



Charity - Mission
VINCENT
DE PAUL
LOUISE DE
MARILLAC
350th anniversary

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Who is Jesus for Louise de Marillac?

Why the Incarnation?

Louise de Marillac liked to understand things clearly. She used to reflect on what could have led God to send his Son on earth. One sentence summarizes her thoughts on the reason behind the Incarnation: *“God never showed greater love for His creatures than when He resolved to become Man.”* (Spiritual Writings, 700)

After Adam had rejected God in his life and wanted to make himself his own god, the Incarnation manifests the great consideration God has for humankind. God wants to renew contact with the sinner at the very depth of his suffering and restore his confidence in himself. He wishes him to understand clearly the dignity of his being made in the image and likeness of God. Louise de Marillac insists that this divine desire could be fulfilled only in total respect for the liberty of the person.

Each individual can respond to this grace or reject it as he or she decides. God does not predetermine human choices. Each person is free and thus has the full capacity to make a choice and to say yes or no to God’s initiatives.

Accomplishment of the Incarnation

Louise de Marillac loved to imagine the Trinity conferring with one another, looking for a way to express all its love to humanity, and deciding together on the Incarnation of the Word: *“As soon as human nature had sinned, the Creator, who wanted to repair this fault by a great act of pure love, ordered, in the Council of His Divinity, that one of the three Persons should become Man. By so doing, He gave proof of deep, true humility.”* (Spiritual Writings, 700)

The promise of the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is inscribed in God’s loving plan for the human race. For Louise, humility defines God every bit as much as does love. God is no longer the distant, demanding God, the All-Powerful One so often presented to the people. The Incarnation itself would suffice to reveal this. However, many acts of the life of Jesus further confirm this. By His birth in a manger Jesus became *“a child so as to be more accessible to His creatures.”* (Spiritual Writings, 718) Louise reflected on *“the humility Our Lord practiced at His ‘Baptism’”* (Spiritual Writings, 719) And, while meditating on the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday evening, she exclaims, *“Nothing should keep me from humbling myself. For this, I have the example of Our Lord.”* (Spiritual Writings, 715) Jesus had a legitimate interest in reminding His followers of their obligation to honor Him but He accepts to humble Himself to the point of *“washing the feet of His Apostles.”* (Spiritual Writings, 719)

Mary the Mother of Jesus

The Incarnation of the Son of God is real. The Word became flesh in the Virgin Mary. With great emotion and gratitude, Louise de Marillac contemplates the choice God made of Mary, a simple woman of Nazareth: “*God had destined her as the mother of His Son.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 735) From personal experience, Louise knew what it meant to give life to a child, to provide it with the most intimate part of her being, her blood. She wanted to express the full extent of the happiness that filled her: “*Blessed may you be forever, O my God, for the choice you made of the Holy Virgin! ... You used the blood of the Blessed Virgin to form the body of your dear Son.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 801)

All Mary’s glory comes from her divine maternity. Louise proclaims that Mary is the “*masterpiece of God’s omnipotence in a nature that is purely human.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 831) Is not praising Mary for the choice God made of her also glorifying God Himself? God so loved humankind that He wanted to come Himself into their midst by receiving His humanity from Mary.

Holy Humanity of Christ

In 1652, Louise de Marillac wrote to the Sisters of Richelieu to remind them of the importance of contemplating the life of the Son of God during His stay on earth. There they will discover true charity: “*Gentleness, cordiality, and forbearance must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity just as humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ, who is perfect charity, is their spirit. That, my dear Sisters, is a summary of what I think I should tell you about our Rules.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 406)

In her long letter of August 1655 to the Sisters who were in faraway Poland, Louise also stresses the importance of contemplating the human life of Christ: “*...honor Jesus Christ by practicing the virtues which He, Himself, in His holy humanity taught us.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 478)

The last letters of Louise return to this same theme. At Christmas 1659, she wrote to Geneviève Doinel: “*You invite me to go to the Crib so that I can meet you there near the Infant Jesus and His Holy Mother... You will learn from Jesus, my dear Sisters, to practice solid virtue, as He did in His*

holy humanity, as soon as He came down upon earth. It is from the example of Jesus in His infancy that you will obtain all that you need to become true Christians and perfect Daughters of Charity.” (*Spiritual Writings*, 666)

Louise’s emphasis on the contemplation of the humanity of Jesus Christ shows how greatly she desired the life of every Daughter of Charity to be a reflection of the countenance of Christ with its infinite goodness and its incommensurable love. Christ is truly the Rule of the Daughter of Charity as He is for the entire Vincentian family.

Jesus Redeemer

Louise de Marillac, who had a solid theological formation, recognized that: “*the Incarnation of the Son of God was, in the eternal plan, for the redemption of the human race.*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 830) The rupture between God and humanity brought about by sin could not go on forever. By sending His Son to earth, God wanted to renew the Alliance and allow humanity to find once again a meaning for its existence. For Louise de Marillac, the Redemption is a new creation, a recreation which can take place only at the end of a long process of transformation, death, and resurgence of life.

Suffering humanity seems to Louise to be a prolongation of the suffering humanity of Christ. The service of love of every member of the Vincentian Family is a continuation of the Redemption, allowing each poor, humiliated, annihilated human being to live again, to resurrect, and to become a living person, freed from evil and sin, in a word, free. Louise’s astonishing reflection echoes that of Saint Paul who dared to say: “*I now find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. I make up in my body what is lacking in the suffering of Christ in favor of His body, the Church.*” (*Col 1, 24.*)

The Passion of the Son of God is so profound that Louise will insert it into the seal of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, “*The charity of Jesus Crucified urges us.*” For Louise, this love must animate and enflame the heart of every Daughter of Charity for the service of those most in need. Louise often concludes her letters with a reference to this unheard of love manifested by Jesus on the Cross. She makes the words of Saint John in his first epistle her own: “*This is what love*

is: we have not first loved God, rather it is He who has loved us and who sent His Son as a victim of expiation for our sins. This is how we shall henceforth know love: Jesus has given His life for us, we also must give our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (1 John 4, 10, 16)

The Eucharist

The Eucharist is not limited in time to the life of Christ. When His Hour was approaching, Jesus found a way to prolong it in such a way that it is always with us. Louise de Marillac is in wonder before this the extraordinary event of the Eucharist: “The Son of God took a human form... Nevertheless, this did not satisfy His great love for us. He desired an inseparable union of divine nature with human nature. He accomplished this after the Incarnation by the admirable institution of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar in which the fullness of the divinity dwells continually in the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity.” (Spiritual Writings, 784)

It seemed to Louise that God wanted to constantly express His great love to humankind. The Incarnation already manifested this great desire for union. The Eucharist concretizes it in a yet greater way. Louise de Marillac does not stop at the aspect “memorial and sacrifice” of the Eucharist. Rather she speaks extensively of communion “this admirable and, in a human sense, incomprehensible action.” (Spiritual Writings, 822)

To receive the Body of Christ is, according to Louise de Marillac, to become a participant in the life of God. Christ gives Himself as nourishment so that humans can draw new energy from it to accomplish their tasks on earth. In imitation of Christ, Christians are called to give themselves entirely if they want to bring life and love to their neighbor. The reception of communion brings exceptional strength because it confers on us “the capacity to live in Him as He lives in us. (Spiritual Writings, 823)

In response to such a gift from God, Louise desires for herself and for those she accompanies on their spiritual journey “loving union” (Spiritual Writings, 823.) with God. Is it really possible for a human being to experience such a union with God? The period of thanksgiving after communion allows time to repeat to God all one’s joy, all

one’s gratitude because Christ coming within us renders us like unto Him. Let us rejoice “in contemplating this admirable invention and the loving union by which God, seeing Himself in us, makes us, once again like unto Him. This he does by communicating not only His grace but Himself.” (Spiritual Writings, 823) Louise de Marillac does not know how to thank her Lord and her God for having thus willed to remain on earth so that all persons might offer Him all the glory that His Holy Humanity already receives in heaven.

Conclusion

Louise has a very clear and profound perception of Divine Love. Like the biblical writers, she recognizes that “God is a devouring fire.” (Heb 12, 26) In their daily lives, the sisters and all those who share the Vincentian charism are invited to allow this Divine Fire to fill their being and to welcome the plenitude of the love that the Spirit comes to spread in their hearts. It is in this relationship that they will find strength, energy, and creativity to accomplish their service of love with those who suffer from poverty in all its forms, long-standing and new.

Louise de Marillac recognizes that to follow Jesus and to serve Him in His suffering members means loving with an “uncommon love” (Spiritual Writings, 829), with a love that is strong, solid and unshaken by any difficulty. This strong love manifests itself concretely and on a daily basis by attentiveness to the individual, gentleness and kindness toward all. The more the Love of God grows, the more there is a consciousness of the dignity and liberty of each individual and the respect due to every person. This is how Christ expressed His Love.



Questions for Personal and Group Reflection

What aspects of Jesus as presented by Louise de Marillac resonate in your heart?

How can we together deepen the Vincentian charism so that it permeate and direct our service?

