

Mutuality in Ministry:



Rosalie Rendu
and
Frederic Ozanam

Rosalie Rendu

Rosalie Rendu (1786-1856), a Daughter of Charity engaged in social work in the Mouffetard district of Paris for forty-six years, attracted the most destitute as if she were a magnet.



Childhood

She grew up in the darkness of the Revolution. At that time it was mandatory for clergy to take an oath of support for the civil Constitution. Numerous priests, faithful to the Church, refused to take this oath. Her mother provided sanctuary to clergy fleeing the guillotine. This experience made her sensitive to the needs of anyone suffering from injustice.



Vocation

She became acquainted with the Daughters of Charity through a friend with whom she worked at a hospital in Gex, and soon joined the community herself at age sixteen.



Rosalie's Work With the Poor

All her qualities of devotedness, natural authority, humility, compassion and her organizational abilities would be revealed. "Her poor," as she would call them, became more and more numerous during this troubled time. To assist all the suffering, Sr. Rosalie opened a free clinic, a pharmacy, a school, an orphanage, a child and maternal care center, a youth club for young workers and a home for the elderly without resources.



Rosalie's Work With the Poor

She often reminded new volunteers that poor people have "many more things to do than to study etiquette and good manners! You should not mind rough words nor should you shrink from uncouth looks. These people are far better than they appear."



Rosalie's Work With the Poor

Once Sister Rosalie wished to avoid embarrassing someone who was one of her clients, so she asked the person in front of others: "Will you please do me the favor of bringing this package to some one who lives near you? I cannot go there today and I want the person to get this as soon as possible. You will render me great service by doing this." This sensitivity to the bashful poor revealed the profound respect she had for others and her humble stance in dealing with persons in need.



Training Ozanam and Others

Among those Rosalie taught was Frederic Ozanam, whom she trained along with other student volunteers. Monsieur Emmanuel Bailly, professor of philosophy and editor of The Catholic Tribune, had referred Ozanam and his friend, Auguste le Taillandier, to Rosalie. Bailly requested that she be their mentor in reaching out to needy families to address their needs for social services.



“School of Charity”

Bailly hoped to channel the students' youthful idealism and impetuosity, but tempered with Rosalie's practical charity and wisdom. Bailly had seen the students' deeds but also believed in their potential for greater good. Wisely, he sent them to Sister Rosalie as to a school of charity.



How to Serve the Poor

It was Rosalie who taught the energetic but idealistic students of the Sorbonne how to serve the poor with an attitude of respect and genuine helpfulness. She taught them how to foster partnerships that enhanced the quality of service, when they were establishing the fledgling Conference of Charity in 1833, which became the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.



Significant Influence

From Rosalie, they learned the value of pooling resources and personnel skills, of strengthening church presence and providing mutual support as a means to be effective voices for the voiceless: to be advocates for poor persons. Exerting such a significant influence in shaping the mission of the newly formed Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Sister Rosalie Rendu could be considered its cofoundress.



*Bienheureuse Rosalie Rendu
1786 Fille de la Charité 1856*

A Bold Response

The world Rosalie and Frederic knew was not too different from ours. There was a decline in religious practices and living by gospel values, a dominance of secularism and new age philosophies among students, the prominence of political ploys and civil unrest. Despite these social currents, Rosalie and Frederic were drawn into service of the poor with respect and daring in the face of injustice; a bold response to a peer's taunting challenge: "What are you doing for humanity, for the poor today?"



Courage

Following a famine in 1847, and during the Revolution of 1848, the archbishop of Paris, driven by Frederic Ozanam and his friends, mounted a barricade in Faubourg Saint-Antoine on 25 June to beg for peace. He was shot and killed. Learning the news, Sister Rosalie made her way through the crowd, stood on top of the barricade and begged: "Stop this shooting! Haven't I enough widows and orphans to care for now?" The fighting ceased in that quarter of the city.



Collaboration with Frederic

Frederic Ozanam was a man who lived by his faith, opted for the path of good works, and thirsted for the blessings of the poor. He was a truth-sayer whose mere forty years of life mobilized the laity to carry on the legacy of charity begun by Vincent de Paul. It is said that at his death, a photograph of Rosalie Rendu was among his most cherished possessions.



Learning from Rosalie and Frederic

- Rosalie and Frederic are models of collaboration and partnership in mission.
- Collaboration is in a Vincentian's genes: we serve the poor not in isolation, but in the context of relationships involving church, community, and family.
- To be Vincentian is to comfortable with the family of poor persons: bonded by friendship rather than servitude alone.
- Humility grounded Rosalie and Frederic: they saw the truth and potential in others and situations.



Sources:

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