

Love is a fire



Sister Rosalie, a great figure of charity who was beatified in Rome on the 9th November 2003 brings to us a 50 years later, a very topical message, which is at the heart of the Gospel:

For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked and you covered me; sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me! (Matthew 25, 35-36)

Sister Rosalie's testimony has not dated. In our suffering world, where the weak are excluded or eliminated, let us welcome it with a new heart, with open arms, ready to serve... 9th November 2003



The Chapel Pamphlets

English

Blessed Rosalie

In Paris In the 19th century



Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal
140 rue du Bac – 75340 Paris Cedex 07

<http://chapellenotredamedelamedaillemiraculeuse.com>

After the Terror, life returned to normal. Madame Rendu, concerned about her eldest daughter's education sent her to the boarding school run by the Ursuline sisters in Gex. While on her walks around the town, Jeanne-Marie sometimes went to the hospital where she discovered the service to the ill and the poor by the Daughters of Charity. She had but one desire: to join them. Despite her young age, she did some training in this place of suffering. Rosalie had had a premonition for several years of God's call on her life and it now become clear: she will be a Daughter of Charity.

The announcement that one of her friends would enter the novitiate persuaded Jeanne-Marie to do the same. She was only 16 and a half! She asked her mother's permission and she agreed. It was an emotional departure. Jeanne-Marie kept this sensitivity to partings all her life, always feeling pain at the loss or departure of a person who was dear to her. Nothing could lessen the pain of separation. The mother and daughter only saw each other one more time and found themselves in heaven at the same time: the news of the mother's death reached Paris on the 25th May 1802, Jeanne-Marie arrived in Paris at the Mother house of the Daughters of Charity. After a few months, she was sent to the little community in the Mouffetard district, rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-Marcel (Paris 5th), where she continued her training. She was renamed Rosalie, to distinguish her from another sister with the same name.

In 1807, at the Mother house, Sister Rosalie took her vows to join the Company to serve God and the poor, and returned to the Mouffetard district, never to leave. She stayed there for 54 years.

An early vocation

Jeanne-Marie Rendu was born on the 9th September 1786 in Confort, the Gex area in the Jura. Her parents were farmers. These respectable small mountain landowners lived a simple, comfortable life. Jeanne-Marie was a lively little girl, mischievous, a great one for teasing, but reasonable and pious, very caring towards the people around her and of such a charitable heart!

Despite a very strong Christian faith, the family's attachment to the Church will be tested. After the Revolution of 1789, the Reign of Terror erupted, accompanied by anticlericalism. From 1790, the adherence by oath to the civil Constitution is forced upon the priests and the religious. Many were those who refused to do so out of loyalty to Rome. Despite the risk of being found out, the Rendu household became a refuge for priests turned away from their parishes and in danger of death.

Jeanne-Marie, who was then aged 7, found out some strange behaviour around a new gardener. One night she discovered that he was celebrating Mass. Upset at the fact that this was concealed from her, she said to her mother: "Careful, I will tell that Peter is not Peter". It was in fact the bishop of Annecy... So that the little girl would not talk, the situation and its dangers was explained to her. Jeanne-Marie thus understood the necessity to keep quiet and later thanked God for saving her from great remorse.

In this atmosphere of heroic piety, Jeanne-Marie made her first communion in a cellar, without celebration or solemnity. In 1796, the family was shattered by the death of the father and the youngest sister of 4 months. Madame Rendu, a widow after 11 years of marriage, raised her 3 girls single-handedly, with the help of her eldest Jeanne-Marie.

A solid faith

An inexhaustible charity

In the impoverished area of a rapidly expanding capital, the poor were more and more numerous and the misery was deep, made worse by a triumphant economic liberalism. Help was organised. The office of the Daughters of Charity was designated as one of the four offices of charity in the district. Together with administrators named by the State and the City, the Sisters were appointed to look after the care of the sick and the destitute. There was a pharmacy, a store for clothing and linen, and a free school for the poor children.

Sister Rosalie completed her new duties with zeal; for every difficulty she found a solution; everything was done according to her opinion, or rather her hands. Every day, in all weather, she went up and down the roads and lanes that rose up to the Panthéon, on the south side of the Saint Geneviève mount, taking provisions, clothing, treatment and offering comfort. This charity office became an example. At 28, Rosalie was named the Superior of her little community. The district celebrated her nomination.

All human misery attracted her compassion: poverty, illness, bad care, ignorance, lack of education, rejection. So she fed the hungry, looked after the ill, cared for the babies, sent the young girls to school, educated the children, brought together the young apprentices and workers, provided for the elderly. She was called "the angel of the district" and "the mother of all misery".

In her charity, Sister Rosalie pursued another goal, the most serious in her eyes: the saving of souls. She instructed, taught catechism and evangelised. In this spiritual task, she was especially admirable towards the sick. When death was near, she doubled the care and prayers; in this district where God was often unrecognised, nobody turned away the priest that Rosalie had sent.

A bold charity

There were many ordeals in the Mouffetard district. During the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, Sister Rosalie risked her life in the confrontations. She climbed over the barricades to save the wounded on both sides, she put a stop to vengeance, protected all those who took refuge in her house. "You will not kill here", she shouted. Like her parents before her, she gave refuge to the archbishop... Her courage and her spirit of freedom were admired. She helped the dying. To bury the bodies, she had coffins made from planks of wood ordered from the local joiner's workshop and took them to the church in a handcart. She then took them to the cemetery.

After the riots, Sister Rosalie fought energetically to exercise her influence in favour of peace. She had only one goal and one thought, to prevent further bloodshed.

In 1832, cholera was about to reach France. The scourge reached Paris. There was panic everywhere. The Daughters of Charity distributed the first medals of the Immaculate Conception that the people named "miraculous" because of all the healings they brought about.

In the parish of Saint-Médard, 150 deaths were recorded in one day, not counting the children. Sister Rosalie took all kinds of risks. She was seen carrying away bodies that had been abandoned in the street. Faced with her activity and courage, everyone surpassed themselves under her direction and influence.

The 1849 epidemic was even more deadly. Sister Rosalie arranged everything, supported everything, saw to everything and flew over her district like an angel of consolation and hope.

In 1852, Napoléon III awarded Sister Rosalie the Cross of the Legion of Honour, a tribute from the government for all the work accomplished by the Daughters of Charity in this most miserable district of the capital.

A spreading charity

In Sister Rosalie's eyes, the support of all the united forces of charity, private and public, was needed to fight poverty. She became renowned within Paris and beyond, in the towns of provincial France. Individuals, associations, religious orders, the Church, the State, society, everyone turned to her.

In 1817, Sister Rosalie set up her headquarters at 3, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, where she had a small badly-lit office which was simply furnished. She surrounded herself with devoted helpers, ever more numerous and efficient; she influenced everyone. The Ladies of Charity, which she helped to resurrect, visited families. The young Conference of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul which was created around Frédéric Ozanam, found support and sought advice from her; lots of youngsters were indebted to her for light, support and advice.

Sister Rosalie knew how to make people of all positions and wealth feel charitable; she asked everyone what he does the best, what costs him the least, and to all a few moments of giving help.

Often the rich also came to ask for charity: "My sisters, she said, if we knew the misery in the hearts of the rich, we would pity them a lot". The answer, for her, was simple: to give oneself to the service of the poor, visit the sick and the miserable.

Donations poured in too. How could one resist this persuasive woman? Even the sovereigns who headed the country didn't forget her in their generosity.

The visitors' room in the rue de l'Épée-du-Bois was always full. One day there were 500 visitors!

All were welcomed with the same kindness.

One always left there feeling better.

One thought inspired everything: to love and soothe the poor.

The charity of God

Sister Rosalie loved God through the poor, and she loved the poor through God, like the suffering of the Saviour. "I see the Good Lord in them and that's all" she said. She continually lived in the presence of God. She was glad to suffer from insomnia because that was how God gave her the time to pray.

Sister Rosalie prayed to the Holy Virgin with confidence and a loving heart. She loved saying the Rosary. Her favourite books were the Gospels, the Imitation of Christ, the works of St Francis of Sales. But above all, she nourished herself on the life and thoughts of St Vincent de Paul. She also had a particular devotion to Saint Joseph and prayed to him constantly; she admired his hidden interior life.

In her compassionate, tender and caring charity mixed with great respect, Sister Rosalie had great faith in the power of the prayers of the suffering.

At the end of her life, she developed cataracts and gradually became blind. "I have a great fear of death" she said to a sister. She offered her suffering to God in memory of the Holy Agony of Jesus at Gethsemani; this offering made her serene and gave her new confidence in God.

She, who like St Vincent de Paul, lived humbly, simply and in poverty, died on the 7th February 1856. There was great emotion everywhere. Her funeral, which was held in the church of Saint-Médard was a great triumph for this humble Daughter of Charity. A very emotional and large crowd followed her remains to the Montparnasse cemetery. On her plain tomb surmounted only by a large cross are engraved the following words:

**To the good mother Rosalie,
Her grateful friends, the poor and the rich .**