 in New York City.

*Rebecca Mary (1802-1816) died at age 14 in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Elizabeth frequently referred to her “*darlings*” with maternal pride. When the three oldest children were still quite young, Elizabeth described them fondly to a friend.

“Anna is extremely altered [improved] since you were here and has grown [into] a most lovely girl indeed; she is everything you would most wish in a child. Will is a Bouncer and would rule the house, if permitted, but my little Richard rules all Hearts, for you never did see a lovelier Baby, very like Anna but a much milder expression.”⁹

8. 1.30 To Julia Scott, *CW*, 1:49. The infant to whom Elizabeth refers is Richard; the two toddlers are Anna and William.

9. 1.39, To Rebecca Seton, *CW*, 1:61-62

The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows

Looking beyond her domestic domain, Elizabeth saw the inequities in the world and was particularly concerned about impoverished women with young children. She frequently commented on the Setons' blessings in contrast to her "*poor widows*."¹⁰ She joined other women to organize and transform their concern into effective services. In 1797, they established *The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children*, the first charitable organization managed by women in the United States. Elizabeth was its first treasurer. The home visits Elizabeth made to the widows influenced the deepening of her relationship with God. Rebecca Seton shared Elizabeth's religious devotion and participated in the charitable services of the Widows Society. Sometimes those observing Elizabeth and Rebecca Seton visiting the homes of widows living in poverty called them "Protestant Sisters of Charity."¹¹

Her friendships

As a Manhattan matron, Elizabeth developed and nurtured lifelong bonds of friendship with women who would remain loyal when she managed adversity. Elizabeth and Rebecca Seton considered themselves "soul sisters." They worshipped together, shared their reflections on the sermons of Reverend John Henry Hobart and attended communion services monthly in different chapels or mission stations of Trinity Parish. They regularly exchanged notes of spiritual encouragement.

10. 1.155, To Julia Scott, 1 February 1802, *CW*, 1:202.

11. Charles I. White, *Life of Mrs. Eliza A. Seton, Foundress and First Superior of the Sisters of the Sisters or Daughters of Charity in the United States of America*, (New York: Edward Dunigan and Brother, 1853), 35

Family crosses

Elizabeth had a strong relationship with her father-in-law, who treated her more like a daughter. In January 1797, he slipped on ice and sustained extensive injuries that incapacitated him until early June when he died. At his death, a New York newspaper reported that Mr. William F. Seton, Sr. “*was ranked among the most respectable citizens of the community, and has left thirteen [children].*”¹²

As the eldest of the Seton family, William inherited management of the family firm despite his limited executive experience. Maritime piracy in this era made Americans engaged in transnational mercantile enterprise vulnerable to attacks and looting by pirates throughout the Mediterranean Sea. The United States was engaged in an undeclared war (1801-1805) against the governments of Morocco, Tripoli, Algiers and Tunis because those states treated pirates with impunity. Seton, Maitland and Company staggered under its debts and teetered at the edge of bankruptcy. The Setons were in danger of losing their home, possessions and security... to which was added a decline in William’s health, showing symptoms of tuberculosis, a disease common in his maternal lineage.

Elizabeth, in the third trimester of her third pregnancy, wrote a friend that she was assisting her husband with business matters late into the night. “*My pen has been scarcely one hour out of my hand these few weeks past except to sleep, or rather to weep, for I have had much more of the latter than the former — My poor William has kept me constantly employed in copying his letters and assisting him.*”¹³

12. Annabelle M. Melville, ed. by Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., *Elizabeth Bayley Seton 1774-1821* (Hanover, Pennsylvania: The Sheridan Press, 2009), 38

13. 1.22, To Julia Scott, 5 July 1798, *CW*, 1:35-36

Elizabeth and William Magee had been living at 27 Wall Street but planned to move their family to the larger residence in order to care for the recently orphaned minor children, William's half-brothers and sisters. Elizabeth was feeling "*woefully fatigued and so unwell in early June*" that she would not be able to relocate until after Richard's birth.¹⁴ Complications arose during the delivery, which put mother and child at risk. Dr. Bayley was present and successfully resuscitated the infant. For her part, Elizabeth temporarily lost her eyesight. An epidemic of yellow fever further delayed their move for several months.¹⁵ Elizabeth shared her sentiments about the prospect of combining her three children and the six minor Seton in-laws in the same household:¹⁶

*"If I do not try to sustain myself...— to be sure, for me who so dearly loves quiet and a small Family, to become at once the Mother of six children, and the head of so large a number, is a very great change... I have [been] accustomed...to yield to affection for my Will. When I consider his vexations and cares, I bless my God who allows me to share and lessen them."*¹⁷

John Jay, Governor of New York, appointed Dr. Bayley the first public health officer in New York on February 22, 1796. Dr. Bayley had a quarantine station and marine hospital constructed on Staten Island, and on his advice, Elizabeth went there for the birth of her fourth child in 1800. Catherine Charlton (Kitty) arrived without event. Two years later, Elizabeth delivered her last child, Rebecca Mary.

Bankruptcy and the Setons' dire financial straits forced the family to relocate again but to a rented house by the Battery at the tip of Manhattan, 8 State Street. Government officials confiscated the

14. Ibid., 36

15. 1.108, To Julia Scott, 10 March 1801, *CW*, 1:151; Cf. 1.25, Ibid., 42; 1.32, Ibid., 53; 1.147, Ibid., 193

16. Cf. Proverbs 31:10-31

17. 1.22, To Julia Scott, 5 July 1798, *CW*, 1:35-6

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key to the financial headquarters of Seton, Maitland and Company and sat in their library “*taking inventory of our furniture, goods, etc.*”¹⁸ Disease, bankruptcy and misfortune befell the Setons.

Religious beliefs

Before her marriage, Elizabeth was influenced by various religious traditions, including Methodist, Quaker, Huguenot and Episcopalian. Church records are scarce to document the Setons’ participation in Trinity Parish, other than a list of communicants and the baptisms as each child was born.

Weekly worship services consisted of hymns, psalms, Scripture readings and a lengthy sermon. “Low Church” (rather than “High Church”) best describes the Episcopal church to which the Setons belonged. Communion services occurred only about six times a year.

When Rev. John Henry Hobart arrived at Trinity as a new minister, he played an important role in the religious formation of Elizabeth.¹⁹ Well-educated in Sacred Scripture, Hobart was an excellent preacher who inspired Elizabeth. His sermons nourished her Biblical piety and deepened her spiritual awakening. The sisters-in-law Elizabeth and Rebecca, “soul sisters,” forged mutually deep bonds and sought every opportunity to listen to Hobart’s sermons. Elizabeth was so enthralled with Hobart’s preaching that she asked to review sheaves of manuscripts of his sermons, which she used for spiritual reading.²⁰

They worshipped at one of the chapels of Trinity Parish whenever Communion services were held. Like Hobart, as

18. 1.100, To Julia Scott, 7 December 1800, *CW*, 1:141

19. Flanagan, Kathleen S.C. (1993) “Some Aspects of Elizabeth Seton’s Spiritual/Theological World,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 14:2. Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol14/iss2/>

20. Cf. 1.178, To Rebecca Seton, 2 October 1803, *CW*, 1:225

an Episcopalian, Elizabeth understood “the Eucharistic rite as a sacrifice of praise” and Holy Communion as a “spiritual presence of Christ in the elements” but not the Real Presence as Catholics believe.

Merciful Father!

Elizabeth and the children spent the summer of 1801 with Dr. Bayley within the compound of the health station on Staten Island. From his front porch, Elizabeth could see the newly arrived immigrants, including emaciated mothers with lethargic infants. The sight of so much suffering disturbed her. “*I cannot sleep — the Dying, and the Dead, possess my mind. Babies perishing at the empty Breast of the expiring Mother — and this is not fancy — but the scene that surrounds me.*”²¹ Elizabeth added that her father had said that numerous youngsters “*have lain ill for many days in the ship without food, air, or changing. Merciful Father!*”²² The misery bothered Elizabeth since she was a mother who could breastfeed her own infant.

After a day of treating disease-ridden immigrants, Dr. Bayley would take a leisurely evening walk with his daughter. One evening, as they admired the brilliant sky together, her father remarked on “*the different shades of the sun on the clover field... and repeatedly exclaimed ‘in my life I never saw anything so beautiful.’*”²³ Back in the house, Elizabeth accompanied her father on the piano as he sang German hymns and family favorites. The next morning, Elizabeth noticed him “*sitting...with his head leaning on his hands*” exposed to the hot sun. Distressed, she burst “*immediately in a flood of tears.*” Dr. Bayley required support walking to the house and was “*immediately delirious.*” Neither remedy nor treatment brought relief.²⁴ Elizabeth was

21. 1.137, To Rebeca Seton, *CW*, 1:181

22. *Ibid.*

23. 1.141, to Julia Scott, 5 September 1801, *CW*, 1:185

24. *Ibid.*

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heartbroken as she nursed and comforted him for a week. Her father “*put his hand in... [Elizabeth’s] and sobbed out the last of life without the smallest struggle, groan, or appearance of pain*” and passed into Eternity.²⁵

“Hazard zit Forward”

After her father’s burial, the bereaved Elizabeth immersed herself in management of the Seton household and her involvement with the Widows Society. She observed her husband’s health decline. “*My Seton... looks more indisposed than I have ever before seen him.*”²⁶

The day of their marriage, Elizabeth and William had promised one another “*from this day forward... in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.*” Their mutual love enabled both to cope with whatever would come their way. The couple trusted in Divine Providence while also relying on supportive relatives and friends. Elizabeth’s faith in God, coupled with William’s determination, steadied them onward. This spirit reflected the Seton family motto: ***Hazard zit Forward***, derived from Norman French and Old English; in modern English, *Whatever the peril, go forward!*

Voyage of Hope

When traditional medical treatments failed, the Setons arranged a desperate effort to restore William’s health, a sea voyage to the warm climate of Tuscany, Italy. Although many discouraged the Setons’ plan as preposterous, Elizabeth forged ahead with preparations because she and William wished to improve his health. Sea voyages were a commonly prescribed cure for

25. Ibid., 186

26. 1.129, To Eliza Sadler, 26 June 1801, *CW*, 1:172. Elizabeth frequently referred to her husband as “My Seton.”

nagging ailments in the nineteenth century. Elizabeth “*in the month of August weaned a sick baby — broke up housekeeping and [have] been ever since in hourly expectation of embarking for Leghorn.*”²⁷ William had visited Tuscany previously and knew Filippo and Antonio Filicchi, friends and business associates of Leghorn.²⁸ Elizabeth informed Eliza Sadler,

*“The Vessel is chartered — freight procured — and the 25th appointed for departure — but — every Morning sun shows so rapid a change and diminution of my Seton’s strength that if he is out of his bed at that time, it is much more than the present prospect promises.”*²⁹

Elizabeth and William arranged for relatives (Rebecca Seton and Mary Post) to care for their youngest children but planned for Anna Maria to accompany them. They accepted the Hobarts’ offer to safeguard some pictures and furniture while they were away. Elizabeth packed her Bible, copies of sermons by Hobart, writing paper, quills, special jellies and drinks for her husband. Trusting God, she rapidly penned her thoughts to Julia Scott just before boarding *The Shepherdess*: “*My Seton’s decline is so rapid that there can be no hope of his recovery in the view of MORTAL HOPES — but knowing who holds the scale and how merciful is his guidance — My soul reposes on that Mercy and now feels the full force of those consolations.*”³⁰

On October 2, 1803, the Setons departed from the port of New York on *The Shepherdess*, commanded by Captain John O’Brien. Elizabeth’s attentive care of William is reminiscent of how “*Louise [de Marillac] lovingly cared for husband [with]*

27. 1.174, To Julia Scott, 1 October 1803, *CW*, 1:222

28. Luca Codignola, *Blurred Nationalities Across the Atlantic*, (University of Toronto Press, 2019), 153

29. 1.172, To Eliza Sadler, [20 September], *CW*, 1:220

30. 10.4, Dear Remembrances, *CW*, 3a:512; 1.174, To Julia Scott, 1 October 1803, *CW*, 1:222

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his mood swings and frequent bouts of impatience.”³¹ Elizabeth realized that God was inviting her anew to *perseverance, patience and meekness.*³² Sustained by Psalm 23, the Setons confidently entrusted themselves to Divine Providence during their transatlantic voyage.

Quarantine

After forty-six days at sea, passengers on *The Shepherdess* rejoiced to hear the bells from the port of Leghorn ringing the Angelus. However, just before the vessel arrived in port, Italian officials received news of a yellow fever epidemic in New York. Port officers viewed William’s frail condition with skepticism beyond caution and met them with austere formality. Despite the pleas of the Filicchi and others who came to welcome the “Americans,” authorities quarantined the Setons in a lazaretto off the coast of Leghorn.

Elizabeth wrote to Rebecca, her “soul sister”: “*At length we were shown the door we should enter No. 6 — up 20 stone steps, a room with high arched ceilings... brick floor, naked walls, and a jug of water. The Capitan sent three warm eggs, a bottle of wine and some... [slices] of Bread. Willy’s mattress was soon spread and he upon it. He could touch neither wine nor eggs — our little syrups, currant jelly, drinks, etc. which he must have every half hour on board Ship. Where were they?*”³³

Heartbroken, Elizabeth discovered a small niche and braced herself there and wept, as she wrote: “*After emptying my heart and washing the bricks with my tears, [I] returned to my poor*

31. Elisabeth Charpy, *Louise de Marillac: Come Winds or High Waters* (trans. Clara Orban and Sr. Mary Jo Stein, 2018), p. 14

32. Pope Francis, *Guadete et exsultate*, 112-21.

33. 2.7, To Rebecca Seton, 19 November 1803, *CW*, 1: 253. I have edited the original text for clarity.

Willy.”³⁴ Anna “found a rope that had tied her box and began jumping away to warm herself, for the coldness of the bricks and walls made us shiver.”³⁵

Conditions in the lazaretto were uncomfortable, even more so for anyone sick: a strong wind from the sea blew through the open grate, almost extinguishing lit candles. Cold sea breezes penetrated every crevice and seemed like thunder rolling down the chimney. These disturbances precipitated William’s violent coughing fits, and he coughed up blood, which distressed him greatly though he tried to hide it from his wife. Elizabeth encouraged William through reading Sacred Scripture and reciting familiar prayers. She tried unsuccessfully to persuade authorities to respond more compassionately.

The Filicchi family did all they could to advocate for the Setons and to provide some relief during their isolation. Unexpectedly, officials decreased the length of the Setons’ quarantine by five days. Emotionally spent, Elizabeth responded to the news with wrenching sobs; she wrote, “*I was comforted when I did not look at my poor Will, but to see him as he then was — was worse than to see him dead.*”³⁶ Elizabeth immersed herself in prayer, reflection and journaling.

*“These hours I often think I shall hereafter esteem the most precious of my life.”*³⁷ *“I find my present opportunity a Treasure — and my confinement of Body, a liberty of Soul which I may never again enjoy whilst they are united — every moment not spent with my dear books, or in my nursing duty is a loss.”*³⁸

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 255

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 257-258

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Exertion could cause William to spike a high fever: “*the bed shakes even with his breathing.*”³⁹ Elizabeth tried to reassure, calm and let him rest whenever he was sleeping comfortably.

“*But O my Heavenly Father, I know that these contradictory events are permitted and guided by thy Wisdom, which only is light. We are in darkness and must be thankful that our knowledge is not wanted to perfect thy work.*”⁴⁰

As Elizabeth cared tenderly for Will and Anna Maria, their detention in the lazaretto kindled her wrath “*because of the high and damp walls*” and exposure “*to cold and wind*” penetrating “*to the very bones.*”

In Pisa

When released, Elizabeth and William were brought by Filippo Filicchi to an apartment in Pisa, on the opposite side of the Arno River from where he and his wife Mary lived. Elizabeth was grateful that her husband bore the ride to Pisa “*much better than... expected.*”⁴¹

Later that week, William wished to take carriage rides through the countryside, but he was too weak and had to turn back after five minutes.

As Christmas Day dawned, William said that he wished they “*could have the Sacrament.*”⁴² Elizabeth put “*a little wine in a glass*” and recited “*different portions of Psalms and Prayers.*”⁴³

39. Ibid., 261

40. Ibid., 27.

41. 2.8, To Rebecca Seton, 3 January 1804, *CW*, 1:271-272; 277

42. 2.7, To Rebecca Seton, 19 November 1803, *CW*, 1: 273

43. Ibid.

They prayed and shared “*the cup of Thanksgiving.*”⁴⁴ Confusion soon clouded William’s mind. He became delirious and “*so impatient to be gone that... [Elizabeth] could scarcely persuade him to wet his lips, as he continued calling his Redeemer to Pardon and release him.*”⁴⁵ William seemed consoled when Elizabeth repeated “*every promise in the Scriptures.*”⁴⁶ He assured his wife that “*he felt so comfortable an assurance that his Redeemer would receive him.*”⁴⁷

Elizabeth wrote Rebecca, “*I often asked him when he could not speak, ‘You feel my love that you are going to your Redeemer’ and he motioned, ‘Yes,’ with a look up of Peace. At a quarter past 7 on Tuesday morning 27th December [1803] — his Soul was released — and mine from a struggle next to death.*”⁴⁸ Embracing Anna, they knelt together “*by the dear Body, ...[to] thank our Heavenly Father for relieving him from his misery, for the Joyful assurance that thro’ our Blessed Redeemer, Will had entered into Life Eternal, and implored God’s Protecting care*” for the family.⁴⁹

Two laundresses helped to wash, dress and prepare the body for interment. Elizabeth met Mary Filicchi for the carriage ride to Leghorn. Elizabeth “*had not rested for a week — three days and nights — the fatigue had been incessant and one meal in 24 hours.*”⁵⁰ After the obsequies at the English Cemetery,⁵¹

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 274

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 275

51. St. George’s Anglican Church in Leghorn. The grave marker reads: “Here lies the remains of William Magee Seton, Merchant of New York, who departed this life at Pisa, the 27th day of December 1803.” His remains were transferred to the garden of Sta. Ana Elisabetta Seton Church, Piazza Lavagna, in 2004.

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Elizabeth and Anna Maria returned to the home of Antonio and Amabilia Filicchi in Leghorn.

“Teach My Heart”

In Leghorn

Leghorn is an international port, unique for its diversity of nationalities of those engaged in commercial enterprise. The development of ecumenism in this city is also remarkable.

It was the Christmas season when Elizabeth and her daughter Anna Maria arrived as guests in the Filicchi home. Anna Maria had already won the hearts of the Filicchi, who began calling her “Annina,” an endearing name that she would retain. The twenty-nine-year-old grieving widow remained faith-filled, attesting that “*the Protecting Presence and consoling Grace of my Redeemer and God... has never left me.*”⁵² To experience Tuscan cultural heritage is also to encounter Roman Catholicism. Antonio and Amabilia Filicchi lived within a block of the Church of Saint Caterina de Siena, an eighteenth-century, baroque structure located in the district of New Venice.

In the Filicchi home, Elizabeth noticed a small prayer book open to the *Memorare*. The prayer touched the core of her grieving heart, moving her to make several copies of the text. At the end of one, the widow added, “*Love me, my Mother.*”⁵³ One evening, Antonio graciously showed Elizabeth how to make the sign of the Cross.⁵⁴ Moved deeply by the significance of this act, Elizabeth exclaimed in a letter, “*All the Catholic Religion is full of those meanings which interest me so!*”⁵⁵

52. 2.8, To Rebecca Seton, 3 January 1804, *CW*, 1:280

53. 2.11, Journal to Rebecca Seton, *CW*, 1:293

54. 2.14, Journal to Rebecca Seton, *CW*, 1:296

55. *Ibid.*

In Florence

In early January 1804, Elizabeth and Anna Maria accompanied the Filicchi to Florence where they planned to visit relatives.⁵⁶ There, Elizabeth had lovely accommodations with a view of the Apennine Mountains, the Ponte Vecchio and medieval bridges across the Arno River.

La Santissima Annunziata

Once there, Amabilia went to the Basilica of the Most Holy Annunciation for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and took Elizabeth and Annina along with her. Elizabeth sank into a vacant spot and wept “*a torrent of tears*” welling up from “*accumulated sorrow*.”⁵⁷ This may have been Elizabeth’s first experience of Catholic worship.

Santa Maria Novella

Elizabeth next visited the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella. Dating to the Middle Ages, it is an example of Gothic and Renaissance architecture with majestic artwork. *Il Deposizione della Croce* by Giovanni Battista Naldini mesmerized Elizabeth.⁵⁸ (In the Anglophone world, this work is entitled *The Lamentation of Jesus Christ*.) Naldini used darkness and light to enable the viewer to focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ as his body is removed from the cross. At the far left one sees Nicodemus, who brought myrrh and aloes (spices) for the burial. The dominance of red hues indicates religious persecution and martyrdom of

56. 2.10, Florence Journal to Rebecca Seton, [January 1804], *CW*, 1:283-288

57. *Ibid.*, 283

58. Giovanni Battista Naldini (1535-1591), *Il Deposizione*, 1572, an Italian painter in a late-Mannerist style, active in Florence. Cf. <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/property-from-a-private-collection-giovanni-batti-30-c-e2262bc92t#>

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Christians. Elizabeth identified with the grief of Mary receiving the corpse of her Son; it spoke to her of her personal heartache.

“A picture of the descent from the Cross, nearly as large as life, engaged my whole soul. Mary at the foot of it expressed well that the iron had entered into her — and the shades of death over her agonized countenance, so strongly contrasted the heavenly Peace of the dear Redeemers, that it seems as if his pains had fallen on her — How hard it was to leave that picture and how often, even in the few hours interval since I have seen it, I shut my eyes and recall it in imagination.”⁵⁹

The Opera

Before his death, William Seton, an opera aficionado, had hoped to take his wife to an opera featuring the famed tenor Giacomo Davide in Florence. The Filicchi made the arrangements, so despite her lack of interest, Elizabeth reluctantly agreed to go. She described the evening for Rebecca. *“The Opera house is so dark... I could not find the least gratification in their quavers... My William had so much desired that I should hear this David that I tried to be pleased, but not one note touched my heart.”⁶⁰*

The book “Introduction to the Devout Life”

When they returned to Leghorn, Filippo Filicchi presented Elizabeth with a spiritual classic by Saint Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*.⁶¹ God thus led Elizabeth toward Mystery. She wrote that Amabilia *“took me with her to Mass*

59. 2.10, Florence Journal to Rebecca Seton, [January 1804], *CW*, 1:287

60. *Ibid.*, 286

61. The feast of St. Francis de Sales is celebrated January 24, the day of his death.

[again], as she calls it, and we say to church” on February 2.⁶² Elizabeth was filled with awe when “they told me [that] God was present in the Blessed Sacrament.”⁶³ Deeply impressed, Elizabeth confided to Rebecca that she had “so much to tell [her]... about things you do not dream of — these dear people are so strange about Religion.”⁶⁴

“I asked Mr. Filicchi something ... about the different religions and he began to tell me there was only one true Religion and without a right Faith we would not be acceptable to God — ‘O my Sir,’ then said I, ‘if there is but one Faith and nobody pleases God without it, where are all the good people who die out of it?’ — ‘I don’t know,’ he answered, ‘that depends on what light of Faith they had received, but I know where people will go who can know the right Faith if they pray for it and enquire for it, and yet do neither,’ much as to say, ‘Sir you want me to pray and enquire and be of your Faith?’ said I, laughing—‘Pray, and enquire,’ said he, ‘that is all I ask you.’”⁶⁵

The Sanctuary of Montenero

In early February, the Filicchi showed Elizabeth and Anna Maria the Sanctuary of Montenero, also called the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace. This place, dear to the Filicchi’s hearts, is situated atop a small mountain surrounded by verdant beauty. It offers a magnificent view of the Tyrrhenian Sea and terraced multicolor floral gardens.

During the Sacred Liturgy, an incident occurred that shocked Elizabeth, but it became a defining moment of her spiritual journey.

62. The traditional feast celebrating the ritual purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple (February 2). The Candles used in the sacred liturgy are blessed before Mass and carried in procession.

63. 2.11, To Rebecca Seton, 28 January 1804, *CW*, 1:289

64. *Ibid.*, 290

65. *Ibid.*

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During Mass “*this poor young Englishman, at the very moment the Priest was doing the most sacred action they call the elevation... this wild young man said loudly in my ear, ‘This is what they call their real PRESENCE.’ My very heart trembled with shame and sorrow for his unfeeling interruption of their sacred adoration, for all around was dead Silence and many were prostrated... The next thought was how should they eat and drink their very damnation for not discerning it.*”⁶⁶

Elizabeth blushed with shame at the disrespectful intrusion. She bent downward in prayer as a passage from Saint Paul ran through her mind, “*They discern not the Lord’s body.*” As an Episcopalian devoted to the reception of Holy Communion, Elizabeth revered the sacrament and began to wonder how baptized believers and communicants could so casually dismiss the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. She wondered if they were eating and drinking their own eternal punishment, followed by other questions.⁶⁷ “*I am laughing with God when I try to be serious and say daily as the good gentleman told me in old Mr. Alexander Pope’s words: ‘If I am right, O teach my heart still in the right to stay / If I am wrong, thy grace imparts to find the better way.’*”⁶⁸ “*Not that I can think there is a better way than I know, but everyone must be respected in their own.*”⁶⁹

Elizabeth’s openness to accept individual differences reveals her desire for inclusivity and unity amid diversity. It wasn’t long before she wrote Rebecca again, not about sightseeing, but the dawning of her own reflection on the Catholic faith. Elizabeth asked questions about Catholicism, first out of curiosity and later

66. Ibid., 290-291

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid. Alexander Pope (1688-1744), *Moral Essays*. “*If I am right, Thy grace impart / Still in the right to stay / If I am wrong, O, teach my heart / To find that better way!*”

69. 2.11, To Rebecca Seton, 28 January 1804, *CW*, 1:290

as a seeker of religious truth. Curiosity prompted her inquiries about aspects of the Catholic faith that gradually became more focused, and the Filicchi offered her excellent accompaniment. “How happy would we be if we believed what these dear Souls believe, that they possess God in the Sacrament — and that he remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick.”⁷⁰

Homeward

Elizabeth expected to return to New York on *The Shepherdess* when Captain John O’Brien set sail in a few weeks.⁷¹ The day Elizabeth and Anna Maria boarded *The Shepherdess* to set sail the next morning, a bad storm broke out during the night, damaging the vessel and forcing all passengers to disembark. The Filicchi welcomed the Setons into their home again until repairs made *The Shepherdess* seaworthy.⁷² In the interim, Annina developed a high fever and sore throat, diagnosed as Scarlatina, and was confined to bed for almost three weeks. Next Elizabeth became ill with the same malady for two weeks. If Captain O’Brien were to admit a sick passenger knowingly, he would not be able to obtain a Bill of Health and access to other ports. Elizabeth understood but was disappointed as *The Shepherdess* sailed without them. However, with a grateful heart, Elizabeth acknowledged how God had blessed their voyage of hope: from “the day [we] left home we have met with nothing but kindness.”⁷³

At that time, it was neither safe nor prudent for women to travel without a male escort, which concerned the Filicchi. Since Antonio Filicchi had business matters in Canada and New York, he took advantage of the opportunity to accompany Elizabeth and Anna Maria safely homeward. The two Setons and Antonio

70. Ibid., 292

71. Ibid., 278

72. 2.12 To Rebecca Seton, 5 March 1804, *CW*, 1:293

73. Ibid.

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boarded *The Pyamingo* under Captain Blagge and sailed toward America on April 18, 1804. A British naval fleet surrounded *The Pyamingo*, and troops from two British vessels also came aboard on the pretext of assuring the ship carried nothing that could assist their enemy, Napoleon's French Empire. Elizabeth recounted the frightening experiences to Rebecca: "*I have not mentioned two days which I wish to remember — one in view of the towering Alps, which separate Italy from France; also the day we were becalmed opposite the town of Valencia, and surrounded by Lord Nelson's fleet.*"⁷⁴ *We were boarded by the Belle-Isle, and the evening before by the seventy-four Excellent.*"⁷⁵

Reunion

On June 4, 1804, Elizabeth returned to New York with the heart of a Roman Catholic. A large group including her children was there at the wharf to welcome her. Elizabeth was thrilled to see and embrace her children. She scanned the crowd for Rebecca Seton and learned that her "soul sister" was dying from tuberculosis. A month later, Elizabeth buried another member of the Seton family, Rebecca.

Her relatives and friends soon discovered her interest in Catholicism. Elizabeth experienced profound personal distress because the Seton family alienated her, yet she never doubted the mercy of God and benefited from the wise counsel and support of clergymen recommended by the Filicchi.

Elizabeth confided to John Carroll, first bishop of Baltimore, "*I may strictly say, incessantly, as it... [has been] the only and supreme desire of my Soul — to know the Truth.*"⁷⁶ As Elizabeth

74. France and England were hostile to each other, and a British fleet, commanded by Admiral Horatio Nelson, sailed the Mediterranean Sea.

75. 2.14, To Rebecca Seton, 24 April 1804, *CW*, 1:302

76. 3.6, Elizabeth Seton to Bishop Carroll, [26 July 1804], *CW*, 1:315

wrestled with doubts and fears during her discernment of God's plan, the Virgin Mary became her prism of faith.

Rev. John H. Hobart forcefully opposed Elizabeth's interest in Catholicism. Hurt and confused by his public hostility, Elizabeth studied books on ecclesiastical history, doctrine and religious matters, comparing Catholic dogma with that of the Episcopal Church. Presbyterian, Quaker, Methodist and Anabaptist acquaintances invited Elizabeth to worship with them, but she declined.⁷⁷

Elizabeth's conversion

Elizabeth remained in a quandary in her resolute search for truth "*wherever it is, one Faith, one hope, one baptism — I look for [it], wherever it is... I often think my sins, my miseries hide the light, yet I will cling and hold to my God to the last gasp, begging for that light, and never change until I find it.*"⁷⁸

*"Truth does not depend on the people around us, or the place we are in. I can only say, I do long and desire to worship our God in Truth... knowing as he does the sole and whole bent of my Soul is to please him only, and get close to him in this life and the next."*⁷⁹

Overpowered by anguish and unable to sleep well, at midnight Elizabeth would often "*look up at the walls through... [her] tears and distress,*" which had worn her out to almost a skeleton.⁸⁰ Emotionally exhausted after ten months of heart-wrenching discernment, Elizabeth received the grace to resolve her inner conflict and make a decision. "*I left the house a Protestant [but]*

77. 3.31, Journal to Amabilia Filicchi, 19 July 1804, *CW*, 1:368

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 371; cf., *Ibid.*, 372

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I returned to it a Catholic — calmly at last, abandoning all to God, and a renewed confidence in the Blessed Virgin whose mild and peaceful love reproached my bold excesses, and reminded me to fix my heart above with better hopes.”⁸¹

Realizing her parental obligations, Elizabeth acknowledged that as *“I am a Mother, and my children I must answer for in Judgment, whatever Faith I lead them to... could be so full of consequence to them or me, I WILL GO PEACEABLY and FIRMLY TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH — for if Faith is so important to our Salvation I will seek it where true Faith first began, seek it among those who received it from GOD HIMSELF.”⁸²*

On March 14, 1805, Father Matthew O’Brien received Elizabeth’s Profession of Faith at St. Peter’s Church, Barclay Street, New York City.⁸³ She received her first Holy Communion as a Catholic two weeks later, on March 25. When confirmed by Bishop John Carroll on May, 25, 1806, Elizabeth added the name of Mary to her own. Thereafter, she usually signed correspondence as *“MEAS,”* explaining that she had *“added the name of Mary to the Ann Elizabeth, which present the three most endearing ideas in the World — and contain the moments of the Mysteries of Salvation.”⁸⁴*

81. Ibid., 373

82. Ibid., 374

83. From correspondence, it’s apparent that Matignon and Carroll believed that Elizabeth had been validly baptized in the Protestant Episcopal Church although no ecclesial documentation was discovered, probably due to the 1776 fire at Trinity Church, where she was a congregant and communicant. Bishop Samuel Provoost officiated at her wedding in 1794. An autograph notation referring to her Baptism was found on a flyleaf of her copy of *The Imitation of Christ*, about 1936. This discovery opened the pathway for the Seton cause for canonization.

84. 4.19, To Antonio Filicchi, 28 May 1806, *CW*, 1:408

Elizabeth was convinced that her primary obligation was her vocation as a mother and that God would lead her in raising her five *darlings*. To earn her living, Elizabeth entered into an employment agreement with Mr. and Mrs. Patrick White to teach in their school during the academic year 1805-1806. Mr. White informed Elizabeth on August 28 (her birthday) that his school had failed financially, even before classes began.

Rev. William Harris hired Elizabeth in November 1805 to be housemother of a boarding house for male students of St. Mark's Episcopal School. Elizabeth held this position for about two years until parents disagreed with her decision in a disciplinary matter and many withdrew their sons.

Ephata

Having passed through adversity, Elizabeth embarked on a spiritual journey. She broke through the gates of life-changing events, going forward to follow “her star” as a Catholic woman of faith.⁸⁵ Elizabeth sought “*regular hours of communion with God and separation from the tumult of the world... [and wanted] to do nothing, but in the spirit of obedience to God and the accomplishment of His good will and pleasure.*”⁸⁶ This was Elizabeth’s “*secret of finding God in all things and everywhere*” — her way of encountering God — as an icon for us of *Ephata*.⁸⁷

Sister Betty Ann McNEIL
Daughter of Charity

85. 3.31, Journal to Amabilia Filicchi, 19 July 1804 [Entry of January 1805], *CW*, 1:372

86. 8.26, Pyamingo Reflections, *CW*, 3a:191

87. *Ibid.*, cf. Mark 7:34

Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Joseph

1. Saint Vincent's devotion to Saint Joseph

Saint Vincent de Paul is known above all for his impressive works of charity, an aspect of his life presented up through the most recent publications that skillfully bring them out. In addition to his love for those who are poor, we know his love for Our Lord Jesus Christ. How many people, however, know his work for the clergy, his veneration of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Eucharist and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin?

We are even less aware that he also loved Saint Joseph. We should admit that he speaks little of Joseph in what remains of his words and writings (hardly a tenth of his letters, the majority having been pillaged during the French Revolution, and only a tenth of the conferences given the Priests of the Mission were written down, a large number of which were also pillaged during the Revolution, but these remains still fill fourteen volumes...).

I would simply like to make known these few vestiges of Saint Vincent's devotion to Saint Joseph.

His second biographer, Pierre Collet, who had the good fortune to still possess all the documents, could write in 1748,

“His affection for Saint Joseph was similar to that which Saint Teresa had for the noble spouse of the Mother of God” (La vie de Vincent de Paul, Volume II, page 143).

Vincent named him the patron of his internal seminaries.

“Internal seminaries” is the name given the novitiates of the Priests of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity. Vincent wanted the person who presided over Jesus’ formation to preside over the formation of Jesus in the soul of His servants.

We can find this devotion encompassed in devotion to the Holy Family. It is not indicated as such in the Common Rules nor in other documents, but it is implied in Saint Vincent’s devotion to the Holy Family.

Devotion to the Holy Family is part of the spirit of the priests of the Tuesday Conferences:

“The purpose of the Company of the clergy who meet every Tuesday at Saint-Lazare or at the seminary of the Congregation of the Mission is to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ, His eternal priesthood, His Holy Family, and His love for those who are poor” (Regulations, CCD XIIIa, 140).

It is also part of the spirit of the Congregation of the Mission. The Holy Family is only found as an image in its Common Rules, but in a prominent place: at the bottom of the frontispiece, beside an image of the Holy Trinity. We find the three members of the Holy Family named at the end of a letter (written before 1634) in which Saint Vincent asks Louise de Marillac to give something up:

“In short, you will profit if you do this, because Our Lord wishes it so, in Whose love and in that of His holy Mother and of Saint Joseph, I am your most humble servant” (CCD I, 156).

We also find devotion to Saint Joseph for its own sake. Even if Saint Joseph does not have a central place with Saint Vincent, we find traces of his attachment to him, along with some other saints, in his correspondence and conferences.

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Saint Vincent advised the Daughters of Charity to have devotion to him along with to other saints. The 1641 Rule for the Sisters in the hospital in Angers thus reads,

“And, so that it may please God to grant them the grace of accomplishing all these things, they will frequently ask it of Him, will go to confession and Communion for this intention, and will walk in the presence of God. They will take as their patrons and intercessors before God the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, Saint Louis, Saint Genevieve, Saint Margaret the Queen, and Saint John the Evangelist” (CCD XIIIb, 113-114).

He recommended this devotion to the Priests of the Mission at the end of a repetition of prayer on chastity (July 30, 1655), after evoking the example of the first Jesuits.

“... the greatest means is to turn frequently to Our Lord in every circumstance and at every moment; turn to Our Lord and have great devotion to His purity and that of the Blessed Virgin. Let’s ask Him for this grace; I feel that, if we beg Him earnestly for it, He’ll have mercy on us... This is what we’ll ask of God. please, through the intercession of Our Lady, Saint Joseph, our Guardian Angels, Saint Peter, and Saint Ignatius” (CCD XI, 198).

Saint Vincent also inculcated this devotion in those whom he directed, including in an “advice to a distinguished person” (Doc. 42), so that the first biographer of Vincent, Louis Abelly, could copy the rule of life written by Saint Vincent and publish it in his biography (Book III, chapter VIII, p. 75).

“On rising, I shall adore the majesty of God and thank Him for His glory, the glory He has given to His Son, to the Blessed Virgin, to the Holy Angels, to my Guardian Angel, to Saint John the Baptist, to the Apostles, to Saint Joseph, and to all the saints in paradise. I will thank them also for the graces He has given to the holy Church, and especially for those I have received from Him” (CCD XIIIa, 160).

Vincent's disciples inherited this confidence in Saint Joseph.

We see an example of it in the long report (March 1661) from the missionary Nicolas Étienne, on route to Madagascar and held over at Cape of Good Hope due to a shipwreck.

“On the feast of Saint Joseph, one of our sailors fell overboard but, either through the intercession of this great saint or because he had made his peace with God just a few days previously, God rescued him and saved him from the waves of that ocean” (CCD VIII, 568).

2. Portrait of Saint Joseph

a – Characteristics of his life

Vincent constantly contemplated the life and interior states of Jesus, which sometimes caused him to evoke the life of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. For example, he wrote the following to Mademoiselle Champagne, a novice in Notre-Dame-de-Sézanne Abbey, on June 25, 1658:

“Mademoiselle, please reflect a little on the Son of God, who came into the world not only to save us by His death but to submit to all His Father willed and to draw us to Him by the example of His life. He was still in His mother's womb when He was obliged to obey the Emperor's edict. He was born outside of His own native place in a harsh season and in dire poverty. Shortly after that, we see Herod persecuting Him, causing Him to flee and to suffer in exile His own hardships and, out of compassion, those of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, who had to endure much because of Him. When He returned to Nazareth and grew up, He was subject to His parents and the rules of a hidden life. He did so to serve as a model to religious souls who, having embraced a similar life, must submit to their Superiors and the observances of their state. Doubtless, He had you in mind at that time, in His eternal plan to save you by the life of complete withdrawal you have begun” (CCD VII, 202).

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During a repetition of prayer on November 11, 1656, with the Priests of the Mission, he touched on dispositions alternating between fervor and dryness, showing that Jesus Himself experienced vicissitudes during His earthly life. He only mentioned Saint Joseph as a secondary character, but we sense that Vincent did not separate him from his contemplation of Jesus.

“At His birth, we see angels and shepherds coming to adore Him, to rejoice together at His birth, and to render Him honor; next, we see Him constrained, so to speak, to flee to a foreign kingdom to avoid Herod’s persecution. Once Herod dies, back He comes. He goes off to the temple and appears among the Doctors there as a very intelligent child. From that state of admiration in which He was held by all who saw Him and heard Him speak in that way, He passes to another; for, since the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph had gone home, there He is, all alone in the temple like a poor person bereft of all assistance” (CCD XI, 330).

b - Saint Joseph, with Jesus: model of work

This has become a classic theme since Saint Joseph was declared the patron of workers. We find it at least once in Saint Vincent’s conferences, and on the Sisters’ lips, which shows that he was able to pass on contemplation of the Holy Family.

At the beginning of a conference to the Daughters of Charity on love of work (November 28, 1649), the Sisters spoke: *“One reason why we have to work to earn part of our living is that our vocation has the honor of imitating the laborious life of the Son of God; consequently, since He worked with Saint Joseph and His holy Mother to earn His living, so should we...” (CCD IX, 380).*

Another Sister said, *“It seems to me, Father, that one motive for being concerned with earning part of our living is to imitate Our Lord, Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin His holy mother, who worked all their lives” (CCD IX, 381).*

c – Above all, Saint Vincent contemplated the relationship among Jesus, His Mother and Saint Joseph.

** Jesus was submissive to him*

Vincent evoked the obedience of the Son of God in his conferences on vocation and obedience. To the Daughters of Charity, on their vocation (July 5, 1640):

“To be true Daughters of Charity, you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth. And what did He do mainly? After submitting His Will and obeying the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation. How fortunate you are, Sisters, to be called to a state of life so pleasing to God!” (CCD IX, 14)

To the Daughters of Charity, on obedience (May 23, 1655):

“The second means is... to reflect on what Our Lord used to do and to ask Him, ‘Quoi, Lord! Did You never do anything apart from obedience? When You wanted to do something, did You ask permission of Your mother and Saint Joseph?’ He’ll answer yes, and by these considerations will encourage you to obey” (CCD X, 71-72).

Speaking with the Daughters of Charity about availability (June 17, 1657), he came to the excuse that senior Sisters might put forward to have more freedom than young ones.

“Senior Sisters are obliged to be more virtuous than those who come after them. Not only does God ask for greater perfection in a senior Sister than in a newcomer, but we’re obliged to strive after perfection in proportion as we advance in age.

And I – who, as you know, am seventy-seven years old – must have greater perfection than a man who’s only sixty; and the older I get, the more I’m obliged to approach perfection by

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imitating Him who never did His own Will but was always ready to obey His holy mother and Saint Joseph during His childhood and hidden life, and the judges at the time of His Passion - even though they were wicked.

So, I see nothing that can dispense you from this holy practice, dear Sisters, either in sickness or in health, because you can always have this conformity with the Will of God in whatever state you are” (CCD X, 228).

He concluded this conference with a prayer:

“O Savior of my soul, grant us the grace to correct all these feelings in ourselves and to adopt this holy practice. O Savior, You who are Charity itself and Father of the Daughters of Charity, You who never did Your own Will but always that of Your Father and willed to be submissive to Your holy mother and Saint Joseph Your putative father, grant me the grace never to want anything but what Your heavenly Father wills, for that’s true happiness. Grant us the grace, O Lord, to begin, from this moment, that blessed life the saints enjoy in heaven, consisting in having one same will and non-will with God” (CCD X, 230-231).

On October 13, 1658, he explained to the Daughters of Charity how those who did not know how to read could make meditation:

“‘How can poor Daughters of Charity who are out in the country and who can’t read do that?’ Sisters, your Rule states that you may then meditate on the mysteries of the life of Our Lord: His Incarnation, His Nativity, His dwelling in Nazareth, how He obeyed His holy Mother and Saint Joseph, and, in a word, on all the other circumstances in the life of the Son of God from His birth to His death, and, after that, on how He ascended into Heaven” (CCD X, 461).

He speaks in the same terms to the Priests of the Mission on December 19, 1659:

“Regarding the first reason we have for giving ourselves to God that He may give us this virtue of obedience, that’s stated in the Rule, namely, the example the Son of God gave us and continued to give during His entire life, which was simply a sequence of obedience.

It must be said that there’s something great and divine in this virtue, since Our Lord loved it so much from His birth to His death and performed all the actions of His life through obedience. He obeyed God His Father, who willed that He become man; He obeyed His mother and His putative father Saint Joseph, et erat subditus illis, [And he was obedient to them. Cf. Lk 2:51] and all those who were in authority, both good and bad, so that all the actions of His life were nothing but a sequence of obedience. He began His life in that way factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis [Becoming obedient even to death, even death on a cross. Cf. Pil 2:8] obedient unto death, and even to death on the Cross, and because of that – propter quod – His Father esteemed Him highly, exalted Him, and lifted Him up” (CCD XII, 346-347).

** Joseph himself, like the Virgin Mary, imitated Jesus*

On May 2, 1659, speaking to the Priests of the Mission about mortification, Vincent evoked Jesus’ precept of leaving our parents if they want to oppose our desire to give ourselves to God. As was his want (probably taken from the methods of scholastic discussion learned at the university in Toulouse), he put forward an objection and then responded, thus painting a spiritual portrait of Jesus’ parents.

“- ‘But, Monsieur, Our Lord didn’t do that, He always stayed with Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, He had a good relationship with His relatives.’

- Yes, but those holy parents always submitted their understanding and desires to that Divine Child; they were consistent in their

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actions and affections for Him through the instinctive power of the adorable wisdom and eternal Will of His Father, who had established Him as the director and guide of Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin” (CCD XII, 177).

3. Our relationship with Saint Joseph

Saint Vincent can also guide us in our relationships, not only with God, the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also with Saint Joseph.

This relationship is developed by the imitation of his virtues and bears fruit in prayer.

The imitation of his virtues

Vincent recommended imitation of a specific aspect to Louise de Marillac (before 1634): *“This note will serve three purposes...*

The third purpose is to request you not to go to the poor today. In that way you will honor the inactivity of the Son of God and that of Saint Joseph, who, although he had the power of heaven and earth in his care and under his authority, nonetheless, wished to appear powerless.

Send Madame Richard to them. Perhaps God will then impart to her some grace that she needs and to you, some degree of humility, of compassion for the sick, or of self-knowledge - your powerlessness to advance towards the object of your fervent aspiration.

In short, you will profit if you do this, because Our Lord wishes it so, in Whose love and in that of His holy Mother and of Saint Joseph, I am your most humble servant” (CCD I, 155-156; we already quoted the last sentence above).

He returns to this idea on July 21, 1658, in the prayer concluding a conference on fidelity to the Rules:

“O Lord, O Lord, who established this little Company of poor women, You who willed to be born of a poor girl, although of royal lineage, and who want them to act as Your father Saint Joseph did; You desire that they conform themselves to what You and Your mother did on earth; we beseech You, Lord, to grant the grace to this Company of Sisters that, at the moment they receive the blessing, they may really be spurred on to adopt this practice” (CCD X, 439).

Prayer

Saint Vincent certainly prayed to Saint Joseph, but no text remains for us.

However, we still have some texts in which he encouraged his confreres to do this and which encourage us still today to turn to Saint Joseph in the trust that, even if we do not receive that for which we ask, he will obtain other graces, either for us or for other persons, even if we may not be aware of them.

Saint Vincent, in fact, taught us to pray not primarily for ourselves but for our neighbor’s salvation, the good of those who are poor and the kingdom of God.

On January 9, 1654, Vincent encouraged Louis Rivet, Superior at Saintes, to have recourse to Saint Joseph, in a letter summarized by Pierre Collet in his biography of Saint Vincent:

“He urged this Superior of Saintes to ask God, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, for the success of a matter involving the salvation of the neighbor” (Collet, volume II, p. 143; CCD V, 68).

With the Priests of the Mission in Genoa, we find a new intention for Saint Joseph’s intercession: for vocations.

Vincent wrote Charles Ozenne, Superior in Warsaw, on March 20, 1654:

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“...almost everyone in the Genoa house has been sick, in one way or another, but they are all getting better now, although a few are not completely cured. They are going to open an Internal Seminary again and continue a devotion they began - and we along with them - to ask God, through the merits and prayers of Saint Joseph, whose feast we celebrated yesterday, to send good workers to the Company to work in His vineyard. We have never felt the need of this so strongly as we do now because several Cardinals and Bishops of Italy are pressuring us to give them Missionaries” (CCD V, 109).

Pierre Collet (*Vie de Vincent de Paul*, volume II, p. 143-144) reports a letter dated August 14, 1654, to the Superior in Genoa:

“He congratulated the Superior in Genoa for seeking the mediation of that glorious Patriarch in finding workers capable of cultivating the Lord’s vineyard.

He advised him to say Mass, or have Mass said, every six months in the chapel dedicated to him; he wanted him to lead people in his apostolic journeys ‘to have devotion to and confidence in’ this faithful guardian of the ‘Immaculate Mother’ of Jesus: these are his words” (CCD V, 468, note 1).

On November 12, 1655, Vincent declared to Étienne Blatiron, Superior in Genoa, that he had been a long time in embracing, not devotion to Saint Joseph, but the impulse to pray for vocations:

“I thank God for the special devotions you are planning in order to ask God, through the intercession of blessed Saint Joseph, for the spread of the Company. I ask His Divine Goodness to accept them.

For more than twenty years I have not dared to ask this of God, thinking that, since the Congregation is His work, its preservation and growth should be left to His Providence alone. Reflecting, however, on the recommendation given us in the Gospel to ask

Him to send laborers into His harvest, I have become convinced of the importance and usefulness of this devotion” (CCD V, 468-469).

He wrote to Jacques Pesnelle, Superior in Genoa, on May 23, 1659:

“I am consoled by the devotion you have in honor of Saint Joseph to obtain good Missionaries from God” (CCD VII, 581).

May we, in this time when the scarcity of Priests and Sisters is dramatic, take care to cry out to God, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, to obtain holy Priests and Sisters for the good of so many persons who are poor and for the glory of God.

Father Bernard KOCH, CM

The Virgin Mary enfolds us all!

**Jesus extended Mary's maternity
to the entire Church...
shortly before dying on the cross.**

**From that moment on,
we have all been gathered under her mantle...**

Our Lady 'enfolds' us all...

**Mary is always present at the bedside
of her children when they depart this world.**

**If someone is alone and abandoned,
she is Mother, she is nearby,
as she was beside her Son
when everyone had abandoned Him.**

**Mary has been and is present
in these days of the pandemic,
close to the people who,
unfortunately, have ended
their earthly journey
in a condition of isolation,
without the comfort of the closeness
of their loved ones.**

**Mary is always there beside us,
with her maternal tenderness.**

Pope Francis, Audience of March 24, 2021

