



## **Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: The great accomplishment (4)**

### **A spiritual training**

While Louise de Marillac was mastering as well as she could the troubles of her soul, presiding over her foundations and governing her houses, the heavy anxieties which all this work involved absorbed her thoughts and exhausted her strength.

One of her responsibilities was the spiritual training of her Daughters. At first the work had been pressed forward with all urgency and Louise had been content to make of her girls exemplary Christians and highly efficient nurses. But Mademoiselle was far-sighted: she regarded it as part of her vocation to lead her Christian girls farther forward into the love of God, a road along which they could travel a great distance.

She would have to begin quietly with the human virtues, which would serve to sustain the supernatural virtues and those virtues of vocation which are most pleasing to God. This was the work which Louise de Marillac proposed to herself.

Her Daughters were ever present to her heart. Since each one of them had passed through her own hands, she knew their souls as well as she knew their faces; and as she had visited many of the places whence the girls came or where they were working, she could set each girl, not only in one of the houses of the community, but in a spiritual homeland. They lived in communities of two or three or more. If any one of them should ever have to work alone it would be for a time only, and Mademoiselle would suffer in sympathy the effects of that solitude, well knowing from experience that loneliness is a promoter of sadness.

The community day began at four in the morning. In Angers, in Nantes, at Saint-Denis, at Saint-Germain, at Richelieu and elsewhere the bell would ring and its summons would be disputed by none. The first two hours of the day, as was formally stipulated in the contract, belonged exclusively to the Sisters for their private, secret life with God, except when a patient in danger required their instant help. Through every hour of the day, the details of the Rule continued to protect them and to keep them for God. But the Rule was relaxed for the sick; everything, Jesus Christ himself, was to be left that he might be served in his suffering members and be re-discovered in them.

The Daughters did not belong to themselves but to the poor and the sick, their true masters.

To the service of their patients they were to apply themselves with sweetness and respectful courtesy. Not a single letter did Louise write to them without a reminder of this fundamental law of their calling. They were the servants of the sick and the poor. The term 'Daughter' in the language of the time signified 'servant', and the community had taken the name because of this meaning. This was a great feature of their life in the eyes of the world and they must be penetrated with it from the first moment of the day.

These masters, the sick poor, were difficult at times, because they were suffering. The girls must love them greatly to bear with them. To stoop to this humility, they must first stoop to bearing with their own companions: they had to live with each other, day and night, through all the hours that came, even when they were not in sight. This was difficult, as Louise well knew, and she never wearied of reminding her Daughters that without mutual forbearance life in community can be torment, when it should be a paradise.

On one occasion she wrote to the Sisters at Belay:

'It seems to me that I can see both of you in a state of great peace, and with a desire to arouse in yourselves a longing for unity and cordiality. This would consist in your giving yourselves to each other, telling one another what you have done while you were apart, telling one another also where you are going when you go out; the one out of an obligation to humility and the other by an obligation of mutual support and confidence. Similarly, in your



## Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: T...

by Javier F. Chento -

<http://vincentians.com/blog/louise-de-marillac-a-portrait-part-ii-the-great-accomplishment-4/>

---

little exercises: if one be sad, let her master her sadness to take recreation with her sister; and let her who is joyful moderate her happiness to suit the mood of the other, and so, little by little, to draw her out of her melancholy; all this for the love of our Lord and so that you will not listen to any temptation which might cause you to desire to go elsewhere, looking for satisfaction and relief for your own poor heart: that would be the total ruin of that holy friendship in which two Sisters should live together, in which I beg our Lord to preserve you in his holy love; in which I am . . .'

Bearing with one another and bearing each her share of the common misery, the girls must recognise that they each had shoulders and a heart fit for the burden:

'All the afflictions and losses which happened at Angers caused me extreme suffering for the trials which the poor of that place had to endure; I beg the Divine Goodness to comfort them and to give them the assistance that they need. My very dear Sisters, you have been in very great troubles; but have you well considered that it was just that the servants of the poor should suffice with their Master, and that each of us deserves to bear in her own body her share of those scourges which God sends upon mankind at large? Oh, my dear Sisters, how often are we obliged to make this meditation: "Who are we, that we should have received one of the greatest graces that God can bestow on any creature of any condition, in calling us into his service? And would we wish to be exempt from all discomfort?" Oh, my dear Sisters, let us protect ourselves carefully against such a thought; but rather let us very often be astonished, that God should have removed us from places where we might, in the company of the world, have suffered much; and that he should have given us bread, and put us so much at our ease, and caused us to dwell in safety. My dear Sisters, how heavy is the obligation thus laid upon us to habits of virtue, if we are not to pay dearly for it in the next world! Let us not wait for that penalty, but let us do whatever we can to acquire the virtues God asks of us, in thanks\* giving for the graces he bestows on us every day. I do not know, my dear Sisters, whether you ever received a letter in which I discoursed to you on this subject.

'In the name of God, take good care, I beg you, to be lovers of the sturdy virtues, particularly of humility and patience. If I speak to you often on the subject, it is because for some time now I have been receiving intimations that it is necessary for me to do so. Also, the Ladies who come visiting expect to be given some kind of welcome. You know, my Sister, how our Sisters who make ready the dinners take care that all should be satisfied. It is true that your other duties in the service of the sick take up all your time. But when the Ladies come, you may hand over your duties to another Sister, sometimes one, and sometimes another, so as to give them the best satisfaction you can without going against the orders of the Fathers. A good understanding between yourselves will accomplish all things.

'In God's name, Sister Cecilia, raise yourself just a little above your small distastes, and hope to be given opportunities for obedience, not with a hope which makes you anxious, but patient and peaceful; and do unto others as you would wish them to do unto you. Above all, be very compliant, and welcome pleasantly those—if there be any such—who may find it a thankless task to put up with you. Commend me well to all our Sisters, whom I embrace with all my heart. To them, as to you, I am, in the love of Jesus Crucified . . .'

It happened occasionally that the tares of discord sprang up among the Sisters and Mademoiselle would then adopt a tone of severe reproach, softened only by distance. Sisters Barbara and Louise at Richelieu had to suffice the sharp edge of her tongue:

'I have learned, as I always feared I might, that your little occupations, which were succeeding so well for the consolation of the sick and the teaching of little girls, have contributed nothing to your own perfection; on the contrary, it appears to have done you harm, since the good odour that used to come from you begins to be lost. Think, my dear Sisters, what you are doing: you are a cause why God is offended in a place where he used to be glorified, your neighbour takes scandal, and you give people cause not to prize as highly as they should the holy exercise of charity. How will you dare one day to appear before God, to give an account of the use you have made of his great grace in calling you to the state in which he has put you? He expected to derive from it his own glory, and behold, you are the usurper, you, Sister Barbara, by your lack of cordiality towards the Sister God has given you, by your little actions of contempt, and your small negligences, and by your small forbearance with her infirmities. How is it that you can never bear in mind, that when you were put with her to be to her in the position of a Superior, this laid on you the duties of a mother, but heavier than the duties of a mother in the flesh; for you



## Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: T...

by Javier F. Chento -

<http://vincentians.com/blog/louise-de-marillac-a-portrait-part-ii-the-great-accomplishment-4/>

---

were to make more effort for her salvation and her perfection than earthly mothers commonly do, and this obliged you to exercise great patience and charity, as the Son of God commanded when he walked the earth. And having accepted this responsibility, did you not at once perceive what a degree of humility it would require, since you have so much reason to know your own incapacity? Ought you not always to have before your eyes, when you give any command, that it is obedience which causes you to give that order, and not that of your self you would have any right to do it? Now, my dear Sister, I hope that the harm is not yet so far gone that it cannot be remedied. Set your own faults firmly before your own eyes, without excusing yourself, for indeed nothing can be the cause of any evil that we do, but we ourselves. Acknowledge this truth before God, stir up in your heart a great love for our dear Sister Louise, and in the sight of the merciful justice of the good God, throw yourself at her feet, and beg pardon of her for your lack of cordiality to her, and for all the sorrows you have caused her; with the promise that, by the grace of God, you will love her as Jesus Christ himself loves her; take all the care of her you ought to take, and embrace her, having this true feeling for her in your heart.

°And you, my dear Sister Louise, here you are again, falling into your little bad habits. What do you think of your state? Is yours a life of liberty? Very far from it. Your life should be one long act of humility and obedience. Is it possible that you never think of that? Or is it that, if you do think of it, you have so little love of God, and so little fear for your own salvation, that you neglect those things to which you are bound? My Daughter, do yourself a little violence. What comes over you, when you pay calls or go on pilgrimage without permission, so that you apparently desire to live in all things according to your own will? Do you never remember that you should do nothing, nor go anywhere, without the permission of Sister Barbara, whom you accepted as your Superior before you went away, and whom you ought to love as much as, or more than, you would your own mother? I declare you never seem to recall to mind what is your state, since you do so many things incompatible with it. Would you not be sorry if you lost your state for such poor satisfactions? I believe that the cause of most of your faults is that you have money, and have always been pleased to have it. If you will believe me, you will rid yourself of this affection. Put it all into the hands of Sister Barbara; only desire to have what she thinks right, and stir yourself up to love poverty, in honour of that of the Son of God. By this means you will attain what is necessary to be truly a Daughter of Charity.'

This long letter, so firm and to the point, is that of the head of a community and of a mother.

Her liveliest expressions of reproach are never bitter. Sometimes they take on inflexions of tenderness. It is certainly tenderness which is most apparent in her teaching—a very anxious tenderness when the health of any of her Daughters is in danger; a tenderness skilful and delicate on those many occasions when consolation was required. The imagination of a Sister may have been too active: clouds have gathered, such as we call scruples. These scruples play a large part in the interior life, especially in those cases where self-examination is carried too far. This leads to disgust with the basic virtues, and a search for imaginary virtues creating anxieties that are not grounded in reason.

Louise writes to a Sister:

'I will try to help you to get rid of your scruples, having suffered from the same ones myself. Try to dissolve them in other interests, instead of struggling with them directly, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you joy.'

It is by her tenderness that she consoles, but it is an affection which has about it something virile. She drew great distinction between the tenderness which is the strength and depth of charity and that softness which is a serious defect. The latter is a kind of immature delicacy, which is upset by the slightest breath and creates for itself the most extraordinary scruples. A person may form a dislike for going to a particular confessor, or he may scruple because he is too much inclined to go to another. Sooner or later he must rid himself of this kind of softness. 'Our much honoured Father', she said, 'told us in his last conference that we must detach ourselves from these levities, which are much more dangerous in us than in nuns, because we never have the time to reflect on ourselves; our patients claim us.'

Where a sharper reproach was necessary Louise did not hesitate to come straight to the point; but she believed that the lesson would be more effective if it came from a higher authority. On these occasions she invited Monsieur Vincent, or M. de Vaux, or M. Portail, to be the correcting Father, and while she apologised for her own



boldness, she told them plainly what they should know and what she wanted them to say:

'Take note, Monsieur, if you please, that it was Sister Anne rather than Sister Marguerite who introduced the style of arranging the hair, about which you did me the honour to ask; for I know that she tends very strongly to set herself up for a person of much experience, a woman very devout and very wise, not to say full of self-conceit, and is so, everywhere, as much with the Ladies as with the poor, and she loves to say a great deal about humility, but this is a form of self-praise. There is a great deal wrong; but I only mean to speak, Monsieur, of her natural dispositions, and hope that grace may draw some good out of them.'

It is the function of a head to make reason prevail; but it is the heart which is in control; and reason and the heart are both in the hands of God. Consolation, counsel or reproach, all lead back to the centre which is the love of God.

In every word of every letter from the Foundress love flows like an impalpable grace, not only in formulas conventionally used, which despite the convention never lack sincerity, but also in the substance of what she says and her tone of voice heard at a distance by all her Sisters. The formation that she gave, into which she put so much tenderness, was never in the least mawkish or pointless or petty. Many little things had to be said, but once said a few words brought her hearers back to the true framework of her teaching, which is noble and serious. She could abruptly bring to end a letter full of the most detailed advice, on a note that is very modern: 'Let us pray, my Daughters, for France and for the Church'.

These were the sinister years of the Fronde, of princes who exploited to the full the wretchedness and anger of the people and made the young king pay dearly for the violence of the minister who had laid the foundations of his reign. Louise de Marillac had suffered from the excesses of that violence and now she could feel how full of peril were the forces of reaction not only for the king, but for the nation itself and therefore for the Church. Her anxieties and her prayers joined with those of Vincent de Paul and she endeavoured to unite with her own the intentions of her Daughters. Those poor girls from the fields, through close acquaintance with human misery, had grown capable of entering into the real needs of Christianity and the state. The Daughters were in no peril of losing themselves in the great questions of policy, which there was no need for them to understand; for a single principle, which was the very clear expression of a love made to their measure, dominated their lives: the principle of 'holy indifference', or of total submission to the Divine Will.

Correspondence going into great detail and rising to lofty heights was the great instrument used by Louise for the formation of her girls. A letter written by her is a continuous conversation, a conference always returning to the main points. In our day, we have given to this word 'conference' a solemn meaning of diplomatic negotiation or learned discussion. In fact, a conference is no more than an orderly conversation and he who directs it gives it his own character. It was thus that Louise de Marillac understood the word when she conferred with her Daughters; and thus Vincent de Paul understood it when he came to speak of God and to define in the presence of God the spirit that should animate a true Daughter of Charity.

At these celebrated conferences, given once or twice each month, everyone was present. Daughters who were serving Charities in the parishes and who were not detained by urgent services to the sick joined the Daughters of the motherhouse. The subject of the conference had been announced by letter, and in the course of the week or fortnight each girl had meditated and reasoned, with all the ability which God had planted beneath her hood. Shy girls had permission to write down their contribution and to bring their paper to the meeting. Every girl could speak, and she would be interrogated, not as a child at a school examination, but as a member of the community with a contribution to make to the common spiritual treasury.

Monsieur Vincent had made his meditation on the theme. Mademoiselle, with much humility and plain goodness, excusing her own boldness, turned her reflections in the direction of her Daughters' needs which she very well understood. With a familiarity which reassured the most timid, the much-honoured Father would begin by bringing forward the youngest and least fluent among the girls. On getting an answer full of good sense, he would cry out with sincere admiration for he could always perceive behind the simplest words the most profound reality. In turning it over and repeating it and adding appropriate words of his own, he would throw the subject into relief: the pebble picked up on the road became a diamond, and the astonished little Sister could well believe that God had



given her thoughts both rich and beautiful. Monsieur Vincent would then bring forward the more senior Sisters and finally, with much respect, Mademoiselle. Then Monsieur Vincent would conclude by summing up. He himself always took the trouble to make notes of his own 'little thoughts', as he called them; and Mademoiselle contrived very skilfully that he should always leave these notes behind. After he had gone the best heads in the house would bend over them. Minutes would be made, a record sincere and complete of every accent and incident, every word spoken; preserving, too, every word of the much-honoured Father, with all his brusqueness, his picturesque turns of phrase and his warmth. The Daughters of Charity are accustomed, and with good reason, to regard the records of these conferences as the charter of their institute.

No attempt has ever been made to define the respective shares of Founder and Foundress in the formal instruction given to the Sisters. This discretion we shall respect and imitate.

On one point we must express regret. Transcripts were made of these conference notes for circulation to the various houses of the Institute. A deplorable custom grew up of introducing various modifications into the text, apparently with a view to bringing the language up to date. Thus the native sharpness has been refined and polished to vanishing point; long passages have been abridged; short and pithy paragraphs have been amplified. Yet, despite this shocking custom, which to this day has not entirely disappeared, the texts of the conferences still bear a stamp of authenticity. As we read them we feel that we are in touch with the minds of the Founders; we almost imagine that we see and hear them, so living and so strong is their thought, even within the conventional formulas of instruction.

Many of the conference notes have completely disappeared with the passage of the years. Those which survive in the edition of Pierre Coste<sup>1</sup> form a collection of the greatest spiritual value. Taken with the letters written by Mademoiselle, they hold all the instruction received by a Daughter of Charity.

The subjects dealt with are, as a rule, the same as those of the conferences given to the Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of Mary of the Visitation, and the clergy at Saint-Lazare: the love of God and our neighbour, which contains the whole of the Christian law, but with special application to the particular vocation of the Daughters. Minute attention is given to the definition of this vocation, its spirit and its dignity.

The girls are to be the servants of the poor of Jesus Christ; all the ordinary obligations of Christianity are interpreted to them in the light of this principle and are repeatedly brought back to it. Charity to one's neighbour necessarily begins in love of one's own Sister, in mutual help and forbearance, in affectionate understanding and agreement. Without these things, the community would be bound to break up and perish.

Feeling in the meeting would at times run so strong on this point that an interval had to be allowed for scenes of reconciliation and pardon, with smiles and tears and embraces. The grounds of the dispute had been childish and silly: but it is the tapered dagger which makes the deepest wound. Happy the wounds which give occasion for heroic pardon and reparation without measure. Fraternal charity is a somewhat delicate virtue, inevitably injured by complacency, self-confidence or pride. We know from a text already cited how firmly Monsieur Vincent insisted on that simplicity which he so admired in 'village girls', provided they were unspoiled by any subtle contagion from the city, such as sometimes gets into country air.

The discourse would often deal with another virtue, regarded by Founder and Foundress as of fundamental importance. This was the virtue of 'holy indifference'. Saint Vincent teaches that to be 'indifferent' is to desire nothing, to ask for nothing, to refuse nothing; to be attached to no duty, no place, no person; to be ready always either to depart or to stay, to undertake all things or to leave all things in obedience to the will of a superior, which is to say, to the will of God. This subject is discussed in every possible context, illuminated by psychological penetrations of great subtlety. The audience can never have wearied during these conferences at the mother house, as Monsieur Vincent told his stories punctuated with vigorous action. He had a

large repertoire of anecdote which he loved to emphasise with telling gesture:

'I once knew a good lady who loved nothing in the world but her dog—and how she loved it! One day, as they were going on a journey, the dog died. What lamentations she raised, because she had lost her dog! 'Who will



## Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: T...

by Javier F. Chento -

<http://vincentians.com/blog/louise-de-marillac-a-portrait-part-ii-the-great-accomplishment-4/>

---

come to meet me now', she cried, 'when I get back home? For my dog, my consolation and amusement, is dead!' Poor creature! She sighed as she sat in her carriage—and why? For a dog. She was so much upset that she thought she was going out of her senses, and the doctors advised her to do a little travelling to distract her mind. Oh, my Daughters! If love for a wretched animal could have an effect like that . . .!'

One of the Sisters remarked that the only means of enjoying peace of soul would then be to desire nothing.

Monsieur Vincent: 'Mademoiselle, be pleased to tell us what you think.'

'One of the thoughts which came into my mind, Father, in addition to what the Sisters have already said, was this: God desires to be glorified in us in every way possible; which indeed he is, when he makes use of us as, by many titles, belonging to him; and so he can enable us to do whatever he pleases; but he desires that we should co-operate with his will, and it is very proper that we should sacrifice to him the free will that he has given us, and that by this means we should put ourselves into this state of holy indifference in all those occupations in which it shall please his goodness to put us by means of the orders of our Superiors.

'Another thought is that, since we are given to God to form a body within his Church, it is right that each member should perform her function; which she could not do if she were not submissive to the orders of the Superior, who is the head of the body.

'The drawbacks which might arise from this would be: First, the harm that such a Sister would do to herself, by putting herself in a condition of not being able to accomplish the will of God, nor of doing anything which could please him. Another: that without this holy indifference there would be disorder in the Company, the service of the poor would suffer, and a bad example would be given to the other Sisters, which some of them indeed might follow.

'One of the most powerful means that we have to help us to acquire this indifference is the example of our Lord, who during his life on earth testified in so many places that he was here on earth only to practise this virtue by doing the will of God his Father, and who persevered in his obedience for thirty years.'

Vincent de Paul: 'May God bless you, Mademoiselle! How beautifully that is expressed!'

Another Sister suggested that since the Daughters of Charity were given to God, it no longer belonged to them to desire to be this or that, to be in this place or somewhere else. If they should perform any act implying a right of (self-) ownership, they would be withdrawing themselves from God by a sort of robbery. We must therefore allow ourselves to be bent like the willow which the wickerwork woman twists in every direction, to make of it what she will.

Vincent de Paul: 'Can you give yet another reason, Sister?'

'Father, I have further observed that we should allow ourselves to be bent like the willow, so that the basket maker may make what he will.'

'That is what our Sister has just said. The Sisters of Charity should be as supple as the willow in the hands of him who uses her. The willow allows itself to be bent according to the will of the basket-maker, up and down; it does not resist. In the same way, a Daughter of Charity who is not in this state of indifference, who does not allow her superiors to post her where they will, in this place or the other, whether as servant or companion, is not as docile as the willow, nor so agreeable to God, because she has not the suppleness which even a non-rational object has. Oh, Sisters, what a confusion it is to see a girl full of reasons!'

Other Sisters, and sometimes several at one time, would speak in testimony of the virtue of indifference. In conclusion, it would be the turn of Monsieur Vincent to deliver his 'little thoughts' and to conclude. In his view, the Daughters of Charity ought to be indifferent, always available, like the angels who stand before God ready at all times to do his bidding. The Daughters are the angels of the charity of God. Those who were perhaps not in this fitting state of indifference, who might be harbouring in their hearts mere personal desires, would shortly see those



## Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: T...

by Javier F. Chento -

<http://vincentians.com/blog/louise-de-marillac-a-portrait-part-ii-the-great-accomplishment-4/>

---

desires transformed into passions which would agitate them as demons are agitated. Monsieur Vincent concludes with a fervent prayer, calling O 11 God to preserve the Daughters from the wiles of the devil; and to give them and sustain in them the angelic spirit of indifference.

When any of the Sisters were about to depart to another house, Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle would profit by the occasion to discourse on the appropriate virtues, according to the nature of the place to which they were going and the difficulties they would meet on the road, or when they arrived.

Upon the death of a servant of the poor—a common event in those early days, when the work was hard, and the zeal of youth unrestrained—Monsieur Vincent and Louise took occasion to base the conferences on the virtues of the Sister who had gone to receive her reward. There was a most beautiful and moving conference of this kind on Sister Barbara Angiboust, one of the most outstanding figures of the first generation of the movement, ardent, individualistic to the extent of breaking at times a framework of rules still ill-defined, and literally burned out by her love for God and his poor. In 1658 she died, a martyr to her devotion at the hospital in Châteaudun. Those who had known her, those who had had the happiness of living with her came forward to testify how energetic she had been, how cheerful and good, how blunt in her goodwill. She it was who had refused her services to the duchesse d'Aiguillon and dared tell her why to her face: she was not one of the poor, and the poor should come before the rich of this world. Barbara had a special tenderness for small children. In the early days of great misery at the Enfants-Trouvds when there were not even enough cradles, Barbara would sleep with the babies in her arms. She knew how to talk to any child from the very moment that its mind awoke and her manner of catechising was quite exquisite. She succeeded in mastering her ardent nature, bringing it into subjection to the letter of the Rule; and she could handle with patience the most difficult of her poor—the prisoners in the galleys—despite their violence and their coarse habits. A citation from the record of what was said on this occasion will be of interest:

'I was with her among the prisoners in the galleys. She displayed great patience in bearing the hardships which are met with there, and which are due to the bad dispositions of those people. For although they were sometimes enraged with her, to the point of throwing the soup at her, and trampling the meat on the ground, saying to her whatever their impatience suggested, she suffered those things without a word, and patiently picked the things up with as sweet a grace as though they had said and done nothing to her.'

'Oh, that was the way to behave: to treat them just as before.'

'And not only that, Father. More than once, she prevented the guards from beating them.'

'Well, my Sisters, if there be any here who have worked among the prisoners in the galleys, and have felt like standing up to them and being rough with the poor fellows, rendering evil for evil, and curse for curse, grieve, and be sorry, seeing that one of your Sisters, who wore the same habit as yourselves, when they threw at her the meat she brought them, said not a word, and when they were to be beaten, could not endure it. What a reason for grief this should be to those who have acted differently, and who answer railing with railing when they are dealing with those poor convicts and their guards!

'My Sisters, any of you who are here may at any time be sent to serve those poor men. Learn then from our Sister the lesson of how you ought to behave, not only among the prisoners in the galleys, but everywhere else.'

All these features make up a portrait of Barbara Angiboust, the beauty of which Monsieur Vincent greatly admired. One of the Sisters remarked that mankind should wonder at the Artist who had painted such a masterpiece; for it was a work of God and of his grace. Monsieur Vincent then turned to Louise, and asked whether she wished to add any touches to the picture.

'Mademoiselle, will you please tell us what you yourself observed?'

'I acknowledge, Father, that all that our Sisters have said is true. She loved all points which touched the Rule, and was greatly attracted to the teaching of the young. From the moment she became acquainted with the Rule, she never desired to omit anything from what was commanded, or to innovate in any way whatever.'



## Louise de Marillac, a portrait. Part II: T...

by Javier F. Chento -

<http://vincentians.com/blog/louise-de-marillac-a-portrait-part-ii-the-great-accomplishment-4/>

---

‘Wherever she went, even at the Enfants-Trouvds, which place she visited more than once, I never saw her shrink from anything. When the news of her death was made known, reports of her virtues came in from all the places which she had served.

‘When she wrote to me, she would sign herself “The Proud One”, out of the desire that she had for humility, at which she laboured without ceasing.

‘She was a tower of strength to the Sisters wherever she might be. One of these, who had been with her at Chateaudun, having on some occasion been a sore trial to her, was afterwards sorry for it, and begged her pardon. When this Sister saw Barbara lying ill of the sickness of which she was to die, she spoke of that matter (and Barbara replied): “Sister, was it not necessary that it should be so?”, as though to say, “It is by bearing with them that we win over those who are carried away by some impulse contrary to duty.”

‘Our Sisters who lived with her in her last days have informed me that they observed in her so many virtues that eight quires of paper would not suffice to describe them.

‘I never saw her deflected from her resolutions. She loved the Company very dearly, and sorrowed grievously whenever she heard of any matter that was not for the good of the community.

‘Here is the letter by which I was notified of her death: “You will have learned of the death of our dear Sister Barbara by the letter we sent you. We confirm to you by the present letter that she died in God, etc.” Father, there came a woman from Chateaudun who assisted her at her death, who told us all that that letter tells us, and among other things that, had she not witnessed her passing, she would not have recognised her after her death, so beautiful was she: “which is what is written in the letter”—but such was her beauty that some people said she was made up.

‘Well, my Sisters, what a beautiful picture! We may be happy that we have lived with a soul given to the practice of such virtues!’

One of the most attractive features of these conferences is the absence of all formality. Everything is seen clearly, as in the fresh light of dawn, and each Sister says what she has to say in her own way, in her ‘proud country tongue\* so that, though the word is never used, a great demonstration of *truth* may be gathered from the collection. The Daughter of Charity, formed by these instructions, is essentially *true*.

Nourished on the inspired teaching of these discourses— a teaching in part her own—and drawing upon her own stores, which were rich, Louise de Marillac continued the formation of her Daughters in Conferences of her own composition. Following the example of her ‘much-honoured Father\* she avoided all formalism and spoke in familiar terms according to the circumstances. For this reason no formal minutes of her conferences have come down to us. But the book of prayers in use in the Congregation throws a flood of light upon a theme which must have provided the framework and the texture of her teaching: this was the liturgy and the liturgical year. What Louise has to say on the feast of the day is not only very solid theology, but her love of the liturgy shines through every word.

I might have made a study of this subject at this point, to complete our analysis of her method of instructing her Daughters; but we shall arrive at a better understanding of her original and intimate qualities if we defer such consideration until we come to deal with the rich vein of her private spirituality. When her life was drawing to its close she was no longer directly concerned with the formation of her Daughters; but she lived with them, prayed with them and for them. This is the exquisite feature of the teaching activity of the saints: to teach, they have but to be themselves.