



Love

the driving force of St. Louise de Marillac's life



Towards the end of her life, during the last phase of St. Louise's spiritual journey, the love of Jesus Christ crucified urged her on toward the love of total abandonment which is union with God.



As love was the driving force of Louise de Marillac's life, so she wanted it to be for all her Daughters.

In speaking of the sisters of Angers, she wrote, "I desire all of them to be filled with a great love which will immerse them so sweetly in God and so charitably in the service of the poor that they will no longer have place for so many thoughts which endanger their perseverance."

(Louise de Marillac to Madeleine Mongert, June 1642, L.441)

Indeed, love alone was capable of sustaining them on the difficult path they had chosen to follow.



To the sisters of Serqueux she gave the following exhortation:

"Be of good heart! Work well toward your perfection in the numerous occasions you have to suffer and to practice gentleness and patience. Rise above rejection and any contradiction you may encounter. Be so stout-hearted that you find nothing difficult for the most holy love of God and of His Crucified Son."

(Louise de Marillac to the Sister sent to Serqueux, October/November 1645, L.344)



The love to which the Daughters of Charity and their foundress were called was to be nourished by the qualities described by Saint Paul in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Love was to be “patient and kind.”

“be patient, my dear Sister, ... with everyone.... Practice great gentleness, condescension and discretion.”

(Louise de Marillac to Cécile Angiboust, 20 September 1650, L.290B)



Love was “never boastful or conceited.”

“Let us willingly give ourselves to God to accept all the humiliations our pride must endure.”

(Louise de Marillac to Cécile Angiboust, 20 September 1650, L.290B)



Love “does not take offense, and is not resentful.”

“We must not be so sensitive that we are hurt if someone does not speak to us or does not smile at us. We should rather try to win their hearts by support and cordiality.”

(Louise de Marillac to Sister Turgis, 24 August 1644, L.105)



Love “delights in the truth.”

“You must realize that authority is not to be wielded absolutely but charitably ... We must console our dear sisters who will always have sufficient difficulty in putting up with us.”

(Louise de Marillac to Cécile Angiboust, 20 September 1650, L.290B)



Love “is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure.”

“Renew your confidence in God and abandon yourself to His guidance. If you continue ... to observe your Rules, you maybe certain that He will assist you in all your needs.”

(Louise de Marillac to Laurence Dupois, 7 August 1657, L.536)



While [St. Louise] recognized that [love] could at times be difficult, that it must always respect the individual, and that it often called for great virtue, she never tired of reminding them that it was to this love that they were called and that without it the Company could not endure.



In one of her meditations she wrote, “The soul that truly loves God must seek nothing more. The greatest happiness it can experience is to cooperate in rendering glory to Him ... the unique object of all our affections.”

Louise concluded this meditation thus: “Blessed are they who employ the full power of their love so as to make the love of their Master the soul proprietor of their hearts ... Blessed, therefore, are they who help others to fulfill their obligations to Him.”

(“The Purity of Love Necessary to Receive the Holy Spirit,” A.25)



Louise is surely thinking here of her companions on her spiritual journey who had helped her to fulfill her obligations to God.

Her correspondence reveals that, in her later years, her friendship with the sisters and with some of the Ladies of Charity had meant more and more to her.

Yet it was at the same time a period during which she was little by little detaching herself from everything that was not God himself.



However, it is unquestionable that she is referring, in the above text, to Vincent, the one in whom she had found strength and support for thirty-six years. She had come to realize, albeit painfully, what Vincent referred to in his 1660 letter to Mathurine Guerin as “the great secret of the spiritual life” ... Through his freeing friendship she had at last been able to “abandon to [God] all that [she loved] by abandoning [herself] to all that He [willed].”

(Vincent de Paul to Mathurine Guerin, 3 March 1660, CCD, ed. Pierre Coste, CM., 8:255)



In the end she could be fully united with her beloved, exclaiming with the psalmist,

“The Lord has been my strength; He has led me into freedom. He saved me because he loves me.”

Psalm 18:19-20

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