



## ST LOUISE DE MARILLAC'S STORY

Saint Louise de Marillac was born on the 12th of August 1591, the illegitimate child of an unknown mother, who died shortly after Louise was born. Her father was Louis de Marillac and he acknowledged her as his child, and showed her much love. Her father remarried when she was 3 and she was not welcome in the family home, however she was well cared for and provided with an excellent education at the convent at Poissy. She remained at the convent until her father died when she was 12. After that she stayed with a good devout spinster where she learnt household skills and herbal remedies.

Louise felt drawn to the cloistered life and made application to the Capuchin sisters but was refused entry, and was given the prophetic advice, that God had other designs on her. Louise's family arranged for her to marry Antoine Le Gras, who was secretary to the Queen Mother, in 1613. Within a year their son Michel was born. Louise and Antoine grew to love each other and their marriage was a happy one. However, Antoine became ill and his illness made him depressed and difficult to live with. Louise also struggled with depression at this time and felt that she was being punished for not having entered religious life as she had promised. It was at this time that she had, what she called, her Light of Pentecost experience. In this experience she was reassured that she should stay with her husband but was assured that a time would come that she would make vows and that she would live with other women who would do the same. She wrote down this experience and carried it with her as a reminder that God was with her in her troubles.

Louise met Vincent, who became her spiritual director, and a great partnership was created. Antoine died in 1625. In 1629 Vincent sent Louise on mission to visit the Confraternities of Charity which he had established. Vincent sent Louise with these words...

*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.*

It was with this mission that Louise's gifts for organisation and formation came to the fore. Louise continued to work with the Confraternities over the next few years.

After some time it became clear that some of the noble women did not feel comfortable going into the home of some of the poor. Young women also began to offer themselves to help with the service, and so, in 1633 Louise took 4 young women into her home and the Daughters of Charity was born. John Honner writes of Louise

Louise proved herself to be an exceptional leader, with a deep concern for the wellbeing of her sisters and a sharp eye for administrative detail. For all her commitment to a life of prayer and service she was a wise negotiator and a shrewd manager. The number and range of the works the "Little Company", as Vincent and Louise described it, rapidly expanded.

Louise's life was marked by suffering and she wrote *God, who has granted me so many graces, led me to understand that it was His holy will that I go to Him by way of the Cross. His goodness chose to mark me with it from my birth and He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering.*

She transformed this suffering in order to help her become more open to the will of God and to be more compassionate towards others especially the people living in poverty that she served.

## A LIFE OF PRAYER AND SERVICE

