

## **Saint Louise de Marillac and the support she gave to the first Confraternities of Charity** **A model for our commitment to serving the most vulnerable people**

We will soon be celebrating the feast of Saint Louise de Marillac, in the special context of this Jubilee Year, during which, in union with the Daughters of Charity, we commemorate and celebrate her Light of Pentecost, the spiritual gift that marked and transformed her life 400 years ago, leading her to her commitment to the service of the most disadvantaged people.

It's a unique opportunity to get closer to Saint Louise and to learn more about this woman who accompanied Saint Vincent in organising charity, and who remains today an invaluable example for understanding, accompanying and encouraging AIC volunteers in our commitment to serving the most vulnerable people.

Let us briefly remind ourselves of some of her actions, qualities and attitudes, which can inspire and enlighten us in our AIC service:

- Her special and definitive commitment to the service of the most disadvantaged people, based on her spiritual experience of the Light of Pentecost, which gave meaning and direction to her life.
- The depth of her spiritual life and her fidelity to the light she received gave her strength in her service to people living in poverty. Saint Louise was a woman of prayer who had a solid trust in God and His Providence, and let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit.
- She willingly allowed herself to be accompanied and advised by Saint Vincent in her spiritual life and in her service, which she did not carry out alone, but with others: initially with her friends, later - and definitively - with the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity.
- She agreed to be “sent” to visit the Confraternities of Charity regularly, encouraging their members, resolving difficulties that arose in the running of services and with interpersonal relations, and reactivating and initiating new groups. She thus became the Visitatrix of the Confraternities, a mission to which she devoted herself with dedication, revealing her great organizational and human qualities:
  - She prayerfully prepared and organised the visits, making sure she had a thorough knowledge of the group (history, context and situation of the Confraternity), and seeking advice from Saint Vincent and others.
  - She discovered the importance of teamwork: she usually made these visits accompanied by other women she trusted and with whom she shared this mission.
  - During her visits, she demonstrated many human qualities that encouraged others and helped resolve difficulties:
    - Her ability to listen attentively, her availability and her great simplicity, which would put her interlocutors at ease and encourage them to express their difficulties and questions, thus helping them to find solutions.
    - Her respect for everyone, without harsh judgments on their attitudes or behaviour, which would enable her to make suggestions and recommendations to correct what was not working, always with love and politeness, while taking care to highlight what was going well.

- Her power of observation, her training in many fields and her sense of discernment would help her to seek and find precise answers to different problems and situations, and enable her to give advice on how to carry out service (with gentleness and love), how to run meetings and what each person's duties were.
  - Her kind and empathetic character, with which she would encourage the development of harmonious relationships in order to overcome rivalries and personal problems, and encourage meetings and teamwork, always placing the service of the most disadvantaged people above all else.
- She wrote detailed reports on each visit, which she shared with Saint Vincent, showing her missionary and formative activity in the Confraternities.

Louise de Marillac, Visitor and Animator of the Confraternities of Charity, wanted to help each of the women involved in this work of God to understand and fulfil her vocation in the Church and in the world. Together, they shared the adventure of a faith committed to serving people living in poverty. As AIC volunteers, we are the heirs of this faith, which we continue to share today.

For reflection:

*Which of Saint Louise's qualities strikes you most? What quality or qualities do you see in yourself, or would you like to develop? You can share your answers at your next group meeting.*

**Prayer**

*Lord, may the Jubilee Year of the Light of Pentecost received by Saint Louise, which we continue to celebrate, help us to know her better and to let ourselves be guided by her example of life and service. May the upcoming closing of this Jubilee be for each of us a precious opportunity to follow this missionary impulse with increased attention to the breath of the Holy Spirit and ever greater daring and trust in Providence.*

**Prayer of Saint Louise**



*Lord, allow me to imitate your way of living and acting: you said that you were on earth to serve, not to be served.*

*Teach me to practice great gentleness towards everyone, to imitate your great kindness in welcoming others.*

*Like you, I wish to love tenderly and respect profoundly all those I meet.*

*Lord, teach me to always maintain a high regard for my neighbour.*

**Happy Feast of Saint Louise!**

*Editors: Milagros Galisteo and Sister Hanna Cybula*

*Sources: Louise de Marillac, Spiritual Writings, Daughters of Charity, 1983; Sr. Elisabeth Charpy, DC, Louise de Marillac, Animator of the Confraternities of Charities, 2002.*