



Catherine Labouré

1806-1876

Daughter of Charity

She saw the Blessed Virgin,

She saw Christ present in the Eucharist, she saw the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul... but more than anything, she lived the Gospels daily. Simply...

In the days following her death on the 31st December, the people came to see her coffin. A poor woman brought a box on wheels containing her 12 year old child, born invalid, that she wanted to take down into the vault; after having been lowered down, he came back up, his legs strong and firm!

St Catherine's first miracle was for the poor...

The body of St Catherine was found intact in 1933 and transferred to the Chapel, underneath the Virgin of the Globe.

2004

Catherine didn't just content herself with praying. She visited the sick and helped the poor. She felt that God was calling her, but she didn't know why or how. One night, she had a mysterious dream: an old priest was celebrating mass, he looked at Catherine several times, by the door at the end of mass, as she was leaving to visit a sick person he said: "My child, it is good to care for the sick. One day you will come to me. God has designs on you. Don't you forget it!" Catherine woke up full of joy. But at 18, she still doesn't know how to read or write. She obtained from her father permission to enter a boarding house run by her cousin in Châtillon-sur-Seine. One day, while visiting the house of the Daughters of Charity, that was close by, what does she see on the wall? None other than the portrait of the priest of her dream! "That is our Father, St Vincent de Paul", a sister explained to her. Catherine then understood: she would become a Daughter of Charity. She returned to Fain after a short stay at the boarding school where she felt out of place amongst the more sophisticated girls, who made her aware of their disdain.. She went back to her old tasks. When she turned 18 on the 2nd May, 1827, Catherine told her father of her vocation. He refused steadfastly. He wanted her to marry but she refused the good catches! In a fit of pique, Pierre Labouré sent her to Paris in the spring of 1828 to help in her brother's restaurant... After the refusal, the turning away: a double blow to Catherine. The ordeal lasted a year. Her father relented. Catherine went back to Châtillon and in January 1830 she began her postulate at the Daughters of Charity. Three months later, she left for the Seminary in Paris. The dream became reality.

Patient in the face of obstacles

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The chapel pamphlets

english

Saint Catherine 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>

Sister Catherine, was born Zoé Labouré on the 2nd May, 1806, in a small burgundian village, Fain-les-Moutiers, in France. She was the eighth child of farmowners Pierre and Madeleine Labouré. The death of Madeleine at 46, plunged the family into mourning. Catherine, in tears, got up on to a chair and kissed the statue of the Blessed Virgin and said: "Now, you will be my nuncy". In the sad autumn of 1815, Zoé and Tonine, her younger sister, left the farm to move in with an aunt in the neighbouring village of Saint Rémy. Catherine felt even more of an orphan: the death of her mother also took her away from her father. Two years later, Pierre Labouré, feeling uneasy about the departure of his eldest daughter, Marie Louise, to the Daughters of Charity, brought the two young girls back to the farm. They were very happy to be home again. Catherine made her first communion on the 25th January 1818. She was full of enthusiasm. "She doesn't seem to be on earth anymore, said Tonine, she has become all mystical!". A practical mystic, though! At 12, Catherine took over the running of the house. She did everything calmly and competently: the workers meals, tending the vegetable patch and orchard, the hen house, the dovecote with its 800 pigeons, milking the cows, distributing fodder, every week she made bread, did the washing and went to market! Catherine was kind and good with everyone, she was loving and gentle and was always trying to keep the peace. Her serious, modest and solemn nature was strengthened by adversity and her responsibilities. She particularly took care of Auguste, her little brother who was left disabled after a fall. Every day, Catherine prayed in Church in the Virgin's chapel that had been restored by the Labouré family. Since the Revolution, the church had had no priest and the tabernacle was empty.

Courageous during ordeals

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Humble towards celestial favours

Three days after her arrival at the Mother House for the Daughters of Charity, Catherine participated with 110 other girls in the solemn transfer of the relics of St Vincent from their chapel (140 rue du Bac) to the chapel of the Priests of the Mission (95 rue de Sevres)

On Sunday, 25th April 1830, a Pontifical High Mass was celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio in Notre Dame. A huge crowd surrounded the Archbishop and twelve other bishops in front of the silver shrine. A solemn procession crossed Paris. What a joy for Catherine to be part of the procession of the priest responsible for her vocation! The following week, Catherine would often go to the St Vincent chapel to pray, and on her return to the rue du Bac she would pray at the foot of the reliquary that contained the heart of her Founder. For three days running, St Vincent's heart appeared to her as an image. First white, sign of peace and union; then red, the fire of charity that must burn in the hearts of the two Congregations, and finally black, omen of the misfortunes that would soon befall France. Catherine received the promise that the two Families would not perish.

She confided to Father Aladel, a Lazarist, about her visions. He was skeptical, but was shaken when all the violence during the revolutionary days of July materialised ...

During the whole time of her Seminary, she also saw Christ in the host, *"except when I doubted"* she said. On the 6th June, day of the Holy Trinity, the vision turned black, *"Our Lord appeared as a King, with the Cross on His chest...suddenly everything crumbled"*. Catherine again confided in Father Aladel. No response. Catherine had seen M. Vincent, she had seen Our Lord...but she hadn't seen the Blessed Virgin. Her wish would be granted. Three apparitions would follow each other: the night of the 18th July, the 27th November and a day in December 1830. (see: the medal-a gift leaflet).

Humble in her mission

Catherine was very good at keeping her secret. In 1832, without letting on, she received the medal in her Community. Happy beyond all expectations with the miracles that came with the distribution of the first medals, she did not allow herself to be carried away by the success of which she was the instrument. If she managed to evade curiosity, she defended the authenticity of the apparitions. Overhearing someone say: "This sister who claims to have seen the Blessed Virgin must only have seen a painting". Catherine answered firmly: *"My dear, the Sister who saw the Virgin saw her in flesh and bone, like you and me!"*.

Catherine remained close to her family, and she shared in their joys and trials. When her father died in 1844, alone, she was heartbroken; but what joy when Marie-Louise was welcomed back into the Daughters of Charity! She supported Tonine who suffered successive disasters, converted her dying brother-in-law, assisted her brothers at their deaths, rejoiced when her niece joined the Children of Mary, and the ordination of her nephew Philippe as a Lazarist priest!

Suddenly, in 1848, a vision came to Catherine: a monumental cross must be erected in Paris; it would be greatly venerated, people would come from all over France and the world, through devotion, on pilgrimage, and out of curiosity. Catherine told Father Aladel of her vision. Without success. She felt that she should write everything down and ended her letter saying: *"devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary"*.

Catherine was not satisfied. The apparition was still not commemorated and the altar and statue of the Virgin with the globe were still missing. "It's the bane of my life" she said. Moreover, the Chapel was still not open to pilgrims.

Charitable in service

The seminary ended on the 30th January, 1831. Catherine moved on to the Community in the Hospice of Enghien in the commune of Reuilly, a poor district in the South-East of Paris.

Sister Catherine was assigned to the kitchens where she was on familiar territory! Her only problem: she loved to give generous portions, but the Head of the kitchen was parsimonious. Her patience wore thin. Two years later, she was assigned to the linen room: washing, ironing and mending.

Then came the care of the old people. She loved them and they loved her. Her firmness and strength made her respected. She was kind even towards the most disagreeable ones. She would give up her sleep to help them through their pain and all those she looked after would find peace. She also did duty in the lodge, where she welcomed the poor whom she loved so much.

Catherine made her vows on the 3rd May 1835. But this great day was overshadowed by the fact that her eldest sister Marie-Louise, upset at being the victim of slander, had left the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

Catherine was also caring towards the domestic staff. She visited a young laundry supervisor, who became ill upon her arrival and brought her an eiderdown and some elixir.

Finally, she was a haven for the young new Sisters, to whom she dispensed advice full of practical wisdom. She was a reference point for them and was always available.

Present everywhere, Catherine worked flat out. And yet, nobody took much notice of her, she was not really appreciated. She was even treated as a fool... But she was totally devoted to her task, respecting the authority of her superior, even when she was treated severely.

Confident in turmoil

During the revolutionary days of June 1848, the battle was relentless and bloody. There were barricades everywhere in the east of Paris. The retaliations were horrific. The hospice in Reuilly treated the sick from both sides.

In 1870, in the disastrous war against Prussia, Paris was besieged. Catherine remained calm. The medals were attached to the doors and windows of the house, which had been transformed into a hospital. Poverty turned to famine; "treats" were reserved for the sick and injured; the Sisters were reduced to the bare minimum, some days just a piece of brown bread after exhausting work.

Civil war was on the horizon. Catherine was low: *"My God, so much blood, so many ruined buildings!"* but she remained confident: *"The Virgin will watch over us, she will keep everything. No harm will come to us"*. The insurrection spread to the whole of Paris. The bodies were lined up on the pavements, but there were no victims amongst the Sisters...

In the spring of 1876, she felt her approaching death. She spoke calmly of it: *"I am going up to Heaven"*, she would say. At the end of December she asked for the anointment of the sick, which she received lucidly. "Are you not afraid of dying?" she was asked. Catherine was surprised: *"Why be afraid of going to see Our Lord, His Mother and St Vincent?"*.

On the 31st December, Catherine received communion. Prayers for the sick were said around her bed, and the invocation on the medal was repeated. Her last breath was so quiet that it was barely audible. The Litanies of the Immaculate Conception were being read out... From the morning of the 1st January, rumours of her death gave rise to processions. People were attracted as though "she were a saint". Her body remained supple. Her funeral took place on the feast of St Geneviève, 3rd January.