

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**for a new
missionary
momentum**

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Advent 2022

The evangelical counsels:
The universal call to holiness

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To all the members of the Vincentian Family

*Spiritual
Life*

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us! This Advent letter is an invitation to pray, meditate, and interiorize the “Evangelical Counsels” as a means to pursue our journey with Saint Vincent de Paul, a “Mystic of Charity.” Jesus is the center of our being, our action, our aspirations. For us Christians, He is the focus, model, and the One to put in first place in our own lives, regardless of whether our vocation is to married life, single life, or some form of Consecrated life. Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience are indisputable and vivid signs in Jesus’s life, for He was poor, chaste, and obedient.

Usually when we speak of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, we link them to persons in Consecrated life. They follow a specific path, confirmed by the vows they make. However, the Evangelical Counsels are part of the response to the universal call to holiness for every Christian, but always according to her or his specific vocation, given by Jesus Himself.

Jesus remains the prototype of the three Evangelical Counsels. Although He had it all, He lived poorly. He was chaste, allowing Him great freedom in His relationships. He was obedient, expressing with great clarity that His mission on earth would develop according to the Father's plan and surrendering totally to His Father's will to the last second of His earthly life, to the cross where He exclaimed before returning to His Father's house: "It is finished" (John 19:30).

The foundation for the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty is the life of the Son of God:

Jesus Christ, who having all things, had nothing. He was the Master and Lord of the whole world. He made the goods that are in it; yet, He willed, for love of us, to deprive himself of their use; even though He was Lord of the whole world, He made himself the poorest of all men and even had less than the smallest animals.¹

Our common call as Vincentians to serve the poor urges us to witness to the world our configuration to Christ that began with our baptism and deepens until our return to the Father's house. As Vincentians, our priority is not the accumulation of material goods and financial resources for our own selfish reasons, for we always bear in our minds and hearts that the poor are "Our Lords and Masters" who have a claim to our resources. Considering how we can assist them helps us to live the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty through a sober and simple way of life. The Vincentian mission places us in the world of the poor. Vincentian poverty fosters a community of service and solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

1. *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 210; conference 130, "Poverty," 6 August 1655. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD XI, 210.

It also presupposes patterning our life on the example of the poor Jesus, who evangelized the most abandoned. Saint Vincent, following a long Church tradition, distinguishes between interior and exterior poverty, both of which are necessary. Without an external manifestation, “spiritual poverty” is not credible. Without spiritual motivation, “material poverty” may often be evil.

The Evangelical Counsel of Chastity likewise concerns all Christians, obviously those who vow it but also persons who are married and those who are single. As Vincentians, who are regularly in touch with the poor, we must not help them only materially, but also spiritually, approaching the person in a holistic way, sharing the value of chastity with them as we evangelize. The poor will come to understand Christian relationships by how we live in accordance with the Gospel values, serving as light and salt for humanity.

Chastity involves interior and exterior continence, according to one’s state in life, so that a person’s affectivity and sexuality are lived out with deep respect for others and for oneself. Celibacy presupposes the renunciation of marriage and the sexual expressions proper to it.

For Vincentians in Consecrated life, these two elements of the vow—chastity and celibacy—are external manifestations of a total dedication of one’s life. They should be perceived as an undertaking of a “particular responsibility: the service of the poor” and not as a rejection of familial responsibility. The demands of a radical following of Jesus lead Vincentians in Consecrated life to offer themselves completely for the cause of the Kingdom.

For Vincentians in general, the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity helps us to grow in an intimate relationship with Jesus. As generous self-giving to others, chastity promotes our evangelizing and charitable mission to the poor, an expression of generativity

and creativity. Like poverty, chastity encourages a community of service that can be effective only through friendship and fraternal relationships.

We are called to develop freedom and mutual support through healthy friendships and prudence, leading to apostolic zeal. We need to recognize our own weaknesses, our need for humility, and our reliance on Jesus's indispensable support. Saint Vincent affirms, "*Humility is a very excellent means for acquiring and preserving chastity.*"² There are moments when fidelity to Jesus entails sacrifice. Saint Vincent recommends serious sacrifice (mortification) of the interior and exterior senses, and knowing how to avoid ways of expressing affectivity and sexuality that are not in keeping with the celibate life. Because our humanity has its strengths and weaknesses, we must speak about difficulties sincerely with Jesus and with other people who can support us, like our confessor and spiritual director.

The third Evangelical Counsel is Obedience. It speaks to persons who are open to Jesus' message. Despite doubts and uncertainty, they surrender to Jesus and trust Him, persuaded that, in the end, the path He is suggesting we follow is the best. As Saint Vincent reminds us, "*You will have God's blessing in actions performed through obedience.*"³

Obedience involves Gospel values and attitudes including humility, simplicity, meekness, dialog, the gift of listening in married life, in single life, or in Consecrated life. Even when speaking to consecrated persons, Saint Vincent often evokes the example of lay people's obedience and deference:

I knew a Councillor of the court... Although he was a Councillor and up in years, he never did anything without seeking advice. If no one else was about, he would send for his valet, 'Come

2. CCD XI, 162; conference 111, "Chastity," 13 November 1654.

3. CCD VI, 574; letter 2431 to François Villain in Troyes, 25 October 1657.

here, young Pierre. I have to attend to a certain business matter; what do you think I should do about it?’ His valet would answer, ‘I think you’d do well to act this way.’ ‘Fine, Pierre; right you are. I’ll follow your advice.’ And he told me that he felt God blessed matters in such a way that any business he carried on in that fashion was successful.⁴

When two or more persons cannot agree among themselves, especially in serious issues, it is the Evangelical Counsel of Obedience that brings them to a state of inner peace and reconciliation that they could not imagine. As Christians and Vincentians, we strive not to have the last word, or be right, but to place ourselves in the role of a servant, the one who serves and not the one who is served.

May our meditation and interiorization of the Evangelical Counsels help each of us to respond to the universal call to holiness and thus experience great blessings.

How blessed are those who give themselves to God in this way to do what Jesus Christ did, and to practice, after His example, the virtues He practiced: poverty, obedience, humility, patience, zeal, and the other virtues! For in this way they are the true disciples of such a Master. They live solely of His Spirit and spread, together with the fragrance of His life, the merit of His actions, for the sanctification of souls for whom He died and rose again.⁵

4. CCD XIIIb, 282; document 160, Council of 20 June 1647.

5. CCD V, 554; letter 2013a to Joseph Beaulac, [1656]. For the French of this letter, see *SV* VIII, 543; letter 3314.

My Advent prayer for all the members of the Vincentian Family is that you “*continue to fear and love Him [Our Lord] well; offer Him your difficulties and your little services, and do only what pleases Him. In this way you will continue to grow in grace and virtue.*”⁶

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

6. CCD IV, 402; letter 1512 to the Sisters of Valpuseaux, 23 June 1652.

Letter of November 27, 2022

Dear Sisters,

*“When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to Him,
‘They have no wine’” (Jn 2:3).*

At the wedding feast in Cana, it was Mary who saw and interceded with her Son to come to the assistance of the couple in an awkward situation.

A guideline from the Inter-Assemblies Document refers to this Gospel passage: *“Look to Mary, especially when the ‘wine’ of joy and hope is running out”* (IAD 1.8).

Let’s consider the corresponding gate: **“Towards an eyes wide-open spirituality.”** At Cana, Mary had her eyes open and could thus notice the shortage. Like her, we are called to see, to take the focus off ourselves in order to turn towards others. What are they missing?

The guidelines of this first gate invite us to contemplate, look, see, recognize, marvel... Our humanity animated by a faith perspective impels us to take the first step towards our brothers and sisters. Contemplation leads us to look with love and tenderness on the least among us who cry out for help: sick people, prisoners, lonely people, victims of hunger, violence and war... We belong to the same family, and *“If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it”* (1 Cor 12:26a).

“Ephata... *towards an eyes wide-open spirituality*” encourages a spiritual opening, a human opening for a missionary opening. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, Saint Catherine and other saints are models for us in this. All saw, contemplated, heard the call and acted.

Let us use the key, “*contemplation in order to love better,*” in order to give ourselves to God, day after day, according to the Gospel as our Founders understood it. “*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me*” (Mt 25:40). Contemplation in prayer and in life helps us to hear this call: “*do not turn our back on our own flesh*” (Cf. Is 58:7).

Let us reread these guidelines and reflect on how we can better act on them wherever we are:

“Accept being inconvenienced... be ready to go out of our way so as to approach victims of poverty and injustice compassionately” (IAD 1.4).

“Rediscover our common humanity... a call to care for all people who are suffering...” (IAD 1.6).

“Look to Mary...” Through her life, she shows us the way. Meditation on the Word of God, her way of seeing her Son and events made her act simply, with no other desire than to do God’s will for the good of men and women who have been robbed of hope, joy and peace.

At the end of August, Sister Hanna CYBULA, General Councillor, and I were in several local communities in Ukraine. We witnessed the thoughtfulness with which the Sisters welcome those displaced from Kiev, Kharkiv, Odessa... On an everyday basis, the Daughters of Charity’s presence soothes inner wounds caused by the war. Through their kindly regard, they put into practice an eyes wide-open spirituality in order to take better

care of people affected by such a painful situation.

We also saw the resilience of people who had lost everything: a couple in their forties and their adolescent son who had spent several weeks in cellars before abandoning their apartment, an elderly woman who insisted on telling us her story of having to flee towards the west of her country. However, to add force to her account, she chose to stand, an expression of her desire to live despite it all. *“Recognize the Risen Jesus in our world today”* (IAD 1.5), by looking, by listening.

Isn't listening a form of contemplation that leads to prayer and true fraternity?

We can live this true fraternity either physically close to people or in a spirit of communion. On this day when we celebrate Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, let us entrust to the Lord, through Mary's intercession, all the sufferings of the world, those of peoples, lonely people, young people, elderly people... the people with whom you rub shoulders every day. Your messages indicate to me your deep passion for “being with” and constantly finding ways to help lift people out of poverty. Be certain that they are brought before Mary at the foot of the altar.

Let us give thanks for this gift of the Medal that was made to the Company for the world. All of us have often had the experience of giving a medal, and most of the time we are touched by the quality of the reception and the fervor with which people look at it.

Now, as I write you, I wonder. Are we able to continue to receive it with as much faith and hope? Do we still have that capacity for marveling at the gift offered by Mary to Saint Catherine, for ourselves personally and to be able to tell the world that God is present and loves each one of us?

Perhaps we could take the occasion of this day when we are in communion with each other across borders to contemplate more intensely this little medal that reminds us that we have received a mission: to love and serve simply, wherever we are, turned towards Jesus who always gives us the grace to respond to His call and to live each stage of our life in peace.

Let us entrust all our intentions and our respective missions to Mary. Let us pray for each other, for those who are going through suffering of a physical or spiritual nature, a more difficult missioning, a painful situation in their family. Let us also be able to give thanks for the presence of all the local communities in the world that, in one way or another, can pass on the Good News, heal and bind up wounds. Christ is present, close to us, and He shares our joys as well as our sorrows.

Christ is present and comes to save us. We are entering into the Advent season, a precious time when we are invited to keep watch and pray. Our contemplation will become more intense and help us to free our heart from whatever is an obstacle to openness to the world around us. Let us prepare ourselves...

“Come, let us go up to the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us in His ways, and we may walk in His paths” (Is 2:3).

I take advantage of this letter to tell you that five Sisters are currently preparing for the mission *Ad Gentes* in the International Missionary Center: one Sister from Mozambique, one Sister from Nigeria, one Sister from Vietnam and two Sisters from Poland. Sister Suzanne ILOKO LOALI, from the Province of Congo, has generously accepted to take responsibility for this local community as well as the formation and accompaniment of the Sisters. We thank her for her availability as well as Sister Rosa Maria NAPOLITANO, who carried out this service these last three years and has now returned to her Province of San Vincenzo-Italia.

Letter of November 27, 2022

I also inform you that Sister Theresa EKE, General Councillor, and I will go to Rwanda and Burundi (Province of Central Africa) December 1-13 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the presence of the Daughters of Charity in this part of Africa. This Province is going to open a local community in Burundi, in the Diocese of Ruyigi, a very remote mission, truly on the periphery. This time of encounter with the Sisters will be a time of thanksgiving that we will live in communion with all of you, with the whole Company.

Happy feast for November 27, 28 and 29. Let us be happy to give ourselves to God simply, humbly and with great love. Let us pray to Mary, “*woman of listening... woman of decision... woman of action...*” (Cf. closing prayer from the IAD, Pope Francis).

With my fraternal affection and the whole-hearted assurance of my prayer,

Sister Françoise PETIT
Daughter of Charity

Homily by for the Solemnity of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

Readings: Is 66:10-14; Rev 11:19, 12:1-10; Jn 2:1-12

Based on a transcription

In faith events that touch a person or a group, there is always a context. We know in faith that whatever happens to a person, a group, a people or a nation is always situated in history. The three readings that we just heard each say this in their own way.

In the book of Isaiah, when the people return to Jerusalem after a long period of exile, far from Jerusalem, they are invited to “*rejoice with Jerusalem, all you who mourn over her.*” The people of God mourned Jerusalem where they no longer lived, where the temple had been destroyed; they missed that time and the temple. Now, however, is the time to rejoice. The context, the history, is that there had been terrible events – now is not the time to recount them – moreover, we know that there are often terrible moments in human history that don’t need description; we all know what happens.

This is how God cares for His people: in terrible events, he sends messengers to say, “Now is the time to rejoice because this is the moment of my coming, it is the moment of your return, it is the moment when you can express your joy because I never abandoned you, even in the terrible moments.”

The vision of Saint John in the book of Revelation is similar. It is no longer Jerusalem but a woman, a woman bearing a child,

Homily for the solemnity of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

a child of peace. However, this child of peace is threatened by something that the author of Revelation, John, calls the dragon, that is, the author of evil. He does evil to humanity and tries to get ahold of this child destined to be a child of peace. The woman and the birth of the child are protected against all the forces of evil and against the dragon.

It is thus the time to be grief-stricken, fearful, as well as joyful for having been touched by the Lord who wants what is good for each and every person and who always protects the gift of peace that He has made.

Finally, in the Gospel of the wedding feast in Cana, the circumstance is joyful; the context in which it takes place is joyful because it is the context of a marriage. However, this marriage does not produce all the joy that would be expected because the Lord Jesus has not yet made Himself known, and the assistance of a woman, His mother, is necessary to bring joy to those who are there to do whatever He tells them, beginning with those who serve at this marriage. Doing what the Lord says and what He will say means being promised the discovery of the fullest joy, symbolized by the “best wine” at the marriage.

What was missing at this wedding feast in Cana was total joy, the joy of the Lord’s presence, the joy of the Lord’s action; He is the one who gives joy to our life. Through His presence, His word and His desire, He procures joy for those who are there. As long as we have not identified the Lord Jesus, as long as we believe that joy is simply produced by ourselves in our feasts and encounters, as long as we believe that we are the authors of our own happiness, as long as we forget that the author of happiness and joy is the Lord present to us, our joy will not be complete. Jesus will say this so often in the Gospel according to Saint John. *“So that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”*

Here are the contexts: there are reasons to fear, reasons to be afraid, reasons to be worried, reasons to mourn; all of this exists, it is true. However, there are even stronger reasons to rejoice because God does not abandon His people in distress, because God promises the child of peace for whom, starting tomorrow, during Advent, we will wait with even greater insistence and because the Lord tells us, “The joy that you feel is the work of my presence among you.”

In 1830, when Catherine Labouré had just entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity and had her visions that she would reveal only to her confessor, the economic, social and political context of France was harsh, as was the case in most European countries. A troubled context held sway throughout the 19th century, a context of revolution, violence and thinking that claimed to do without the Lord. There was also a lot of suffering and poverty among the people, poverty in the countryside, poverty in cities.

I won't say any more as there is no need to describe what we know of how difficult, painful, hardly peaceful and little inclined to peace today's context is.

We well know that there is a lot of poverty, social misery and suffering of all sorts that affect our contemporaries, often quite close to us. Suffering in the countryside, suffering in cities: this context is the same whether in 1830 or today.

Suddenly, Catherine Labouré's life was completely transformed. She was already faithful and close to the Virgin Mary because she had been confiding in her since her childhood, but all of a sudden, entering this Company, she discovered a force that would drive the rest of her life, a force that would guide her for 46 years. This force was the very joy of God, passed on by the Virgin Mary, who invites all to entrust all those pains and sufferings to the Lord, through the intercession of His Mother. The invocation inscribed on the Miraculous Medal expresses

Homily for the solemnity of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

it well: “*O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.*”

Today, I would like to focus on two points from the events of 1830:

- *The first is that the Virgin Mary always makes herself known in an unobtrusive way, as God makes Himself known unobtrusively, and it is also unobtrusively that the Virgin Mary makes God’s work known. The first time, it was the middle of the night when she called Catherine. Then, it was just before evening prayer that she appeared again without the other Sisters who were also praying in the Chapel knowing. Unobtrusively, Mary called Catherine to be, in a special way, the messenger of good news without revealing that she was the first to have heard it.*

This goes against many of the most usual behaviors of a society, and of ours in particular, that wishes to know everything about everything, that wants everything always to be made public, that does not seek joy in silence and in the peace of the heart. Rather, our society always wants to bring out what is not going well, wants everyone to know about it and constantly spreads rumors, bad news; society no longer knows how to find the Lord in silence. This is the first message for us: it is in the silence of our hearts that we come to know the Good News and that we try to spread it day after day, unobtrusively. This characterizes messages from God, who always wants to open His heart to the depths of ourselves, the most silent part. Clearly, for almost 200 years now, right here, intercessory prayer is lifted up, always in silence. In this silent chapel, from this silent chapel, despite being very busy, such a powerful prayer rises so that the Lord who gives peace might lighten the distresses of the heart, the distresses of humanity, the distresses of societies.

- *The second sign of note is the graces for which we forget to ask. The Virgin Mary explains herself on this topic to Catherine. In a way, she says, “You do not ask enough; your desire is so*

weak; you are not sufficiently disposed to bear the pain of the world because you find it heavy, but bear it by asking the Lord to make it lighter through my intercession.”

We bear sufferings, but perhaps we should express them more in the silence of our heart with a firmer intention and a real desire that the Lord grant all that He judges apt, to each one of us, to all those for whom we pray. God gives His assistance to calm the fears of our contemporaries and of the societies in which we live.

Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Catherine Labouré who, in heaven, never ceases to “work” for us, may we be capable of bringing pains and sorrows before her and before the Lord, without worry. It is the Lord Himself who opens His heart to our requests made through the intercession of Saint Catherine and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

May this be true for each one of us and for all those whom we love and whom we hold in prayer.

Archbishop Laurent ULRICH
Archdiocese of Paris

2022 End of the year retreat day

*“A child is born to us,
a son is given to us!”*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, the rod of their taskmaster, you have smashed, as on the day of Midian. For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for fire. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, upon David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this! (Is 9:1-6)

We heard this passage from the book of Isaiah as the first reading during the Eucharistic celebration for Christmas night.

I. The child of the promise¹

The scene takes place in the second half of the 7th century before Jesus Christ. Israel and Judah are enemy nations. Isaiah was a respected figure with access to the court of the king of Judah and an esteemed prophet... or not! At the death of King Azariah, the

1. Marie Noëlle Thabut, *The intelligence of Scriptures, to understand the Word of God each Sunday in the parish*

Lord would show him a vision in which he received his vocation, and that was the beginning of his ministry.

The Lord spoke to King Ahaz, the successor of King Azariah and Jotham, granting him a sign. King Ahaz did not pay any attention to it and preferred to turn to the king of Assyria to get out of the difficult situation in which he found himself since Pekah, the king of Israel, and Resin, king of Syria, had formed an alliance to oust him.

Before this incredulity, this lack of faith and especially this rebellious people of Judah, the Lord, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, nonetheless gave Ahaz a sign: *“the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.”*

At that time, the Jews were living under the oppression of occupying nations although they were the People of God. They awaited the accomplishment of the oracles concerning the restoration of the kingdom of Israel headed by a leader from the line of David as announced by the prophets, in particular by Isaiah.

Religious Jews of the time were waiting impatiently for this without really realizing the full extent of what was to happen. Isaiah’s message from the Lord was a terrible condemnation; however, in the prophetic writings, God left an escape route open, a hope for those who would remain faithful to Him.

The people would be deported, but a remnant would return. The promised Davidic king would lead them, but does this text actually refer to that? The text speaks to us of a great light for a people who walked in darkness, a people that knew nothing but slavery. The yoke that burdened them, the rod of their taskmaster would be smashed like when Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 6-7). In other words, this people would be definitively liberated from those who oppressed them. The light indicates a time of re-establishment for this enslaved people, most of whom would be departed to Babylon later, in 586.

A child is born to us, a son is given to us!

In verse 5, who will lead this people is revealed to us. He will be called “*Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.*” We cannot help but see here titles that are attributed to God Himself. Yes, David, among others, was admirable and Solomon an excellent counselor, yet there is no doubt that this guide was not ordinary but sent by God. His action would consist in restoring the kingdom of Israel and giving an everlasting reign to the throne of David. Similarly, he would restore justice, and violence will be obsolete.

The people of Israel in exile who returned understood the prophet’s message. They were thus waiting for a king of the house of David who would restore the kingdom. In fact, however, it was not a political or military leader who would come.

The people would return from exile in 539, but at their head there was no sign of this leader who would restore the decimated kingdom. Moreover, he did not restore the kingdom of Israel, which would remain an enslaved people until their disappearance in the 2nd century during the Roman repression.

Today, this prophecy is fulfilled: it is Jesus, “*for a child is born to us, a son is given to us,*” the prophet will say. Matthew repeats this passage: “*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen*” (Mt 4:15-16).

The book of Isaiah already mentions the two tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. After the time of anguish, they would be the first territories to know the glory to come, described in our passage. Matthew reports this as well by naming the location of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, in Galilee.

It is not enough to designate the people of Israel as the sole beneficiary of Isaiah’s prophecy. Indeed, John will tell us with regard to this light, “*He came to what was His own, but His own*

people did not accept Him. But to those who did accept Him, He gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God" (Jn 1:11-13).

In fact, the faithful remnant of Israel about which Micah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and others spoke is the chosen people of the new Jerusalem. It is the nation consisting of all those redeemed by Jesus' sacrifice, those who worship God in Spirit and truth, those who truly seek Him and commit to His commandments as well as to changing their life.

Yes, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!"* This great light about which Isaiah speaks is the light that Christians see when they accept Jesus' existence. Granted, for most of us, it is not the same light that blinded Paul on the road to Damascus.

This light is first of all a hope. It is the hope of a better life beyond the life we know here below. It is also a new insight into life or values that are not the same and where the priority becomes the worship offered Jesus. It is also the starting point for all things, a spotlight on our situation as sinners and on the necessary gratitude that should flow from that. Light is a call to change our life.

This prophecy still resonates for us today. It is for all those down through the ages who have seen this great light that shook them and pushed them to change their life, thus responding to God's call. This call comes out in the love that He had for us in sending us this guide, this Emmanuel: wonderful councilor and at the same time the Son of the living God and eternal Father. *"He dwells in unapproachable light"* (1 Tim 6:16) and yet became man to redeem this lost people. *Yes, a child is born to us, a son is given to us!*

II. The child: poor among the poor²

Popular imagination pictures Saint Vincent mainly in the role that traditional statuary attributes to him: holding one child's hand and cradling another child in his arms. He has been recognized as the "Father of the poor" and even the "Father of the nation." However, artistically exalting his role with suffering childhood etched the paternal nature of his goodness into memories.

However, he only began his work for foundlings at the age when he could have been a grandfather, at age 58, and it was only one of the numerous service sectors that he would creatively develop. His way of caring for children, his provident concern for them, his recommendations regarding them and even his way of speaking about them show a tenderness, such as would not be expected in a man of so much action, developing in him like a late-blooming flower.

Saint Vincent, however, was a man of his times. His contemporaries saw children merely as little adults who would be compelled to play an adult role very early, out of necessity. While they arrived in the family as another mouth to feed, they would soon have two arms with which to work or at least a hand with which to beg. Childhood was not considered a state in itself but simply as the beginning of a lifetime that on average would not exceed thirty years.

Births were numerous, but so were deaths at a young age, often as high as one out of three or even one out of two. Work began very early; the little shepherd on the banks of the Adour River had that experience. In order to give more possibilities to the child, sometimes he would be taught to read and then sent for an apprenticeship.

Young Vincent, after studying the rudiments of knowledge, became in turn a tutor for other children. This role as a tutor

2. Vincentian Study Sheets. The child, no. 24

would later grant him entry into the de Gondi household and give him a leg up, as it were.

After attending to many other forms of distress, Saint Vincent rediscovered only in his declining age the child whom he had been in the children for whom he worked. He realized that they were some of the poorest among the poor: voiceless, defenseless, even unaware of their extreme poverty. Children were abandoned as something burdensome to get rid of. His heart ached, so to save these children, he would take all possible measures, find all possible resources, cover all the details for their care and upbringing.

It was a long-term undertaking, financially costly, costly in daily labor as well. He constantly had to encourage the Sisters engaged in it. *“These children are the very image of Jesus Christ; they are children of God to love and respect just as we respect the son of the king as much as the king himself. God takes great pleasure in their little babbling - even in their little cries and wailings.”*

Saint Vincent himself doubtless took a similar pleasure in hearing them. When the Ladies’ generosity ebbed to the point of endangering the work for the foundlings, Saint Vincent would take on the role of a dramatic beggar on their behalf to save them. *“Their life and death are in your hands. I’m going to take the vote; it’s time to pass sentence on them...”* (CCD XIIIb, 424).

The foundlings deserved the most pity, but working-class children, the children of the poor, also caught Saint Vincent’s attention and called him to care for them. The first Daughter of Charity who presented herself to him, Marguerite Naseau, had found her vocation as a self-made school teacher. Little schools for the poor were thus one of the works of the Company of the Daughters of Charity from the beginning, a work for which Saint Vincent provided his Daughters instructions and advice. For Saint Vincent, education was part of a whole: it is not enough to evangelize and relieve those who are poor; it is

A child is born to us, a son is given to us!

also necessary to give their children the means to get out of that state, and education and literacy are part of that process.

In a wonderful painting illuminated by the humble light of a hesitant flame, Georges de la Tour, a contemporary of Saint Vincent, presents us a little boy in swaddling clothes surrounded by the affectionate regards of a human family adoring the Son of God in him. Saint Vincent reminds us, as does this painting, that every child, however poor he may be, however marked by misery or even vice, is for us the living image of the One who, to become poor among us, wished to first appear as a child.

“He really loved these little foundlings as a father. So it is that the legend, exemplifying his real feelings, has embroidered the tale of what he did. He has been shown setting out at night, the snow on the ground, gathering up abandoned children in the streets, warming them in his cloak and carrying them back to the refuge where Mademoiselle Le Gras’ Sisters awaited him. That picture is true, but only symbolically.”³

There is no doubt that these experiences allowed Saint Vincent to better feel, in contrast, the abandonment of poor children. He would say one day to the Daughters of Charity about the foundlings, *“If these were well-to-do children, Sisters - I mean children of DISTINGUISHED FAMILIES – you’d have a great deal of difficulty, perhaps even more than these give you, and for what reward? Very meager salaries; and you’d be considered servants. But what will you receive for having served THESE BABIES ABANDONED by everyone? God, throughout eternity. Is there any comparison, Sisters?”* (CCD IX, 110)

Faced with countless forms of poverty, experience gradually led Saint Vincent to consider those who had no means to care for themselves as the poorest, and it is on this account that poor children became for him some of the “poorest of the poor.” The

3. Jean Calvet, *Saint Vincent de Paul* (trans. Lancelot Sheppard), London: Burns Oates, p. 157

young Vincent experienced this poverty himself during his first fifteen years, participating from a very young age in the labor of the family's small farm.

III. Become like children⁴

“Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). How can we become like children to welcome the kingdom of God? Nicodemus would ask Jesus during his night of questioning how a man could be born a second time once he is old.

Becoming a child means accepting to be begotten. In the Bible, God creates and saves through begetting: existing is being welcomed as a “son or daughter of...” inscribed in the succession of generations. A child can thus be a sign of life given by God, life that saves, a sign of wisdom.

We might ask if this reference to a child as a sign of free gift, surrender and dependence is still relevant in a culture where the “spoiled child” is increasingly becoming an “experimental child” in whom the expectation, the hope placed in him or her turns into a technical and juridical project, the components of which are clearly identified and traced. To hear the Gospel message on spiritual childhood with fresh ears, we must take the time to contemplate children as they are and thus undergo a radical conversion. The spiritual attitude inferred by Jesus and developed in mystical tradition by various authors does not consist in *becoming* children *again* but in *becoming* children.

Spiritual childhood is a promised land towards which God calls us: like His chosen people, we are called to venture into the desert and depend on Him for everything. Children can be a guide for this voyage due to their awareness of what is beyond them and their openness to mystery, which make them grow

4. *Christus*, no. 217, January 2008

A child is born to us, a son is given to us!

in a relationship with those raising them who are attentive to nurturing their capacity to wait, desire and simply be.

There is no possible confusion between spiritual childhood and infantilism, for it is indeed seeking childhood and filiation in God that makes it possible to become the face of Jesus in truth in the world and for others, like Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Thérèse de Lisieux won so many hearts because Christians had forgotten the God of the Gospel and made themselves an idol with a heart of stone. Saint Thérèse's message was like living water from a fast-flowing stream that refreshed all of Christianity. God once again became the Father and Christians the children. For Jesus, the paths of freedom pass through spiritual childhood, which requires the choice of simplicity, for we are not "self-sufficient adults" before God but children.

The spoiled child did not exist in Jesus' time. Yes, children were considered a gift from God, but they did not really have their place in society until they were adults. In the meantime, they were usually considered of minimal importance. We easily understand why Jesus' disciples kept people from bothering their master with children. In their view, Jesus had much more important things to do.

Jesus does not tell us that children are innocent. Biblical tradition actually says the opposite, since each one of us is a sinner from birth. What Jesus stresses here is the nature of God who generously gives to those who recognize that they are weak. The only way to enter into His kingdom is to trust Him and surrender ourselves totally into His hands. Salvation will always be a gift that God grants freely, without any merit on our part. "*Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it*" (Mk 10:15). It is useful to recall that Jesus had earlier said to these same disciples, "*The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you*" (Mk 4:11). For the reign of God, they had left everything to follow Jesus. They sought God's presence and wanted to be part of His kingdom. Now Jesus warns them that

by pushing the children away, they are closing the only entrance into this intensely desired kingdom of God!

“But what does it mean to ‘welcome the kingdom of God like a little child’? A child trusts without reflecting. Children cannot live without trusting those around them. Their trust is not a virtue; it is a vital reality. To encounter God, the best thing we have is our child’s heart that is spontaneously open, that dares simply to ask, that wants to be loved.

But the phrase could also mean: ‘welcome the kingdom of God like you welcome a child.’ The verb ‘to welcome’ used here has in general the specific meaning of “welcoming someone,” as can be seen a few verses later when Jesus speaks of ‘welcoming a child’ (Mark 9:37). In this case, Jesus would be comparing welcoming God’s presence to welcoming a child. There is a secret complicity between the kingdom of God and a child.

Welcoming a child means welcoming a promise. A child grows and develops. In the same way, the kingdom of God on earth is never a finished reality but rather a promise, a dynamism and an uncompleted growth process. And children are unpredictable.

In the Gospel story, they arrive when they arrive, and in any case not at the right time for the disciples. But Jesus insists that they must be welcomed because they are there. In the same way, we have to welcome God’s presence when it presents itself, whether it is the right time or not. We have to play the game. Welcoming God’s kingdom like we welcome a child means keeping alert and praying so that we can welcome it when it comes, always unexpectedly, whether at an opportune moment or not.

Jesus showed particular concern for children because He wanted his followers to be particularly attentive to the poor and the defenseless. Until the end of time, these people will be His representatives on earth. What is done to them will be done to Him, Christ (Matthew 25:40). The ‘least of my brethren,’ those

A child is born to us, a son is given to us!

who matter little and who are mistreated with impunity because they have neither power nor prestige, are the road it is necessary to take in order to live in communion with Him. If Jesus placed a child in the midst of His disciples gathered together, that was also so that they themselves would accept to be little.

Jesus explains this to them in the teaching that follows: 'For whoever gives you a glass of water because you belong to Christ, I tell you the truth, that person will not lose their reward' (Mark 9:41). Walking along the roads of the world to proclaim the kingdom of God, the apostles too will be 'delivered into human hands.' They will never know ahead of time how they will be welcomed. But even for those who welcome them with a simple glass of cold water, without taking them very seriously, they will have been bearers of God's presence.'⁵

To conclude

What is a child?

A child is mystery, hope, tomorrow.

What is tomorrow?

Tomorrow is what we want the child to be.

A sick child is an undermined tomorrow.

A wounded child is a broken tomorrow.

A suffering child is a worried tomorrow.

A dying child is a murdered tomorrow.

But a child who sings is a tomorrow with a future.

A child who smiles is a tomorrow with hope.

A child who heals is a tomorrow with life.

A child who lives is a tomorrow with love.⁶

Father Bernard SCHOEPFER, CM
Director General

5. Letter from Taizé: 2006-2

6. Alberic de Palmaert

Province of España-Sur
“Called to live unity”
*in the process of unification
of the Province of España-Sur*



Since 2013, the process for the unification of the Provinces of the Canary Islands, Grenada and Sevilla and, a few years later, North Africa has been a real experience of fraternal communion among us. Here is our story in the light of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.

*News
from the
Provinces*

Genesis of the reconfiguration of the Provinces

*“If the conviction that all human beings are brothers and sisters is not to remain an abstract idea but to find concrete embodiment, then numerous related issues emerge, forcing us to see things in a new light and to develop new responses.”*¹ In 2007, facing new realities in the world, the Provinces of Spain began a reflection process to discern how to move forward. Based on an Interprovincial reflection sheet, “Measures to take, attitudes to cultivate and suggestions to move forward,” Sisters and local communities reflected on this question. In 2009, a commission was created to study the reality of the Daughters of Charity in the country, and an action plan was considered during Interprovincial formation gatherings. Later, during the meeting of the Provincial Councils of Spain, the Councils of the

1. *Fratelli tutti*, 128

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three Provinces of Grenada, Canary Islands and Sevilla expressed their desire to work together with a view to reconfiguration. *“I encourage you to experience the entire process in faith and hope, with the assurance of the Lord’s love that expands the horizon of your perspective to the dimensions of the Company and of the world... to take on realistically... and peacefully all that these changes will entail,”* Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, wrote. They then chose as their motto, *“Called to live unity,”* with a Scripture quote, *“one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father”* (Eph 4:5-6).

Immediate preparation for reconfiguration: “Called to live unity”

*“The arrival of those who are different, coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift, for the stories of migrants are always stories of an encounter between individuals and between cultures... an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all... When we open our hearts to those who are different, this enables them, while continuing to be themselves, to develop in new ways... Those cultures should be encouraged to be open to new experiences through their encounter with other realities.”*² Convinced that the Company is not the sum of the Provinces but the communion that exists among them, we developed a common plan for living the present moment with a faith that is deeper than our fears and customs. With a sense of responsibility for the Company of the future, local communities reflected on what is truly essential for welcoming the Spirit who wants us to be *“born from above”* (Jn 3:3) in order to revive missionary momentum in the heart of each Sister and determine what steps had to be taken to live real communion among ourselves.

Inauguration and first steps of the Province: “We all form one body”

2. *Fratelli tutti*, 133-134

*“Mutual assistance... proves enriching for each... We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved.”*³ On March 15, 2013, accompanied by General Superiors and the Visitatrixes of the other Provinces of Spain, the Sisters of the Provinces of the Canary Islands, Grenada and Sevilla participated in the inauguration of the Province of España-Sur. From that point forward, the primary mission of the new Provincial Council was to promote communion among the different regions of the Province, harmonizing them to create an authentic sisterly unity. The objective was to weave bonds of friendship between local communities, encourage participation, co-responsibility, subsidiarity... This is very rich but also a great challenge that each Sister is called to take up. The members of the new Council, intent on being “detached” from their Province of origin, really placed themselves at the service of the whole of the new Province, fostering communication among the different regions of the big Province, sharing all the necessary information... In this way, they generated a real atmosphere of trust.

One and a half years later, God asked us to expand our tent once again... and to welcome the Province of North Africa.

North Africa joins the Province of España-Sur

*“Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfilment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging.”*⁴ On November 29, 2015, the Province of España-Sur welcomed the Sisters of Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia. This inaugural day had as its theme, *“I saw a new heaven and a new earth,”* an invitation to look with fresh eyes, to be even more open to changes, to scan new horizons in the joy of belonging to a

3. *Fratelli tutti*, 137

4. *Fratelli tutti*, 95

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Company that is missionary by nature. The Province of España-Sur, now including Sisters from 11 different countries from four continents, continued its journey with trust and imagination, sure that God was accompanying it to overcome difficulties, contradictions and even certain failures.

Open ourselves to the future with the arms of light

“Political charity is also expressed in a spirit of openness to everyone. Government leaders should be the first to make the sacrifices that foster encounter and to seek convergence on at least some issues. They should be ready to listen to other points of view and to make room for everyone.”⁵

In order to continue to progress in fraternity and communion, we decided together to develop several attitudes:

- *Patience* in order to adapt to what is new, overcome difficulties deriving from diversity, change “traditions” or customs of each region without merely putting up with change...

- *Openness of heart* in order to go towards the other person, try to get to know her better and love her differentness by striving to emphasize the positive.

- *Generosity* in order to place ourselves at the service of the Province and desire to move forward together for the good of the mission.

- *Tolerance* in order to overcome possible impressions or prejudices and commit ourselves to collaborating in concrete ways.

- *Asking pardon and reconciliation* when there are misunderstandings or words that sow discord.

5. *Fratelli tutti*, 190

During our Provincial Assembly and with the 2021 General Assembly theme, “*Ephata, break through the gate... go towards... encounter...*,” we noted several challenges to meet to continue our path of fraternity and communion resolutely and enthusiastically:

- Promote simple projects in the places where we serve those who are most poor in order to respond to the calls of the Church, the signs of the times and the cries of the poor.

- Become prophetic and credible communities by deepening our union with God in order to strengthen our faith perspective and to live mercy.

- Courageously continue the revision of works to respond with boldness and creativity to forms of poverty that are not addressed by others.

- Collaborate more with the Vincentian Family and congregations or institutes that work on behalf of those who are poor.

“In this our time... contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity... No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together!”⁶

Sister Cristina MUGICA LOPEZ
Daughter of Charity

6. *Fratelli tutti*, 8

Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia

*“We have run the race...
we have fought the good fight”* (Cf. 2 Tim 4:7).

Ephata... Be opened... Go towards... Encounter...

In June 2019, I was assigned to St. Anthony College of Roxas City, consisting of a university and a hospital.

I first heard about the Covid-19 virus in January of 2020, but I was not bothered by it then. However, two months later, on March 15, 2020, we had the first lockdown... and suddenly, our life was never the same again; everything came to a standstill. Everyone had to stay home, and many people were dying, including healthcare workers. Only essential establishments such as hospitals remained open, and all other businesses closed along with schools and churches. Slowly things were shifting to the virtual mode.

In the hospital, we organized a Covid task force because we had to make many quick yet prudent decisions, adjustments to our operations and protocols as the situation unfolded. For us in the Finance Office, major issues included maintaining an adequate oxygen supply, finding personal protective equipment supplies and Covid medicines, but also having to turn away some patients and dealing with the resignation of nurses, hazard pay, Philhealth claim payments, cost-cutting measures, sustainability concerns, etc. For more than two years, this was how we lived from day-to-day while trying to keep ourselves healthy and Covid-free and continuously learning the meaning of trust in

Divine Providence...

In dealing with the pandemic, the government's approach was more militaristic than health-driven. The government's efforts were marred by anomalies, particularly regarding procurement of materials. On the other hand, Vice President Leni Robredo mobilized volunteers in implementing a multitude of creative and effective responses to the pandemic. (In the Philippines, the president and vice-president are elected separately.) Local sewers made standardized PPE sets that were given to hospitals all over the country. Volunteer doctors organized to provide online consultations. For frontline service workers, a free shuttle service and free dormitories were offered. Free Covid kits were delivered to households, and market vendors offered delivery of goods from the market by motorcycle delivery people. Community learning hubs with volunteer tutors were set up for students without computers or internet, as were locations for express tests and vaccinations and distribution of food packs, etc.

Seeing all these social projects implemented by our vice president, we felt very proud because she is a graduate of our Universidad de Santa Isabel. In this university, she learned to live the Vincentian spirit.

After she declared her decision to run for the presidency in the 2022 national elections, there was an outpouring of support for the vice president. I shed tears listening to her candidacy declaration. I was filled with hope: hope for the poor, hope for change and a better life for the millions of ordinary Filipino families neglected by society and abandoned by government. Throughout the campaign period, her network of volunteers continued to expand and widen. They campaigned for her and lived out everything she represented and stood for. Totally at the service of the people, they demonstrated a true spirit of volunteerism that came to be known as the "Pink Movement."

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Among her many volunteers were Daughters of Charity. Previously, religious congregations had never openly supported any candidate. However, in this vice president, we found the epitome of a good public servant: very hardworking, competent, people-oriented, clear about her intention to fight poverty and her dedication to human rights, honest, free from corruption, living a simple lifestyle and a solid family life with three well-raised daughters and long track record of genuine public service.

Leni Robredo finished in second place behind Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., son of the former dictator from the 1970s-1980s. Today, the challenge to call to account those in government has never been greater. We have to continue our struggle to uphold the values we held dear long before this election, what we have openly declared when we campaigned for Vice President Leni and all that she represented and stood up for. Yes, we have to channel our efforts and energies to serve the people in whatever way we can; at the same time, we have to continue en fleshing the prophetic role to denounce injustice, lies, corruption, etc. and to keep doing the good that we are capable of doing, for the sake of our sisters and brothers, especially those in the peripheries of society... Yes, the good fight goes on.

At the end of our lives, with Saint Paul, we would like to be able to say, “*We have fought the good fight, we have finished the race, we have kept the faith...*” (cf. 2 Tim 4:7) and hear the Father say to us, “*Well done, good and faithful servants...*” (cf. Mt 25:21).

Please include the Filipino people, our government and Church leaders in your prayers.

Sister Geraldine DENOGA
Daughter of Charity

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

I - Louise de Marillac, a woman with an experience of being accompanied

The circumstances of Louise de Marillac's birth, childhood and youth—without a family home for reference, recognized as the illegitimate child of her father and not knowing who her mother was—made her a woman wounded by life from birth. From childhood, she suffered the wounds of loneliness and exclusion from her family, the absence of maternal care and emotional warmth in a united family; all this made her a hypersensitive woman needing sound accompaniment.

During her years at the residential convent school of Poissy, Louise was well accompanied by her great-aunt Louise, a Dominican nun. The sister of her paternal grandfather, Guillaume de Marillac, a lawyer in the French Parliament, this woman was well formed on a human, cultural and religious level; in fact, she was one of the best educated nuns in the convent. This religious aunt would contribute to Louise's formation and help her to grow personally, socially and spiritually. She knew in detail the events causing psychological suffering to the child whom was placed under her care by the father, Louis de Marillac. On January 12, 1595, in Saint Paul Church, he married Antoinette Le Camus, widow



*History of
the Company*

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

of Louis Thiboust, and already mother to three boys and a girl. Despite her father's marriage, Louise, 3½ years old, could not hope to leave Poissy... Her step-mother did not allow her to join this new family. Even worse, after December 28, 1601, the date of her half-sister Innocente's birth six years after the marriage, Louise could no longer appear in her father's house because her step-mother no longer tolerated her visits. Louise felt totally rejected. Fortunately, she could speak about her suffering with her aunt the nun, and she would be accompanied well during her years at the residential school in Poissy.

Given this family rejection, her aunt the nun took on her responsibilities to raise Louise. Slowly, patiently, through an affectionate close relationship, this intelligent woman would help Louise to acquire human and cultural knowledge and to build her personal plan. She helped her to manage her emotions, to understand her attitudes towards her fellow boarders and towards her father during his visits. She accompanied the child by observing her and observed her by accompanying her. Louise felt loved and understood. Little by little, she turned to God, read the lives of the saints... She also learned to paint, and we can read the following inscription on one of her first watercolors: "*The name of the one I love: Jesus.*"

The Dominican nuns offered their boarders the education typically given noble girls: knowledge of God, reading, writing and painting. Louise's aunt was able to be close and attentive but also to take the necessary distance to educate Louise's heart in freedom so that she could grow in truth and liberty and thus take responsibility for her actions. Through their relationship, the aunt passed on to her an interest, enthusiasm and motivation for reading the Bible or other books, for embroidering, painting, learning liturgical hymns and, naturally, a sense of duty to study all her school subjects. With respect, her aunt formed Louise into a sensitive, cultivated, courageous, charitable and pious woman.

Louise was thirteen years old when her father died, and she had to leave the residential school in Poissy where she had acquired a real human, cultural, social and religious formation. Now she found herself in a working-class boarding house in Paris. There, she learned to run a household. Still needing accompaniment, she joined the spiritual circle of the Capuchin monks in the Saint-Honoré neighborhood. Her confessor and spiritual director was Father Honoré de Champigny. Louise also went regularly to the Capuchin nuns, the Daughters of the Cross, and thought that God was calling her as well to live a cloistered, contemplative vocation. She spoke about this with Father de Champigny, but he, given Louise's weak constitution, counselled her not to become a Capuchin nun, assuring that God had "other plans" for her. He advised the married life for her. Louise accepted this decision. Michel de Marillac saw Louise as an opportunity to be closer to power and chose to have her marry a secretary to the Queen Mother, Marie de Médicis. On February 5, 1613, Louise thus married Antoine Le Gras.

Now Louise had a new home in a new neighborhood, the Marais, where the nobility and upper bourgeoisie lived. Already in October 1613, Louise gave birth prematurely to her son Michel-Antoine Le Gras. She entered into relationship with people from a select social class and also had a new spiritual director and accompanier, the Bishop of Belley, Jean-Pierre Camus, nephew of Antoinette Le Camus, her father's second wife. This bishop was a theologian and a great writer, publishing more than two hundred works. A disciple of Saint Francis de Sales, Jean-Pierre Camus was fervent and competent. Expending himself without counting the cost, he spiritually accompanied Louise during many years of her marriage. Beginning in 1622, Antoine fell gravely ill, and the following year, Louise made a serious decision: if her husband died, she would not accept a second marriage, even if it would offer her a better social position. She thus made a vow of widowhood; she wanted to serve God. But how? She did not know, and this left her very troubled. The same year, it seems that Jean-Pierre Camus advised Louise to take Vincent de Paul

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

as her new spiritual director and accompanier. However, Louise felt reluctance. It was only on June 4, 1623, in Saint Nicolas des Champs Church, after having asked God for inner peace in her prayer, that the *Lumière of Pentecost* would enlighten her mind and dissipate her doubts in a single moment; Louise was flooded with an extraordinary mystical grace.

We know this thanks to a small 9 cm by 28 cm manuscript, damaged by the fact that it was folded and carried around in a pocket or purse. This transcendent experience is the major event of Saint Louise's life, which restored her peace and union with God and would produce in her an exorbitant charity despite her human limitations. All her doubts disappeared: yes, she would accompany her husband to the end; then, she would give herself to God in consecrated life although she did not yet understand its novelty. God would do His work in good time, Saint Vincent would say. The Holy Spirit prepared Louise for great things by giving her the grace of serenity.

After a long and painful illness, Antoine died on December 21, 1625, and Louise allowed her new spiritual director to accompany her as he accepted her, listened to her, consoled and guided her. However, difficulties arose from the fact that Vincent was very busy with his many activities, and Louise felt alone, overwhelmed by her husband's death and her son's unpredictable reactions. She needed a personal and always available accompanier. However, Louise gradually became less self-centered, accepted Vincent's absences and waited with greater patience to know God's will. Ultimately, she would become the foundress and accompanier of the Daughters of Charity as well as a formator of school teachers.

II - Louise de Marillac's beginnings offering accompaniment

In terms of education and spiritual accompaniment, Louise reproduced the experience from which she herself benefited throughout her life. She knew the importance of accompaniment

and helped those whom she accompanied to look with the eyes of faith at themselves and their lives; she developed their ability to discern and brought out their gifts and skills, inviting them to place them at the service of others. Her accompaniment was unobtrusive and respectful. Her presence, listening, knowledge and faith helped each person to share her life as well as her experience of God and to open herself to others.

In the seventeenth-century Church of France, Louise was a great spiritual companion. Her faith convictions, her knowledge of her era's society, her charitable life style and her way of serving those who are poor all led Pope John XXIII to declare Louise de Marillac the *patron of social works* on February 10, 1960.

It was with Mademoiselle Du Fay that Louise de Marillac took her first steps as an accompanier, in 1628.

A widow for three years, Louise remembered the inspiration received in 1623. The “coming and going” glimpsed during her spiritual experience on June 4, 1623, remained quite present in her mind. Vincent the missionary was also the spiritual director of Mademoiselle Du Fay, a pious and charitable woman from Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish, to which Louise also belonged. The two quickly became fast friends. Isabelle du Fay had a brother who was a priest, Antoine Hennequin, Lord of Vincy and a faithful friend of Vincent who would join the Congregation of the Mission a few years later. Her uncle, René Hennequin, was married to Marie de Marillac, one of Louise's aunts. There was thus a certain kinship connection between them in addition to their friendship, which comes through in the correspondence each one had with Vincent de Paul, despite differing opinions on certain events such as the change in the prioress of the Poissy convent.

In the first letter that Vincent wrote to Isabelle du Fay in October 1626, he said, “*Mon Dieu! how different your director's daughters are: one full of respect for the defense of the Church, and the other*

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

fully confident that she is right about the Poissy affair! Have courage! Our Lord is honored equally by both of them from what I see of your community, to whose Mother I send my regards.”¹

In other words, the two friends frequented the same circle of Dominican spirituality in Poissy (close to Paris) and were concerned with the change in the prioress and its consequences, but each had a different opinion. Despite this, the letters that they sent to their spiritual director between 1626 and 1629 bring out their deep friendship and their mutual assistance in following the guidance of their spiritual director, both seeking God’s will, but also doing little works on behalf of persons who are poor, such as making shirts... They formed themselves together for the mission: reading the Gospel, meditation and *Lectio divina* as it was practiced in Poissy. As both of them were troubled by Vincent’s absences due to his long missionary visits, they often wrote him to communicate their spiritual state. For example, on June 5, 1627, Louise gave an account of the state of anxiety from which Mademoiselle du Fay was suffering and informed him of her illness soon afterwards. Vincent answered the two women in a single letter.

In October 1627, Vincent suggested that Louise expand her circle of friends. In the villages of Poitou and Cévennes at the time, he saw the needs of the poor country people and their lack of formation. He thought of involving Louise and Mademoiselle du Fay in this mission, but the latter had already offered herself to Louise, without having spoken to Vincent about this. He asked Louise to accompany Mademoiselle du Fay. *“I thank you, Mademoiselle, for notifying me of good Mademoiselle du Fay’s donation. Please keep it until you need it, unless she thinks it should be set aside and reserved for going to win over poor souls to God in the regions of Poitou and Cévennes. If that is not her intention and she wishes it to be used for the poor of this area, be so kind as to forward it to me and send three shirts to*

1. CCD I, 25

*Mademoiselle Lamy in Gentilly for the Charity of that place.”*²

Vincent gave Louise the responsibility of helping Mademoiselle du Fay to discern the decision that she should make.

He put Louise in contact with Mademoiselle Lamy, Catherine Vigor, wife of Antoine Lamy, Auditor in the Tax Court of Paris, and president of the Confraternity of Charity in Gentilly. She wanted to make a retreat and with her husband join in Vincentian charitable activity. In 1634, the Lamys founded a mission in Gentilly.

Some weeks later, Mademoiselle Guérin, wife of Gilles Guérin, Councillor of the King and Auditor of Accounts, joined Louise de Marillac’s spiritual entourage, as she also belonged to Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish. Mademoiselle Guérin offered herself without prompting to participate in the parish’s charitable activities. Louise’s spiritual and charitable influence constantly increased... Vincent approved of this and recognized her. In a letter probably written in the autumn of 1627, Vincent entrusted administration of donations to Louise. He knew that the ladies trusted Louise, recognizing her precise management of goods: *“As for the money from Mademoiselle du Fay’s Charity, I gladly approve the use you wish to make of it, and I am also pleased with the decision those good young women have made to put everything in common.”*³

Louise was not only a collector and administrator of donations; she created a spiritual circle in Paris that would also include its members’ involvement in charitable activities. She accompanied this new group and coordinated it. In 1630, it would become the Confraternity of Charity in Paris. The previous year, Vincent had sent Louise to visit the existing Confraternities of Charity.

2. CCD I, 27-28

3. CCD I, 31

III - Louise de Marillac, accompanier of young village women and young women of the bourgeoisie

Louise's correspondence with Vincent from 1627-1629 reveals that Louise was already a formator and accompanier of young village women who wanted to settle in Paris.

On June 5, 1627, Louise made this succinct report to Vincent: *“Allow me, Father, to bother you again about the 28-year-old girl that they wish to send from Burgundy and confide to my care. From what I hear, she has a good background and is virtuous. Prior to this, the good blind girl from Vertus had told me that her 22-year-old companion might also come here. She has been under the direction of the Oratorians for the past four years and is a true country girl. I am not convinced that she wants to come but she has given me some assurance that she desires to do so. I humbly implore you to tell me what I should do in this matter.”*⁴

This report brings out a very important issue. It speaks about three young women: one 28-year-old from Burgundy with whom Louise has never had any ties but whom she was asked to form so that she might work as a servant of the Confraternities of Charity and be paid by their treasurer. Nonetheless, Louise asked if she should provide this formation. She wanted to know her director's opinion. The two other young women came from the commune of Vertus in the department of the Marne. Louise knew them; they were directed by the Oratorian Fathers. The first was blind and the second had her eyesight and had indicated her desire to enter into Louise's spiritual and charitable entourage.

What was Vincent's reply? We do not know. Louise feared that the following letters were also lost, but she continued her formative mission. Vincent would later give his approval. On January 13, 1628, Louise wrote Vincent about her worry concerning her son, a boarding student at the Seminary of Saint-

4. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 1, p. 6

Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, who had no intention of becoming a priest, and she asked his advice. Four days later, Vincent, who was then in Joigny, answered her to reassure her. He took advantage of the letter to ask her to welcome two more needy young women from Joigny, find them housing and form them. *“Meanwhile, get ready to do an act of charity for two poor girls whom we have decided should leave here. We shall send them to you from here in a week’s time and ask you to direct them to some good woman who can find them work as servants, unless you know some upright lady who may need them.”*⁵

Louise had the first one hired as a servant in the home of Mademoiselle Isabelle du Fay and the other as an employee of the Confraternity of Charity in Joigny. In February 1628, Vincent again wrote Louise to thank her for having welcomed into her home another young woman from Joigny. Events thus led Louise to this mission of accompanier. Vincent saw this as the expression of God’s will. *“Mademoiselle... be quite cheerful in the disposition of willing everything that God wills. And because it is His good pleasure that we remain always in the holy joy of His love, let us remain in it...”*⁶

Joy is an indispensable condition for accompanying young people well and helping them find meaning in their life. On July 30, 1628, Vincent wrote to Louise that she was, as described in the day’s Gospel (Mt 7:17-20), a good tree that bears good fruit for the Kingdom of God: *“I imagine that the words of today’s Gospel touched you deeply; they are so impelling to the heart that loves with a perfect love. Oh! what a tree you have appeared to be today in God’s sight, since you have borne such a fruit! May you be forever a beautiful tree of life bringing forth fruits of love...”*⁷

5. CCD I, 35

6. CCD I, 36

7. CCD I, 46

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

The good fruit of her formation multiplied, and Louise had the experience of God's blessing, seeing these young village women and young ladies join the Confraternities of Charity. Encouraged by Vincent, Louise made a retreat to discern, in God's light, how to respond to her ardent desire to expand this mission. Vincent encouraged her: "*Well yes, dear lady, I do consent. Why not, since Our Lord has given you this holy thought? Go to Communion tomorrow, then, and prepare yourself for the salutary review you have in mind; after that, you will begin the retreat you have arranged. I could not tell you how ardently my heart desires to see yours in order to know how this has come about in it, but I am quite willing to mortify myself for the love of God, in which love alone I desire yours to be immersed.*"⁸

After the days of retreat at the end of 1628, Louise committed to throwing herself into the service of God in the Confraternities of Charity and providing much-needed Christian formation for its members. The sixth day of her retreat, Louise informed Vincent in writing of her decision: "*I must be mindful not to seek tenderness or spiritual consolation as a motive for serving God. Rather, I accept all the dryness and lack of consolation for which my soul is destined. I offer myself in total abandonment...*"⁹

Vincent welcomed this with joy but did not respond right away since he was overworked. He explained himself in response to Louise's manifestation of impatience. "*You are wrong, my dear daughter, in thinking that I was of the opinion that you should not accept the young lady's suggestion, because I have not given it a thought. And I have not given it a thought, because I am sure that you wish and do not wish what God wishes and does not wish, and that you are disposed to want and not want only what we tell you that God seems to want and not want. Therefore, confess your fault with regard to that thought and never let it enter your mind in the future. Try to live content among your reasons for discontent and always honor the inactivity and*

8. CCD I, 46

9. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 7, p. 701

unknown condition of the Son of God. That is your center and what He asks of you for the present and for the future, forever. If His Divine Majesty does not let you know, in a way that cannot be mistaken, that He wants something else of you, do not think about or let your mind become engrossed in that other matter. Leave it to me; I shall think about it enough for both of us."¹⁰

Was Vincent worried Louise might be ambitious? Perhaps! Indeed, Louise regularly confessed her sins of vanity and haste. In any case, she was asked to honor the hidden and unknown condition of the Son of God... and to take the time to discern God's will in this matter. One or two weeks later, before the end of this year of 1628, Vincent encouraged Louise not to run ahead of Providence and to trust. "*Mon Dieu, my daughter, what great hidden treasures there are in holy Providence and how marvelously Our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not try to get ahead of it!*"¹¹

Between February and May 1629, Vincent wrote her six successive letters in which he recognized her qualities as a formator and accompanier of young village women, but at the same time, he wanted to be sure that this mission was really God's will. According to research done by the Historical Society of Suresnes, it was during this period that his surprising encounter with Marguerite Naseau took place in the parish of Saint Cloud. In simplicity, Marguerite shared with him the graces that she had received from God. "*She herself told Mademoiselle Le Gras that one time, when she hadn't had any bread for several days but hadn't told anyone of her distress, she found, on her return from Mass, enough food to last her for quite a long time.*"¹²

During this time, Louise continued to meditate on the Word of God, assist people who were poor with the help of Isabelle du Fay, Mademoiselle Lamy (Catherine Vigor), Marie Guérin and

10. CCD I, 54

11. CCD I, 59

12. CCD IX, 65

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

the members of the Confraternities of Charity close to Paris and those over which she presided.

IV – Formator sent to the mission of the Confraternities of Charity (1629)

During these years of Louise de Marillac’s “novitiate” (1626-1629), Vincent pursued his missionary work! In May 1629, he was in Montmirail (100 km [60 miles] from Paris) in the castle of the de Gondi family, at the request of Father Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, who had become an Oratorian priest.¹³ On May 6, Vincent sent Louise her letter of sending on mission followed by a second letter to communicate all the necessary instructions to reach Montmirail. The “coming and going” of the 1623 *lumière* thus began.

Now, Vincent was convinced that God’s time had come, and he wrote Louise about the importance of this mission: “*I am sending you the letters and the report that you need for your journey. Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally, that He may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works.*”¹⁴

In this missioning letter, the text of which was inspired by the *Itinéraire des Clercs*, Vincent placed Louise’s trip in Christ’s hands. “*Go to Communion the day of your departure to honor the charity of Our Lord, the journeys that He undertook for this same and by this same charity, and the difficulties, contradictions, weariness, and labors that He endured in them. May He be pleased to bless your journey, giving you His spirit and the grace to act in this same spirit, and to bear your troubles in the way*

13. CCD I, 63

14. CCD I, 64-65

He bore His."¹⁵ He added several practical details, particularly the possibility of remaining longer in the mission location if this would seem necessary to her; writing him the reasons for extending her stay would suffice. Everything was well ordered! In 1629, there were more than thirty Confraternities of Charity in the different villages of France. Since 1625, the missions preached by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission had always concluded with the foundation of a Confraternity of Charity. Given the increasing number of Confraternities, it was important to establish a centralized organization to coordinate the Confraternities and ensure each one's good spirit.

This was essential because operational problems and even some abuses were beginning to appear. In fact, it had become urgently necessary to accompany the Confraternities on both the pastoral and spiritual levels. This was Louise's mission: to visit the Confraternities of Charity.

There would be more and more voyages: in 1629, Louise visited the Confraternities of Charity in Montmirail and Asnières. There, she had to help the members to know God better and to find great consolation in service.¹⁶ Louise shared her knowledge, her judgements and her convictions. During this missionary activity, Louise had a special mystical experience, that of spiritual espousal. *"I left on the Feast of Saint Agatha, February 5, to go to Saint-Cloud. At the moment of Holy Communion, it seemed to me that Our Lord inspired me to receive Him as the Spouse of my soul and that this Communion was a manner of espousal. I felt myself more closely united to Him by this consideration which was extraordinary for me. I also felt moved to leave everything to follow my Spouse; to look upon Him as such in the future; and to bear with the difficulties I might encounter as part of the community of His goods."*¹⁷

15. CCD I, 65

16. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 704-705

17. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 705

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In 1630, she visited the Confraternities of the parishes of Saint Cloud, Villepreux and Villiers-le-Bel. She then returned once more to Montmirail before setting off again for Beauvais. Not long before, Louise had created on her own initiative the first Confraternities of Charity in Paris in the two parishes of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and Saint-Sauveur. Vincent did not, in fact, give missions in cities. Louise, however, having been in the parish of Saint-Sauveur when she lived on rue Cours-au-Villain (or Courteau-Villain),¹⁸ and then in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet when she lived on rue Fossés Saint Victor,¹⁹ would persuade the parish priest in each of these two parishes. Knowing both of them well, she was able to reach out to them and committed to accompanying the ladies of the nobility or bourgeoisie who joined the two Confraternities. Louise became the president of the Confraternity of Charity of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.

In 1631, Louise visited the Confraternities of Charity of Montreuil-sous-Bois, of Montmirail for the third time, then those of Le Mesnil, Bergères, Loisy, Soulières, Sannois, Franconville and Herblay. Nothing stopped her. The voyages were uncomfortable, the coaches dilapidated, the accommodations not very safe, the inns in villages and towns half abandoned, but she knew that she was doing God's will, and that conviction was a source of peace and encouragement for her. With missionary zeal, Louise crisscrossed France, accompanied by Isabelle du Fay, Marie Guérin or a servant of the poor. The reports that she sent Vincent on the visits that she made are the best testimony to this, as are the Rules that she wrote.

V – A series of formations and accompaniment

One of the first Confraternities of Charity visited by Louise was that of Saint Cloud. On February 19, 1630, Vincent wrote Louise,

18. CCD I, 127-128, note 2

19. Elisabeth Charpy, *Petite vie de Louise de Marillac*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1991, p. 18

*“I praise God that you have the health for the sixty people for whose salvation you are working, but I beg you to let me know right away whether your lung is being irritated by your talking so much, or your head by so much confusion and noise.”*²⁰

Louise spent hours inspiring sixty lay people, explaining the catechism and the Gospel to them but also the Rule of the Confraternities so that these women would clearly understand the purpose, namely, to honor Jesus Christ, continue His mission with those who are poor and see them with the eyes of faith: *“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it for me.”*²¹

From Saint Cloud, she went to Villepreux to visit the Confraternity of Charity, then to Beauvais, Montreuil, Pontoise, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, Loisy-en-Brie, Gournay-sur-Aronde, Asnières and several other villages. The journeys were not without their fatigue, but Louise accepted all the discomforts as a way of sharing in the suffering of those who are poor. Louise never traveled alone. If the distance was short (under 2 km), she set off on horseback; otherwise, she went by stagecoach, accompanied by a devout servant or pious ladies. At night in modest inns, she discovered promiscuity, libertine conversation and the moral and religious ignorance of the people. The comfort in the rooms was minimal given the cold and straw mattresses.

Fortunately, most of the time, once she arrived at the Confraternity, one of its members hosted her in her home. During her stay, she brought together the ladies of the Confraternity to listen to them, encourage them, examine the account books and, if necessary, modify the Rule. She also took time to visit the sick, meet the poor girls without any instruction and strive to train someone who could teach them. Her enthusiasm was contagious, as this document attests: *“Another time, she was in a village where all the women were so deeply consoled at hearing her that they told*

20. CCD I, 67

21. Elisabeth Charpy, *Petite vie de Louise de Marillac*, p. 21

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their husbands, who wanted to go there; they were told that men did not attend. They went and hid themselves under the bed and in all the corners of the room, and afterwards they asked if she might hear confessions."²²

Louise's other preoccupation was to form catechists and school teachers to teach children and young women in the villages who had no instruction. She wanted to create a network of transmission of Christian knowledge and values. For this purpose, she wrote a catechism.²³

In 1630, the first parish Confraternities of Charity were established in Paris, and, at the request of Vincent de Paul, Louise accompanied Marguerite Naseau in a special way: "*I shall tell you about them when I return. I shall also thank you for what you told me about the young woman whom I discussed with you and for having thought of her. I beg you earnestly to exert yourself on her behalf. I am delighted with the employment of those good young women and I commend your desire to give them a painting, but not your giving way to concern over the matter. You belong to Our Lord and His holy Mother. Cling to them and to the state in which they have placed you until they make it clear that they wish something else of you.*"²⁴

Did Louise want to bring these young women together and form with them the community that she had glimpsed in the *Lumière* of Pentecost? It is probable, but Vincent held her project back and wanted to discern the will of God well.

Due to Louise's excellent human, cultural and spiritual formation, she was the ideal accompanier for this great charitable movement organized by Vincent. She deeply lived the spirituality of the

22. *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines – Documents*, p. 923

23. *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines – Documents*, p. 958-970 (Doc. 824)

24. CCD I, 70-71

Incarnation, which she expressed in her writing, conferences and reflections. Vincent trusted her completely... During her second visit to the Confraternity of Charity in Montmirail, on October 22, 1630, he wrote her, “*You want to know whether you are to speak to the assembled members of the Charity. I would indeed like that very much, they would profit from it, but I do not know whether it is opportune or advisable. Speak to Mademoiselle Champlin about it and do what Our Lord inspires you to do.*”²⁵

Four days later, Vincent received news of the positive effects of Louise’s visit given that the members of the Confraternity of Charity asked for Louise to remain longer to offer them formation. On October 29, Vincent hurried to respond. “*Blessed be God that you are cured... That being the case, please continue until you have results somewhat similar to those you have had elsewhere.*”²⁶

What is the source of this spiritual fruitfulness?

Without a doubt, it is her life of union with God, as she indicated in the report that she wrote after her visit to the Confraternities of Charity in Asnières and Saint Cloud: “*Throughout my trip, I seemed to be acting without any contribution on my part; and I was greatly consoled by the thought that God wished that, despite my unworthiness, I should help my neighbor to know Him.*”²⁷

Her profound spirituality impelled her to serve the poorest of the poor, to encourage and re-motivate, if necessary, the members of the Confraternities while assuming the difficulties of the mission and inevitable misunderstandings. In Villepreux, one of the first Confraternities of Charity founded by Vincent twelve years prior, the members’ fervor was declining. Louise assembled the

25. CCD I, 89

26. CCD I, 90

27. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 704-705

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ladies of the Confraternity and some young women to change the situation and renew the Confraternity.²⁸ Unfortunately, Louise did not inform the parish priest, who was upset and wrote about it to Vincent, who corrected Louise on this account.²⁹

VI - Formation and accompaniment of ladies in the city of Paris

We would have a very incomplete idea of Louise's works if we failed to add the following two points: not only did Louise visit the Confraternities of Charity in the countryside, she also contributed to the development of Parisian Confraternities of Charity.

The first Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity in the city of Paris was established in 1629 in the parish of Saint-Sauveur. Things happened quickly, and lassitude would soon appear in the Confraternity. *“The Ladies at Saint-Sauveur had a Confraternity of Charity in their parish; they were serving the sick themselves, carrying the soup pots, medicine, and everything else. Since most of them were of the upper class, were married, and had families, they were often inconvenienced by carrying this soup pot, became disheartened, and talked of finding some servants who would do it for them.”*³⁰ Here, we can see the first allusion to the future Daughters of Charity: *“some servants who would do it for them.”* One event would follow another, providentially.

In 1630, Louise sought to endow her parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet with a Confraternity of Charity. Making use of the plans for the Confraternity of Saint-Sauveur and after making some modifications to the Rule for the Confraternities of Charity in the countryside to make it viable in a big city, she could count on the collaboration of her parish priest and assembled

28. CCD I, 78-79 and *Spiritual Writings*, p. 7-8

29. CCD I, 75

30. CCD IX, 358

five or six ladies.³¹ In February 1630, that is, at the beginning of Lent,³² the Confraternity of the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet was created.³³ Louise was its founder and the first president of this second Confraternity established in Paris. She accompanied the members, formed them and enrolled new ones. This Confraternity would become a model for the other parishes of Paris, and Vincent congratulated Louise: “*Mademoiselle, with regard to your Confraternity of Charity [that of Saint-Nicolas], I cannot tell you how much it consoles me. I beg God to bless your labor and to perpetuate this holy work.*”³⁴ He simply corrected a few details of the Rule that Louise submitted to him. For example, he recommended not to entrust the money of the Confraternity to the vicar. “*You must take care not to let the curate keep the money because of the many difficulties that might arise... of all the methods, the surest ones that can be practiced in the Charity are those which you had in mind.*”³⁵ “*Experience has shown that it is absolutely necessary for the women not to depend on the men in this situation, especially for the money.*”³⁶

The Ladies, who demonstrated real generosity, offered to feed the sick at their own expense, and Vincent supported this initiative: “*If you now relieve each one at the Charity of the obligation of getting the meat cooked, you will never again be able to restore*

31. CCD I, 69-70

32. Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, *The Streets as a Cloister: History of the Daughters of Charity*, trans. Sr Marie Poole and Sr. Margaret Barrett, New City Press, 2020, p. 135-137

33. “*In 1630, with the approval of the Pastor and the help of a few ladies, Saint Louise founded and organized a Confraternity of Charity, of which she was the president, in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. (cf. Abely, op. cit., vol, I, chap. XXIII, p. 109.) It is probably about this confraternity, still in its initial stage, that Saint Vincent is speaking in this letter. It was the second confraternity established in Paris. Nothing indicates that Saint Louise had any part in that of Saint-Sauveur which had already been in operation for several months*” (CCD I, 72 - note 2 for Letter 45).

34. CCD I, 69-70

35. CCD I, 70

36. CCD I, 70

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this practice. If you have it cooked elsewhere and someone undertakes to do it out of charity right now, it will become a burden to her in a short time. If you hire someone to do it, it will cost a lot. Then, with time, the ladies of the Charity will say that the woman who prepares the food should carry the pot to the sick, and in this way your Charity will be reduced to failure.”³⁷

However, the neighborhood covered by the Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet Parish Confraternity was filled with poor people of all sorts. “So you are a small number of workers for so much work. Oh, well! Our Lord will work with you. The suggestion that each one of you take a day to feed the sick at your own expense seems fine to me. That is how it is done elsewhere until the day the confraternity is established.”³⁸ Vincent then committed to helping Louise financially. “It will indeed be proper for you to make use of those offerings for the needs of those poor people. I think you are good managers since you are only spending about half an écu... Well now, there are more than five women. I beg God to send you some others. As for the means, Our Lord will provide.”³⁹

After having heard about the Ladies’ idea to have the help of some servants, Marguerite Naseau presented herself to Vincent de Paul because she “wanted to be a part of it.” Vincent approved of Marguerite’s initiative. “We were so impressed with that poor young woman that we accepted others who presented themselves, and they did what she had done.”⁴⁰ He encouraged Louise to continue in this sense and accompany these young women. “I am delighted with the employment of those good young women.”⁴¹ The network of charity expanded day after day...

37. CCD I, 70

38. CCD I, 71

39. CCD I, 72

40. CCD IX, 473

41. CCD I, 70-71

In the meantime, Louise and Mademoiselle du Fay continued their missionary work and visited the Confraternities of Charity in villages and hamlets. Vincent invited Mademoiselle du Fresne to join Louise in Villepreux in May 1630.⁴² She went enthusiastically. One year later, in September 1631, we again find her alongside Louise in Montmirail.

In 1631, the Parisian parish of Saint-Sulpice, seeing the good done by the Confraternities of Charity of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and Saint-Sauveur, asked that a Confraternity be established there as well. Very quickly, almost all the parishes in the capital established a Confraternity of Charity to assist the sick poor, many of whom were afflicted by the plague ravaging the city of Paris.

We might wonder if this expansion is connected to the fame of the Marillac name in both political and spiritual circles. It is true that the Marillac family, tied to the nobility and the devout party, was also very much implicated in the circles of Carmelite spirituality. This was undoubtedly a favorable circumstance allowed by Divine Providence that influenced the ladies of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, favoring their enrollment in the Confraternities of Charity in the various parishes of Paris.

Nonetheless, this takes nothing away from Louise's responsibility, commitment, courage and dedication. The Ladies of Charity enjoyed Louise's company and especially the radiant intensity of her spiritual life. Her union with God thrust her into mission, as we can see during her visit to the Confraternity of Charity in Asnières: *"Throughout my trip, I seemed to be acting without any contribution on my part; and I was greatly consoled by the thought that God wished that, despite my unworthiness, I should help my neighbor to know Him."*⁴³

42. CCD I, 77

43. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 50, p. 704-705

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What did Louise do in the Confraternities of Charity? What did she say? She does not tell us explicitly, but we can make it out from the notes from her spiritual journal in 1632. Wishing to *conform herself to the divine will*, she wrote, “*I hereby renounce self-love with all my heart and choose Your holy will as the directing force in my life... O Holy Will of my God! How reasonable it is that You should be completely fulfilled! You were the meat of the Son of God upon earth. Therefore, You are the nourishment which will sustain within my soul the life received from God.... I shall recognize Your will by reflecting upon the life which Your Son led upon earth, to which I shall strive to conform my own.*”⁴⁴ During her 1632 retreat, she made this resolution: “*...[I] resolve to follow Him wholeheartedly, without any reservation... I felt interiorly moved freely to place myself in a disposition of total availability in order to receive the call of God and to carry out His most holy will.*”⁴⁵

For Louise, the service of the Confraternity of Charity was a call from God and a way of doing His will as Jesus Christ did. Louise no longer belonged to herself and wanted to live like Jesus Christ and serve those who are poor; for her, this was doing God’s will. This is the spirituality that would guide her life and that she would put forward for the Ladies of Charity as early as 1632. The Rule for the Confraternity of Charity written in her handwriting, surely at Vincent’s initiative and under his supervision, clearly indicated this: “*It shall be instituted in the Parish Church, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, which is a symbol of union. Its end is to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ, as its Patron, and His Holy Mother; to assist the sick poor of the Parish where it is established.*”⁴⁶

During a trip to Beauvais, Louise visited eighteen Confraternities of this diocese, numbering more than 300 women, and had a role of advisor, according to what Vincent wrote her: “*Would to God*

44. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 15, p. 713

45. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 715

46. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 46, p. 707

that good Madame de la Croix could follow your advice! It would be worth as much to her as a good religious order would be."⁴⁷

Her renown as a spiritual advisor increased with each passing day. At the beginning of 1631, Mademoiselle Tranchot of Beauvais was traveling to Paris where Vincent was starting the Confraternity of Charity in Saint-Benoît, a parish close to one of the first Confraternities. He wrote Louise, *"You will be talked about at the Saint-Benoît meeting. Mademoiselle Tranchot is relating wonders about you. Do you think it would be a good idea for you to take the trouble to visit the good woman in order to stabilize her spirit so that she can strengthen the others? If you have visited her before, you could easily do so under any pretext you might find, for she will not fail to talk to you about it.*"⁴⁸

Louise was called upon to rehabilitate Confraternities of Charity that were doing poorly all over France. In June 1632, Vincent wrote that Mademoiselle Tranchot *"really wants you in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges where the Charity is going badly.*"⁴⁹ Only nine members remained. Vincent sent Louise there and allowed Madame Goussault and Mademoiselle Poullailion to accompany her. From Paris, Vincent encouraged her: *"I certainly had no doubt at all that you would find it very difficult to reestablish the Charity and more so than you tell me. But blessed be God that there is some reason to hope you will set it up again! As for the difficulties you reported to me, I think it wise for you to act as you have written to me.*"⁵⁰

With the assistance of these two ladies, Louise reorganized the Confraternity of Charity in less than a month. On July 10, 1632, Vincent wrote her, *"Blessed be God, Mademoiselle, that in the*

47. CCD I, 93

48. CCD I, 96

49. CCD I, 128

50. CCD I, 162-163

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

*midst of so much work you are well and that He has blessed your efforts!”*⁵¹ In the notes for her preparatory retreat for Pentecost 1632, Louise confided her secret: *“The principal reason for the recollection of the Apostles was their love for their Master. This same love must also be the sole reason for my dependence in which, with the help of His grace, I shall persevere all my life.”*⁵²

Vincent encouraged Louise’s mission while purifying her spirituality from any non-Gospel-based attachments. He gave her an infallible instruction that she would follow faithfully: *“God is love and wants us to go to Him through love.”*⁵³ It is the spirituality passed on by Saint John’s Gospel, read and meditated by Louise de Marillac.

By September 1630, Louise’s reputation as a spiritual model and teacher began to spread throughout Paris. Ladies of the nobility asked for her as a spiritual advisor. This was the case of Geneviève d’Attichy, wife of Scipion d’Acquaviva, Duke d’Atri, in the diocese of Soissons, not far from Beauvais. This cousin of Louise, who was going through a difficult situation, asked Vincent for an opportunity to speak with Louise. Vincent told Louise to accept this new mission of formation: *“It is not without good reason that you are going to visit a person of such high rank as the one who is asking for you and who perhaps needs your advice to make a decision on something very important. Go then, Mademoiselle, in the name of Our Lord and with His blessing. If the opportunity arises to do something for the children of that place [Soissons], do it with prudence; a great deal of it is necessary in this diocese.”*⁵⁴

Here was a new mission: spiritual advisor. Vincent sent her with the same formula used for her visit to the Confraternities of Charity: *“Go then, Mademoiselle, in the name of Our Lord,”*

51. CCD I, 163

52. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 717

53. CCD I, 81

54. CCD I, 85-86

and at the same time asked her to do what she could for the children there. The situation was quite sensitive. The daughter of Geneviève d'Attichy, Mademoiselle d'Atri, had set off a terrible controversy in Paris, causing great displeasure to her family, to the point that she was considered to have diabolic powers.⁵⁵ Louise accepted this new mission.

Her dependence on the Holy Spirit made her aware of her capacities despite her weaknesses and limitations. Yes, she was capable of advising and animating.

From 1633 onward, she would focus all her attention on the Daughters of Charity, and the Ladies were relegated to a position of secondary importance even if she continued to accompany them throughout her life. The Saturday before Palm Sunday, April 8, 1656, knowing that a General Assembly of the Ladies of Charity chaired by Vincent de Paul would take place, she told him, *"I have been informed that the General Assembly of the Ladies is to take place today. Would you consider it appropriate, my Most Honored Father, to point out to them the spiritual good that could be accomplished if they visited the poor galley slaves at the same time as our sisters bring them their dinner. This would be at ten o'clock in the morning, which is a rather convenient time for them since it would allow them to return home early and thus cause no inconvenience for their household."*⁵⁶

In 1641, Louise moved the Sisters' Motherhouse from the village of La Chapelle and established it in the neighborhood of Saint-Laurent Church. It was in this new house that, at the request of some priests and with Vincent's consent, she began to welcome ladies of high Parisian society to direct retreats. We have a letter from Louise to one of the ladies who had made a retreat with her. *"Enclosed are the spiritual exercises that I mentioned. According to the insights which, in your goodness, you gave me into your dear soul, they seem to me to be exceptionally well-*

55. Joseph Dirvin, *Louise de Marillac*, New York, 1970, p. 33

56. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 472, p. 502

Louise de Marillac, a zealous accompanier

suited to you. Put them into practice, my dear Lady, living entirely for God by this loving and serene union of your will with His in everything. In my opinion, this practice, in its holy simplicity, contains the means for acquiring the solid perfection God asks of you. Always have great esteem, my dear Lady, for humility and gentle cordiality. While reflecting on the divine gentleness during your periods of meditation, speak to Our Lord with great simplicity and innocent familiarity. Do not be concerned whether or not you experience any consolation; God wants only our hearts. He placed within our power only the capacity to make a simple act of the will. He considers this alone and the deeds resulting from it. Make as few reflections as possible and live in holy joy in the service of our Sovereign Lord and Master. In all simplicity, I present these suggestions to you, Madame, as Our Lord has given them to me since, in your humility, you requested them from my poverty. I beg Him, in His infinite goodness, to raise your dear soul to the heights of holiness that, in His love, He desires you to attain. Commend me to His divine mercy I implore you, Madame, and be assured that I have already done what you asked of me and that I shall never forget you in my poor prayers nor will I fail to remember your husband and all those dear people who are so precious to you. May God be blessed!”⁵⁷

Louise thus presented herself as a director of conscience. She advised, accompanied, gave direction on the way to go to God. She did so in response to the request of this married woman. While projecting her spiritual experience, she prayed the Holy Spirit to enlighten her to discern what she should say. “*In all simplicity, I present these suggestions to you, Madame, as Our Lord has given them to me since, in your humility, you requested them from my poverty,*” and she indicated lofty objectives for her on the way of holiness: “*I beg Him, in His infinite goodness, to raise your dear soul to the heights of holiness that, in His love, He desires you to attain.*” She concluded the letter by asking for her prayer: “*Commend me to His divine mercy I*

57. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 40, p. 679-680

implore you, Madame, and be assured that I have already done what you asked of me and that I shall never forget you in my poor prayers.”

Conclusion

Louise de Marillac’s zeal in accompanying lay people, encouraging them and forming them is an example for us. Of course, this study should be supplemented with one on the formation of the Daughters of Charity that she provided from 1633 to 1660.

Her way of accompanying people and groups, either orally or in writing, during meetings, conferences, retreats, etc. brings out the importance of attention and attentive listening, dialogue and a close trusting relationship but also an authentic and profound life of communion with the Lord.

Our world today is always engendering solitude, individualism, but also the absence of God and of ethical and spiritual values... Society and the Church of our time challenge us as well to be able to dedicate a little of our time to accompanying people around us when they feel that need.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

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Jesus is the smile of God.

**“Jesus came to reveal to us
the love of our Heavenly Father, His goodness,
and the first way He did so
was to smile at His parents,
like every newborn child in this world.**

**The Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph
were able to accept that message;
they recognized in Jesus’ smile
God’s mercy for them**

**and for all those who were waiting for His coming,
the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God,
the King of Israel...”**

Address of Pope Francis,

December 21, 2019

