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**FRANCE**

In his encyclical "Deus caritas est" Benedict XVI quoted Louise de Marillac as a witness to God's charity. And let's say up front that Louise was not simply a worker directed by Mr. Vincent. She was the woman who, on her own, created the new dynamic of fully devoted women, given to God in the service of the poor.

A woman called by God, even as a child she dreamed of becoming a nun, but her fragile health would prevent her. In order to give her a status, for this we will find a nobleman, secretary of Queen Mary of Medici, whom she married in 1613. She and her pious believer husband, they have permission to read the Bible, something rare in the 16th century.

With a nervous temperament, she is concerned about her unstable son. In 1623, during Pentecost, she received a revelation that she would have a mission with other women in the service of the poor. It was during this period that to accompany her, her uncle, Monsignor Camus, would direct her to Mr. Vincent.

The culture shock must have been great: she from a noble family with a man from rural France. She will immediately be touched by the insight of this man of God. He is aware of her frailties, but above all he will be able to see the abilities she has. The first charities were born in the mission parishes, and they were accompanied by multiple conflicts. As early as 1629 Saint Vincent entrusted her with visiting these nascent charities in an attempt to resolve tensions. Through her visits, reconciliation will be brought about, resulting in greater efficiency of these charities. Louise is already showing her personal gifts as a mediator. A woman of great spirituality, she will be able to restore the beauty of the young teams who wish to serve the poor in the footsteps of Jesus.

When Marguerite Naseau, a young girl from the countryside, meets Mr. Vincent during a mission, she expresses her desire to help the poor by offering them the knowledge they need. Some other girls have the same desire. Mr. Vincent will propose to Louise that she join with them to try to create what had been revealed to her in her Pentecost spiritual experience.

On November 29, 1633, Louise finds herself with six young girls. She begins what will be the Sisters whom St. Vincent thought to call Providence and whom the people will call "Daughters of Charity", their official name. They began to serve and were soon called upon to serve abandoned children, staff many hospitals, serve war displaced persons, the elderly, galley convicts and other types of poverty of their time.

When their work with the foundling children begins, it is in the "Good Children's House" in the house of Bicêtre, where the ladies welcome abandoned children; Louise developed a place where the children find the family they have not been lucky enough to have. Sensitive regarding young people, with Monsieur Vincent she will give them a safe place to live. She watches over their quality of life along with Mr. Vincent. He had found in an auction house



a painting of the holy family. They put it in the common living room, as a representation to young people of the model they did not have and are entitled to expect.

At the same time, the sisters will be their true educators. Louise will develop the specific regulations, some of which have come to us. In the latter, we aim to be simple: to give young children an education and training that will enable them to face their future as adults and parents. Girls will learn cooking, sewing, education, boys the work of the land and that of wood etc.... for the knowledge they will need in their adult lives. We will make sure to teach them good manners and mutual respect.

When, together with Mr. Vincent, the Daughters want to prevent the elderly from dying in the streets of Paris, he created the Hospice of the Holy Name of Jesus. Together with the sisters, in the service of these elders, they create a microcosm of social life where everyone will participate in a common life according to his strengths. The rules applied by the sisters will ensure that all guests are respected in every detail: clean tablecloths, cutlery, plates, hot soups, the freshest meat. In all rules, the importance of never forgetting the spiritual aspect of service is evident: before and after the meal, blessings are called or they give thanks to God, filled with generosity. In these senior homes we see her giving advice worthy of contemporary ecological measures. She made sure to tell the sisters who sent her rare food products in Paris, to use them for the sake of their residents, for nutritional value. She even went so far as to get angry with a sister who sent her a rare and expensive medicinal plant when she did not need it; she already had another similar species with the same properties.

She was careful to develop the inventiveness of the sisters so that the various houses would be self-financing: for this reason they created fishing taxes, or created a bakery so that the money generated would be used to improve the experience of the people who were welcomed.

Louise will have the constant concern to pass on the faith. In this, she will invent a simple catechism to help the sisters with an easy memorization of the truths of the faith. During her regular meetings with the sisters, through the teachings she shares with them, she continues her mission as an educator.

We see that Louise is a woman driven by the desire to meet God and love neighbor. It is her work to translate God's love into everyday life, so that as many people can rediscover ordinary joy without forgetting that its source is in God. We see her, in the heart of the 17th century, a woman so nourished by the Word that she never ceases to transmit it, in the pedagogy of the concrete details of human existence, the concrete expression of faith in Jesus Christ incarnate.

