

Saint Louise de Marillac

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Today is a big celebration: we are celebrating Saint Louise de Marillac, the first coordinator of the charities. First, I suggest that we make a small pilgrimage to the Church of Saint Nicolas des Champs, which was her parish in 1623. Louise had many trials in her life; she was a sensitive, worried soul, going through a painful period of doubt. It is in this church that, during the Pentecostal Mass, she receives an illumination which brings her peace; she will write: "my mind was cleared of its doubts". This explains the exceptional devotion she has for the Holy Spirit. Together, let us pray to the Spirit of God, in the words of Saint Louise, to guide us in our mission today.

Peaceful host of the soul, rest in effort, appeasement of passions, consolation in tears, light possessing perfect happiness. Amen.

Louise's path was made step by step: two years later, she meets Mr. Vincent who agrees to become her spiritual director, and little by little Louise will understand that her vocation is the service of the poor. In 1629: Mr. Vincent entrusted her with the coordination of the Confraternities of Charity which have multiplied in France. He placed in her hands a Rule for the Charities, as well as a guide on how to establish, visit and organize them. Louise will devote herself to this for four years. Her first visit took place in Montmirail. Saint Vincent wrote to her, before her departure: "Go then, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray to his divine goodness to accompany you, to be your consolation on the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your cover against the rain and the cold,.... and may he finally bring you back to perfect health and full of good works." You have to imagine what travel was like at that time: the discomfort, the insecurity, which Louise faced with a cousin and a maid; not to mention the Confraternities which are multiplying in Paris in almost all the parishes. Louise herself was to be Superior of the Confraternity of Charity in her parish, then: Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. In this role of coordinator, two aspects strike me. Today we would say Louise is a leader. Visits to the Confraternities are demanding; it is necessary to bring together the Ladies of Charity, to encourage them, to remind them of their mission, to restore their confidence and dynamism. And it's not always easy. Because each confraternity has its problems, she must listen to each one, facilitate communication, calm rivalries, help make decisions and always come back to the basics: the service of the poorest. And Louise works very hard, so much so that Mr. Vincent writes to her: "Be careful not to overdo it. It is a ruse of the devil, of which he deceives good souls, to make them do more than they can, so that they can do nothing."

Today the pandemic prevents face-to-face visits and meetings; but we have other ways to stay in touch with volunteers at all levels, for us too: listening, building confidence, training. Most



of the AIC teams have added telephone contacts, Facebook pages, newsletters, Zoom meetings... let's continue to be inventive!

Louise offers answers to the poverty of her time. Louise is convinced that education is part of charity. During these visits, she teaches catechism to children, she gives methods of teaching it, creates schools, especially for little girls-- this intuition remains fully relevant. And relates to our second AIC 2020-2023 Priority Line of Action: "To set up educational and transformative projects based on Vincentian values".

I would like to end by specially greeting our sisters, the Daughters of Charity, to thank them for their collaboration with us AIC volunteers in so many countries, and to wish that we continue to work hand in hand in the service of the most disadvantaged, as St. Louise invited us to. Happy Feast Day to all of you!