

VENERABLE PAULINE MARIE JARICOT (1799-1862)

Pauline Marie Jaricot was born into a faithful, Catholic family immediately after the French Revolution, on July 22, 1799. She was the seventh and last daughter of Antoine and Jeanne Jaricot who were silk merchants in Lyon, France, a city whose Christian roots date back to the second century and which boasts of having the Father of the Church Saint Irenaeus as its second bishop.

Pauline was baptized on the day of her birth. Her parents had asked a priest loyal to the Pope to baptize their last daughter in the family home, because their parish priest of San Nizir had taken the oath required by the revolutionary government, an oath that undermined the authority of the Church in France. Clearly, Pauline lived during a time of civil instability and during a period of profound social change, carrying out a work that became crucial for the activity of evangelization.

From all the accounts of her life, it is clear that she was a happy and lively girl, very determined and even stubborn. In her autobiography – which should be read with caution, as Pauline was very severe with herself – she wrote, “I was born with a fervid imagination, a superficial attitude, and a violent and lazy character. I would have been totally taken up with other things... [but] God gave me a loyal heart, which easily surrendered to devotion.” She was very fond of her brother Phileas, born two years before her, who was determined to become a missionary in China. When Phileas announced his intention, Pauline immediately said she wanted to go with him, to care for the poor and the sick and to arrange the flowers in the church.

During her adolescence and early adulthood, she was inconstant in her devotion. She alternated between moments of intense prayer, which developed in her a desire to spend long periods in church before the Blessed Sacrament, praying through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On other occasions she was very eager to participate in social events where she wore elegant clothes and was admired and courted by young men while she fantasized about the possibility of idyllic marriages. On April 16, 1812, at the age of thirteen, after a careful and reverent preparation, she received her First Communion with great devotion.

Pauline's life, however, changed drastically at the age of fifteen, after she fell from a stool while she was cleaning at home, hitting the floor violently. The fall seriously damaged her nervous system, preventing her from properly moving her limbs and from speaking normally. Though the doctors tried various therapies, they became doubtful about the possibility of recovery. Her mother worried so intensely about her daughter's health that she too became ill. This illness got worse at the unexpected death of her eldest son Narcisse at the age of twenty-one. Antoine Jaricot decided to have his daughter moved to a small village outside Lyon, in the hope that separating mother and daughter could help them both to heal faster. Unfortunately, however, on November 29, 1814, Jeanne Jaricot died. Out of fear of further worsening Pauline's health, her family decided not to inform her of her mother's death.

The local parish priest invited Pauline to resume her religious practice, and she freely decided to ask for the sacrament of reconciliation and to receive the Eucharist. This experience of forgiveness and spiritual nourishment had a profound effect on her. From that moment on, she began to recover the use of her limbs, and when she was finally told of her mother's death, she admitted that she had suspected it. As soon as she managed to walk, she asked to be brought to the Basilica of Notre-Dame of Fourvière in Lyon, so she could pray before the magnificent statue of the Madonna presenting the child Jesus to the world.

From that point, Pauline decided to devote her life exclusively to serving the poor and the sick, visiting hospitals and the terminally ill every day, putting bandages on their wounds and offering words of comfort. Her ministry to the needy was accompanied by a life of intense prayer. She received the Eucharist daily and prayed for the conversion of sinners and for the evangelization of the world. A devotion to the Sacred Heart grew in her, and she became part of the Association of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. This led her to create a new association called *Reparation*, and she invited many women in Lyon, some of whom worked almost as slaves in the silk factories of the city, to join. Her meditations before the tabernacle inspired her to write and publish the book *Infinite Love in the Divine Eucharist*, a source of consolation and spiritual nourishment for many.

At that time, her brother Phileas was studying at the seminary in Paris. He informed Pauline that the Paris Foreign Missions Society wanted to send priests to Asia and asked her to find a way to raise enough funds to ensure the success of the enterprise. It was at that moment Pauline had an idea that would change history: she decided to invite every member of her Reparation Association to find ten new members who would pray and offer a penny a week for the evangelization of the world, or, as was said in Pauline's day, for the propagation of the Faith. Groups of ten members were led by a leader called a *dizeneire*, groups of one hundred members by a *centenaire*, and groups of one thousand members by a *millenaire*.

The idea was simple: to pray and collect funds personally, creating a network of personal relationships. The group leader of the ten would meet its members and collect the pennies every week, the leader of the hundred met and collected the money from the leaders of the ten, and finally the group leader of the thousand from the heads of the hundreds. The substantial funds raised were divided and sent all over the world. The idea spread and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith was founded, which soon moved its work out of France to become a worldwide phenomenon. On May 22, 1922, as a result of a decision made by Pope Pius XI, it became

the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In this way the Holy Father wanted to express his paternal solicitude for the local churches arising from missionary activity.

Pauline's reputation as a devoted and resolute woman in the faith earned her the great respect of the Holy Father, cardinals, bishops, and contemporary saints, some of whom asked her for help and advice. The founder of the Society for Holy Childhood (today known as the Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood or Holy Childhood) consulted with her to find the best way to raise funds for children in the missions of various countries. Later, when her health began to worsen, Pauline decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome, but she fell ill there. While she was confined to a bed in a convent near the Church of the Trinità dei Monti, at the top of the staircase known as the Spanish Steps, the Holy Father visited her to encourage and give her his blessing.

In spite of all these enormous spiritual and missionary successes, Pauline's life was full of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Pauline had never considered the religious vocation; she was convinced that she had been called by God as a lay woman to dedicate her humble existence to the support of the poor and the missions. Falling into a state of poverty, she was forced to join the list of the poor of Lyon to receive something to eat. Her love for God, for Our Lady, and for the missions never wavered. She died in peace on January 9, 1862, and was later proclaimed Venerable by Pope John XXIII. Her cause of beatification is being examined by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and we pray that she will soon be recognized as a blessed.

It is worthwhile to recall that Pauline had another important missionary prayer initiative. In 1826, encouraged by the success of her personal approach in the organization of the Missionary Society through the creation of small groups, Pauline used the same approach to start a Living Rosary. She began to organize her friends and collaborators in groups of fifteen people, based on the number of the mysteries of the Rosary. She asked each

member to commit to pray a decade of the Rosary daily and meditate on a mystery a day, for a whole month. In this way, the entire Rosary was recited daily and all fifteen mysteries were meditated upon by each group. At the beginning of the month, the person in charge of the group personally redistributed the mysteries amongst the members, making sure that each received a different mystery upon which they would meditate during the prayer of the Rosary during the four following weeks. Every month the whole life of Christ was meditated upon by the group. Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, God's help was sought, making the prayer of the Rosary a "living" reality in support of the mission of the Church, especially for the proclamation of the Gospel to those who had not yet received it.

Pauline's dream of the Living Rosary soon became a widespread phenomenon all over the world. In 1831, she wrote, "The groups of fifteen continue to multiply with incredible speed in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, England, and in various parts of America. The Rosary has spread its roots to the Indies and especially to Canada." Pauline's hope was that the Living Rosary would unite people, scattered throughout the world, in fervent prayer for the mission of the Church.

The initiative of the Living Rosary was so successful that after Pauline's death in 1862, there were more than 150,000 groups, with 2,250,000 members in France alone! Today the Living Rosary is still practiced in many parts of the world and the groups of fifteen have expanded to become groups of twenty in order to include the new Luminous Mysteries, established by St. Pope John Paul II.