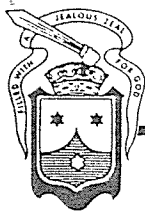


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Carmelite Spiritual Center

8433 Bailey Road * Darien, Illinois 60561 * 708-969-4141

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Life is Worth Giving

PAULINE JARICOT: FRENCH GIRL WHO SPREAD THE FAITH

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

A little over 200 years ago, on July 22, 1799, a baby girl by the name of Pauline Marie was born into a faithful French family by the name of Jaricot. The place was the city of Lyons, and the time was scarcely a year after the end of the French Revolution (1789-1799) which attempted to destroy much of the Catholic Faith in France. [And after almost a quarter

century of persecution, many churches, convents and monasteries had been destroyed or confiscated. Priests, nuns and religious brothers were driven into exile or prison, and the Faith of the ordinary people was tested in many ways.

In establishing "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," the revolutionaries attempted to make the Faith either disappear or become irrevelant in France. Supposed freedom was in; God was out.

Challenge of Faith

It was into this religious and social atmosphere that young Pauline Jaricot was born. But she saw the situation as an opportunity not only to restore the Faith to France but to the world. And so, at the age of 17, in 1816, she founded her first Faith venture called "Reparatrices du Sacre Coeur de Jesus Christ." This was a society of serving girls in Lyons who made acts of reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

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But it was several years later, in 1822, that Pauline Jaricot discovered her life's work when she founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith which today supports missionary efforts throughout the world from its headquarters now located in Rome.

A Simple Idea

As with many brilliant successes, the ~~plan~~ ^(plan for) the missionary society came to Pauline Jaricot in the guise of a rather simple idea. It was in 1819 as the young French girl observed her family and their friends were playing a game of cards at home. For quite a while Pauline had been trying to find a way to organize her fellow workers in a silk factory to support missionary work. After much prayer and thought, the solution came to her while observing the simple card game in which people not only joined together but interacted with each other.

"I understood," she later explained, "just how easy it would be for each person that I knew well to find ten members who would donate a penny a week for the propagation of the faith. I wrote this scheme out on a scoring board at the card table."

Circles of Ten

The plan was dubbed simply "Circles of Ten" and began growing almost immediately. In a few years Pauline Jaricot's "Circles" included some 2,000 active members in the area of Lyons.

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Most were young working women who pledged not only the donation of a penny each week, a goodly gift from their ^(MERGER) pay, but also promised to pray each day for the success of the foreign missions.

"Prayers and pennies for the missions" soon became the great motivation for the young French woman and her more than faithful followers.

But before finalizing her overall plan for supporting the Church's missionary work, Pauline Jaricot turned once again to prayer. During one intense session of prayer, she had the deep thought of two lamps in her mind's eye. One lamp had no oil for producing light while the other was filled to overflowing. The full lamp was actually pouring its surplus into the empty lamp until both were completely full.

While still at prayer, Jaricot came to an understanding of the symbolism of her vivid imagination. The empty lamp stood for the Church in France which was virtually empty after years of persecution by the French revolutionaries. Even France's once flourishing missionary effort, which sent priests, nuns and brothers to such far-away places as Canada to convert the various Indian tribes, was almost extinct.

But the full lamp to Jaricot stood for the increasing Faith of new Christians in the missions around the globe who found Christ.

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Their new-found Faith, in her understanding, would serve to restore the lost Faith of the French people.

Call from God

In this way young Pauline Jaricot felt a call from God to aid and support the work of missionaries throughout the world. It would, indeed, become her life's work that continues to this day and age.

In her interest in the missions, Pauline was also greatly encouraged by her brother, Phileas, who was later ordained as a Sulpician priest. This group is still involved in conducting seminaries for the training of priests in many parts of the world. His letters to Pauline were replete with news of missionaries in China and other foreign lands. The implied message was that there was a great need for missionaries in many places who needed to be supported financially and spiritually by those back home.

"Keep on with this work which God has started through your hands," he wrote. "It will perhaps one day grow into a great tree, whose branches will give shade to the whole earth."

Request from America

In May of 1822, an interested group met in Lyons to consider a request for mission funds from the Church in America. The group agreed to send help after they agreed to adopt the structure of Pauline Jaricot's "Circles of Ten."

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She readily agreed to the new plan, and this is considered the official beginning of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Move to Rome

In 1922, a century after the historic meeting, the group agreed to move its headquarters to Rome and become the Vatican's official organization to provide aid to missions everywhere. None other than Fr. Angelo Roncalli, who would become Pope John XXIII, was national director in Italy. He is was who guided the group's move from Lyons to Rome and helped to establish its world-wide outreach.

Last Years

By the time of her death on Jan. 9, 1862, Pauline Jaricot not only saw her small "Circles" flourishing in many parts of the world, but she had also founded the Association of the Living Rosary. The group prayed the rosary by simply dividing it up among 15 members who recited a decade a day. The group was also involved in providing spiritual reading books and other materials to those around them.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII signed the decree which made public the heroic virtues of Pauline Jaricot and declared her "venerable." This is the initial step towards becoming a saint of the Church she had served so well throughout her life with her "Pennies and Prayers!"