



**SOR MAGDALENA  
PARIS**



### **SAINT LOUISE TRAINER AND EDUCATOR**

Louise de Marillac had great gifts: the education she received, her life experience, and above all, her virtues nourished by a deep spiritual life. All of these virtues were the basis for her role as a trainer and educator. In her actions, she shows wisdom and judgment, strength and boldness as well. She communicates her beliefs about God and about life, to others. A woman of her time, devout and charitable, she instills all attitudes and a way of serving God and the poor.

The basis of St. Louise's training is faith; the constant vision that *"serving the poor is serving God."* Indeed, Jesus considers any service rendered to the foundling children, to the convicts, to the sick, to the hungry, as done to himself. The rescued poor are seen as *"suffering members of the Body of Christ."*

If Louise's mission with the Ladies of Charity is to channel and organize their goodwill and, above all, to give it a "mystical" meaning, with the Daughters of Charity her mission is very different. Many of the first Sisters who joined Louise were uneducated, unable to read or write. They came from the countryside and had to live in contact with the Ladies of Charity, who were more cultured. Louise's task is enormous. She must build their spiritual life on their human poverty. But Saint Louise is able to transform them into true responsible women, in control of themselves; she models for them charity, gentleness, self-giving, Christian virtues.

To illustrate communion with God and Christ's presence in the poor, St. Louise repeatedly urged St. Vincent to make images of devotion in order to help the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity conform their lives to the imitation of Christ. An image made by Charles Le Brun in 1639, named by St. Louise *"The Lord of Charity"*, becomes the support and emblem of Christ's service in the poor, the engine of vocation and the model of the charitable mission. An image endures, while words can be forgotten. Based on this principle, the image of the Lord of Charity distributed to the Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of Charity, thus becomes an exemplary model for learning. St. Louise asks that this image be in the meeting rooms and of the Daughters and Ladies of Charity, but also in the rooms of the sick.

#### **Saint Louise Educator**

Haunted by the realization of the poverty of her time, Saint Louise envisions a way to remedy ignorance, the cause of all miseries. Relieving suffering seemed necessary, but preventing it was even more essential: nothing does this better than teaching and education. Teach the poor and catechize them at all times, starting from their circumstances and their needs.

In these visits to the Daughters of Charity, Louise is also very attentive to the plight of poor little girls. That is why she establishes charitable schools, visits existing ones, supports them, and sometimes reorganizes them according to the needs of the poor. She does not consider her mission to be complete or her visit to be over until she finds a teacher who can continue the work she has begun.



After the founding of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Saint Louise trained Sisters to be good teachers. It was not a question of making them scholars, but of giving them the basic concepts of faith, reading and writing, so that they could teach their young students. In every place where Louise sends the Daughters of Charity, one of them is assigned to teach poor girls. To help them, she herself composes, in the absence of a diocesan textbook, a simple catechism, which was unique in its clarity and brevity, but also its cheerful and lively tone.

At the Mother House at the time, Louise organized a "small school" that would serve as a "training center" for the Daughters of Charity; she taught there herself, but she also utilized the experience of some new arrivals who had previously been boarders of the nuns.

Hearing of the good results of the Ursuline method, Saint Louise had the "*alphabetical signs*" used by them made available to her teachers. She always followed the work of the Sisters, gave advice, made remarks, imposed changes when the Sister did not quite correspond to the mission entrusted to them. She insisted that education be simple, practical, and especially that poor children learn to read and write.

Outside of the regularly formed schools, there were Sundays and holidays, meetings of local women and girls for catechism. St. Louise, as a good teacher, knew that "*big girls sometimes need instruction more than little ones,*" but they must be educated "*without making them ashamed of their ignorance.*" And since the word catechism might turn them off, she recommends that they use the word "*reading*" instead. In addition, she encourages the Sisters to invite the older girls to attend "*the reading and admonitions*" given to little girls. We see here an indirect way of educating them.

This same concern for the education of the poor inspired her to ask the Daughters of Charity to go "*to the homes or to the fields*" in order to educate the children held at home or on the farm while they were working on the heavy tasks of the countryside. Even though the school had a fixed program that had to be respected, she advised the Sisters to receive the girls, discreetly and kindly, at all times and to be more attentive with those who were shy or ashamed.

The competence of Saint Louise, in many areas, facilitated her advice, her decisions. She was aware that you have to know and keep up to date to teach others. Throughout her life, she wanted to and was able to help women dedicated to the work of Charity, the Ladies of Charity and Daughters of Charity, to understand and fulfill their vocations in the Church and the world. Together, they lived the adventure of a faith committed to the service of the poor.

