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The creativity of Saint Louise of Marillac to launch a humanizing service

Introduction

In the midst of a unique situation, that of the coronavirus pandemic that challenges us to rebuild a better world, we celebrate **St. Louise de Marillac**, reflecting on the aspect of her creativity to launch a **humanizing service** that in her time, and in our time, gives hope in the midst of suffering.

Creativity demanded by a charism

In 17th-century France, Louise de Marillac, who had an extraordinary personality, at 33 years old meets Vincent de Paul and, months later, is widowed with a young son, thus moving on to a situation of independence. She was already free to give herself to God and serve Him in the poor. Together with St. Vincent she launches herself into this adventure. To be faithful to the charism received they began a revolution carried out with boldness, tenacity and sagacity.

The first great revolution for the service of the poor was made by St. Vincent organizing, through the Confraternities of Charity, thousands of women who engaged in tasks for the poor.

A second revolution was quieter. In those days the religious ideal was the search for personal holiness through contemplation and separation from the world. Poor women could not aspire to this kind of life-- but not in Vincent and Louise's new Institute designed for the service of the poor since no kind of "dowry" was required.

The third revolution touched the foundations of Church legislation regarding religious Institutions. It was Louise de Marillac who managed to realize the wonderful idea that she and St. Vincent had conceived in frequent conversations: An Institute without solemn vows or closure, dedicated to the material and spiritual service of the poor, and to be permitted so in the Church.

And all this led to a fourth revolution, the same one that Jesus Christ initiated: To place the poor at the center of society.

Creativity in the service of the poor

In the time of the founders, the bulk of the people—three-quarters of the French—were living in poverty. Because of this reality came the foundations with Vincentian charism. The poor were considered as unsociable and dangerous, begging, embarrassed and frightened citizens. The solution seemed to be to lock them up.



St. Louise's work was to train the young women who joined the Company of the Daughters of Charity to serve the poor in the elements of the charism: 1. service to God in the poor; 2. *consecration to God* living chastity, poverty and obedience; 3. fraternal life; 4. and all in a *spirit* of humility, simplicity and charity.

The founders teach the Sisters that the poor *are their lords and masters*, for they are the grieving members of Jesus Christ and the Sisters are their servants. And to help them realize that the poor have possession of that person who must serve them with *humility, simplicity and charity*. The poor are "our masters and dear members of Jesus Christ," Saint Louise tells the Sisters.

The formation that St. Louise offered to the Sisters had very clear objectives in relation to the service of the poor.

1- A *human formation* to treat the poor delicately, to know how to respectfully relate to the ladies and to know how to live together.

2- If they were given the direction of a work, a hospital room or a school, they should have *professional and technical training* for a responsible service.

3-St. Louise entrusted the teaching of girls and the evangelization of the sick. The Sisters had to be given *pastoral, religious and moral* formation, very different from that which comes from society.

4- Their Daughters were girls consecrated to God who lived the evangelical counsels, but were required to come and go through the streets. That's why she encouraged them to have true and solid virtues.

5-St. Louise considered it a delicate task to instill spiritual life in young women. Louise sought to ensure that her Daughters lived the spirituality marked by the superior Vincent de Paul, with which she identified: emptying herself and *clothing herself with the Spirit of Jesus Christ*.

As St. Louise's own contribution to Vincentian spirituality, she strongly instilled attention to the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of each Sister who leads her to seek and find God, first within, and later in the poor through the events of life.

The Sisters' training was aimed at providing a good service to the *poor, a humanizing service*. That is why they were encouraged to go to the poor with material and spiritual service. Before the service of the poor everything is postponed until the observance of the same Rules. Luisa de Marillac knew that the spirituality of the Daughters of Charity was nourished, lived and developed within service, and in this she wanted to form them.

Conclusion

Knowing and understanding St. Louise in her quest to implement actions to develop a humanizing service of the poor, following Jesus Christ and supported by St. Vincent helps respond to the reality that shakes us by recognizing we are part of a large family where we support each other to act.

Bibliography

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