

Sister Rosalie Rendu





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1786-1856

OVER FIFTY YEARS DEVOTION AND SERVICE TO THE POOR
DAUGHTER OF CHARITY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

PLACED in the center of Europe, with different races overlapping her north, east, and south borders, France has been in frequent turmoil for the past hundred and sixty years. Internal revolutions and external wars have spattered her history and, amid all the evils of those times, the Wisdom of God has brought forward a succession of saintly men and women to balance and rectify the doings of the wicked.

The French Revolution, between 1789 and 1799, besides proclaiming the Republic, sought to nationalize the Catholic Church. During that time, many martyrs died for the rights of the Church. Religious communities of men and of women were butchered or dispersed and the diocesan clergy were compelled to leave their parishes and often deported and forced to seek temporary refuge abroad. Many of these went across the mountains of Switzerland where the Rendu family home became one stage on the weary journey for many of them and a hideout for others.

THE RENDU FAMILY

The modest Rendu family home was in the village of Confort (named after a chapel of Our Lady of Consolation or "Confort." It was built on the roadside by Cistercian Monks. It looked out over the valley to the majestic peaks of the Jura Mountain Chain, between France and Switzerland.

It was here that Jeanne Marie Rendu was born in 1786, the first child of this branch of the family, which had its well-known roots back in the fifteenth century. Her father died when she was ten, followed by her baby sister. This left her mother with three girls to care for and educate.

Jeanne Marie made her first Holy Communion in the secrecy of the cellar, when she was nine years of age. In later years, she recalled the pleasing risks of the Masses celebrated in the morning darkness in her home by her parish priest and Masses celebrated also by "the gardener, Peter," who was actually the Bishop of Annecy. Both of these were in hiding in the house.

SCHOOLING AND VOCATION

The Ursuline nuns had bravely reopened their boarding school at Gex a few years earlier, and Jeanne Marie was sent there, thirty miles from home, for a couple of years instruction and education. Well grounded in the elements of her religion by her mother, she enjoyed the freedom of its practice in this convent. Her willing nature benefited by the teaching given, as is evident in her capacities in after life. She first saw the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in Gex. The Daughters' Gex hospital had been founded in 1660 by Saint Vincent himself, shortly before his death. On one of her visits to Gex, Madam Rendu took her daughter to visit a friend in the hospital. The sight of the sick and their nurses impressed the girl indelibly, though she was not yet twelve years of age. Jeanne Marie was accustomed to helping her mother care for the poor and sick who called at their home. She had even given her best Sunday shoes to a barefooted stranger so the closer view of human distress and suffering in hospital beds stirringly appealed to her generous heart. The grace of God was to add its force to her own compassionate nature and would soon bring her to make the gift of herself and her life for the service of the poor and suffering.

NOVITIATE

Jeanne Marie returned home and continued to help her mother for two years, but with her dream of the future always in mind, until, at the age of fifteen, with the advice of the parish priest in Gex and in company with one of her schoolmates; she decided to join the Community of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. Their novitiate had been reopened in 1800 when the Daughters of Charity, scattered and tried by the Revolution, came together again to continue their charitable works for the people who had molested them. After their heartfelt farewells and a long, tedious drive in the stagecoach, the two postulants were delivered to the Mother House on 25 May 1802. Jeanne Marie then began her training and the consolidating of her vocation in charity, humility, and simplicity. The change of climate from her mountain air to the ardent life of the Novitiate threatened her health, so she was transferred to another house in Paris, whilst still in the black habit of a Novice, and was given the name of Sister Rosalie.

ACTIVE SERVICE

Her new home was in the street of the “Epée de Bois” or of the “Wooden Sword,” not far from the Mother House and from Saint Sulpice Church, in a slum area, with its crowds of people, its vulgarity and wretchedness, and its shops and markets along the dirty streets. She was now sixteen years of age and would reside in this dreary quarter of the city for the rest of her days, going about doing good. Here the government had set up a “house for relief,” which was used by the sisters to distribute relief to the numerous poor (due to the disorganization of the Revolution). The seven Sisters also conducted a primary school, a dispensary, and a depot for clothing and linen goods. They visited the sick and the poor in their homes and hovels. Their services were valued so much by the local residents that, when the Sisters had been accused of being revolutionary “reactionaries,” the local men told the judges they were determined to protect the Sisters and take them back to their home. The judges gave way, and the men escorted the Sisters back in triumph.

IN THE SCHOOL

Sister Rosalie was initially placed in the schoolroom. She had a kind and devoted heart and a gay and bright disposition. She was also capable and experienced from handling her own smaller sisters. Therefore, she found instructing children to be a pleasing apostolate and gave herself to it in the spirit of the Blessed Virgin teaching the Christ Child. As the pastoral care of priests had been scarce and fitful for nearly ten years, she also became the catechist to many adults at evening classes that began specifically for their benefit. After school, she was allowed to accompany other Sisters visiting the homes of the poor to bring food, clothes, and all sorts of necessities. She had an astonishing experience at this time when the Archbishop of Paris asked her Superior to attend to the meals and care of a good priest, who, through no fault of his own, had become a victim of diabolical possession.

Sister Rosalie went on one of the visits to see him. When she had swept and tidied the room where he sat at a desk, writing, her Superior said to her, "Say good-day to Father and ask for his prayers."

She was about to do so when, like lightning, the poor man sprang to the ceiling and ran around on it as if it were the floor, calling out, "Rosalie, what a lot of souls you will snatch from me."

In terror, Sister Rosalie was out and down the street in a moment. It was a startling event, but it was a revelation of the virtue of the young Sister and of the power for good that she wielded.

In 1807, at the age of 21, she made her vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Service of the Poor, as a full member of the Company of the Daughters of Charity; she continued her schoolwork and her errands around the slum. Her cornette was a sign of comfort and charity wherever she went in the dirty, narrow streets and the low, verminous houses. No visitor was more welcome, more pleasant and charming; and no one was more happy and pleased to be serving the needy and the poor. Mishaps of all kinds came for her healing. One day she was seen leading a horse along the street. A strange sight, but it had a

simple explanation. A man came to her in tears at the loss of his horse; he was a carrier, and his livelihood was in danger. She approached one of her benefactors. "I need a horse," she said rather shyly. "If that is all," her friend replied, "take one of those in the stable." But these were racehorses. "Well, then, you will have to go and buy it yourself, if you want a draught horse," the man said. "Send the account to me."

SISTER SUPERIOR

In 1815, when she was only twenty-eight, Sister Rosalie was appointed Superior of the house of eight Sisters in the street of the "Wooden Sword." She was young for such a charge, but her worth was evident and her capabilities esteemed. Her zeal was contagious, showing its effect in the house by the fervent, regular life of her companions, and outside, by their willing cooperation in the works of charity. In all the busy days of her life, priority was given to her duties to God in prayer, presence at Holy Mass, and the devotions normal to her Community. It was from this source that all her activity for others was guided and stimulated.

Her spirit of Faith never flagged, and she saw the spiritual aspect of every circumstance. "You should not lose a moment of your lovely calling," she said to a school sister.

"You alone will teach these children to know and love God; their mothers would never do it. . . . And remember that you are paid to teach them; if you do not do it, you will fail in justice."

"Since you will not have the good fortune to be visiting the poor, you can do good for yourself by cleaning the shoes of those who do, and who may not have the time to do it themselves."

She chose a strong young Sister to do the visiting in a thickly populated area, known as the "Gilded City."

"You will have the best part," she said, "in this place. Twelve hundred people live in huts of all sorts built by the rag pickers. People are without work and without clothes; many couples are not married and most of them come here through vice rather than by misfortune. There are many drunkards. Ask the children you meet whether they go to school. There is a great deal of good to be done among them by a Daughter of Charity."

A policeman on duty met the Sister on her way.

"I think, Sister, this is not your place," he said kindly, "it is hardly wise for you to come among these rogues. We ourselves come only in squads."

On reporting this to her Superior, Sister Rosalie told her, "You have nothing to fear; the police are there to deal out human justice, you are there to show the mercy of God. Do what you can. God wants us to dig and sow. He will bring on the fruits; grace has its own time. Get the children to pray."

Sister Rosalie had no qualms about her zeal, with complete confidence in the helping hand of God.

HER CHARACTER

A determined woman of strong will, she was kind and maternal towards her companions. She rarely gave commands, but rather gently begged her Sisters to oblige her. She asked their advice in the affairs that concerned them and their work.

"If I wanted to know how to bark," she said in justification of her practice, "would I not ask a dog?"

She had full confidence in their judgment, for they were, like herself, fully devoted to the work of God for His poor. She showed them many kind attentions and favors, seeing that their shoes were dried if they had been out in

the rain, preparing a special dish for the delicate, or taking a day in their classrooms to relieve them. Sisters did not like to be changed from her side, nor did she like to lose them. She said to Sister Melanie, who thought of going across to the Mother House for some family ceremony, "Do not go; you are tall, and when they see you they will be thinking of you for some other place."

She was strong and firm in her management, but never severe; rigorous and thoughtful; understanding and considerate, though not soft; compassionate and forgiving, unselfish, and more tender than a mother towards the Sisters in her care. She was Superior in the one house for forty years. There she trained many sisters and postulants, for it was a place of apprenticeship. Sister de Verien, who planted the Company of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland at Drogheda in 1855, was among these; and it was from the house in Drogheda that the first Superior in Australia came in 1926.

SOME UNDERTAKINGS

She had not long been Superior in the Rue de l'Epee de Bois, when she was summoned to the Mother House and given the message to remain there. She was engaged in sewing and at some work in the garden for several days, waiting to know what was to be her destination. Being asked did she not want to interview the Mother General, she replied simply, "I shall see her when she wishes to send for me; I have nothing to speak to her about; just now I have only to be obedient."

She was sent for, and her Superior said, "Sister, you are a nuisance to us here; you may return to your own house."

Humble and happy within herself, she set off at once for the Mouffetard quarter of the city and the poor and to the work she loved.

Her undertakings were advancing under her valiant guiding hand. She kept a vigilant eye on the children's school, for she valued their instruction and

upbringing—always in accord with their social status, for she did not wish them to be overeducated, with ambitions beyond their reach and with a distaste for life among their own families.

As the girls grew up and left school to go to work, she encouraged them to come back on Sundays and feast days for some recreation, dancing, and singing—and for her good advice. Her past-pupils were delegated to look after the younger girls in their first years in the world—they were to be “big sisters” and were formed into an Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Since good is contagious, these girls extended their charity to visiting old and lonely people in the district, talking and reading to them, bringing them some delicacies and doing their laundry for them.

The Day Nursery she established was dear to her heart, for it gave her contact with these innocent souls, and though she could not spend much time personally with the babies, she took care to meet their mothers and inquire after their welfare and the practice of their religion in the Sacraments and the Mass.

As her charity embraced all ages, she began a night shelter for men. As many as eighty, old and solitary for the most part, were given lodging. She also gave them comfort and encouragement. She appreciated the anxieties and the crosses of old age and regarded them as near-candidates for Heaven. She instilled into them the patience and courage to go on in their hope of a blessed after-life. She had no complaints or rebukes for them, but always defended them in their faults and made excuses for them. If they took too much wine she would call it “Old men's milk” and excuse it because they wished to forget their troubles and misery; or because, having no other place of recreation or comfort than the taprooms, they were led unconsciously to indulge in the bright, shining wines.

During one period of cholera, in 1832, Sister Rosalie gathered seventy orphan children in a few days. Their parents were stricken down in this unsavory quarter of the city so the Sisters stepped into their place.

The expenses of these branches of her charity never worried Sister Rosalie. The generous open hand of Providence, through some human medium, secured the funds for the expansion of buildings, for the food and clothing of the boarders, and for the articles distributed to those in want. One month in 1838, two thousand people were given a daily ration from the "soup kitchen" kept by the Sisters. This, of course was after several hours of service and a considerable cost.

She had always cultivated a childlike confidence in the Mother of God, appealing to her in all circumstances and trusting in her maternal protection. From their foundation, the Daughters of Charity had been schooled in the devotion of the Rosary and in the belief of the Immaculate Conception, which gave special prayers and cult to Mary. Sister Rosalie was no exception and her filial piety for Our Lady was always to the fore. It is exemplified in the advice she gave to one of her friends, whose wife had just died when she said, "Make Mary the Mother of your children." Frequently she visited the Church of Our Lady of Victories to pray for special needs, but the shrine of Our Lady of Hope in Saint Severin's Church seemed to be her chosen place of pilgrimage; it was near her house, and she could call there easily.

She lived in the days of the manifestation of the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, when the Blessed Virgin appeared to Saint Catherine Laboure, one of the younger Sisters of her Community at the Mother House. She saw the medal get its name of "miraculous medal" because of the graces and conversions and favors received through its use. In her own activities, she was an ardent propagator of the medal and its devotion. When she passed near the Mother House, after that date, she never failed to call at the shrine. At her monthly visit there, she would spend as much time as possible in the chapel, interceding for her people and their needs and welfare.

VISITING THE POOR

The primary duty of visiting the poor in their own homes and garrets was never neglected. These were, in the words of Saint Vincent de Paul, her "lords and

masters," so, for them, she gave her love and service, begging her Superiors to send her more Sisters to relieve them more. She instructed her new helpers in their approach to the poor, in the good offices and attentions they should show them, and in the ways of attending to their ills and sicknesses.

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Among her other helpers were some men, university students and professors, who became the foundation members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. They were engaged in visiting prisons and hospitals and in rescuing foundlings in their spare time. They worked individually under the direction of Sister Rosalie in her district, visiting the sick and needy. There was a study circle or "conference of history" meeting regularly in the home or office of Professor Bailly, of the Sorbonne University. It was frequented by students like Frederick Ozanam, Lamache, Lallier, and Letaillander. It was at one of these meetings that someone complained in disgust, "Christianity is dead. You boast of being Catholics. What are you doing about it?"

After the meeting, Ozanam said to Letaillander, "It's true. Let us not talk about charity, but let us put it into action."

At the next gathering, it was suggested that a "conference of charity" be formed. All present agreed. Professor Bailly was pleased and advised them to go to Sister Rosalie for advice and instruction about the ways and means. The "Conference for History" became the "Conference for Charity," the first Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, in 1833.

It was not far from the university to Sister's house in the street of the "Wooden Sword," where she had now spent 30 years. Ozanam knew the way very well. Sister Rosalie knew him and had warned him of his excessive generosity to the poor. She told him of one of her young men who had given all his clothes to a poor beggar, so a friend who called on him in the morning found him still in bed because he had nothing to wear. A message was sent to Sister Rosalie, who

supplied the necessary garments, and a note that said, "My poor friend, if you become a bishop some day, you will give away your cross and miter." (The young man, M. Dupuch, did become Bishop of Algiers, and did give away his crozier and miter in his generosity.) Ozanam learned this lesson of prudence, as he did many other things, from Sister Rosalie.

The Conference of Charity often met in her house in the "Wooden Sword." She provided them with contacts to call, which provided them the need and the welcome nature of their activities. She also generously refilled their "poor- box" with alms, when it was depending solely upon their weekly collection among themselves. Moreover, she freely gave them her advice and experience, and imbued them with the spirit of supernatural charity and the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. The first Rule of the Society, published in 1835, is remarkable for its many expressions identical with those of Saint Vincent, for instance, "Here at last is the commencement of the written Constitution for which we have so long yearned. It has had to wait for a long time. . . . But were we not bound to feel assured that God wished it to continue? Was it not necessary to see what it could do, by what it had done already, before framing its rules and its obligations? . . . Jesus Christ first practiced what He was afterwards to teach mankind. He began to do and to teach. We wish to imitate that Divine Model so far as our weakness allows. . . . We shall love our Society tenderly, and even with a greater affection than any other similar body, not because of its excellence or through pride, but as dutiful children love a poor and deformed mother more than all other women, however remarkable they may be for their wealth and attractions."

These are formulae taken from Saint Vincent's own writings. Besides, this Rule adopts what Saint Vincent wished and what he did not wish in various circumstances as its guide in charity. The President General of the Society, Professor Bailly, in a letter to the whole Society in 1842, emphasized the source of these Rules saying, "They are not the word of man, or at least they are the word of a man who was made a Saint, a man whose sayings and whole life God has crowned with heavenly glory. You are aware, of course, that those thoughts are taken from the most intimate writings of Saint Vincent de Paul, from the Rules

that he drew up after many years' experience for the holy societies of which he was the father." Where did these ideas of Saint Vincent come from? What was the channel bringing them to these charitable men, if not Sister Rosalie Rendu?

She knew the first members of the Society very closely, and knew their goodwill and earnestness, their zeal and charity; they sought her aid and her counsel, and they valued her experience and guidance. When the question arose at one of their meetings of branching out into a second conference, after fruitless discussion, the member who had proposed it, said, "It is not my idea; it came from Sister Rosalie." The proposal was at once agreed to by all. It is no wonder that she is revered by the 16,000 Conferences throughout the world as one of the founders of their Society.

DAILY CALLERS

It was reckoned that at times in her small office in the Street of the "Wooden Sword," Sister Rosalie interviewed as many as five hundred people in one day. What doctor or lawyer or executive would see as many? There were poor and sick, rich and miserable; some coming for alms, others to give them; some for employment, others for advice. Prudence, patience, charity, and good humor were active there all day long.

Seeing a client in the queue at her door, she called him and said, "I want you to do me a little advice; take this parcel to the address written on it for me." On leaving, the man was surprised to read his own name and address on the packet—a ruse of Sister Rosalie to cover up his shame and shyness and preserve his self-respect.

"Sister, I want to get a place as a singer in a church choir," was the request of one caller, and forthwith he began to sing.

"You sing very well," she said, "but I imagine you have sung in the taverns oftener than in the church."

“Oh, well, I do take a glass with my friends, but it is not a habit,” was his simple admission.

“Well, then,” she replied, “I’ll give you a recommendation to the Parish Priest, but, though I would not forbid a small taste after you have sung the Lord’s praises, do not take anything beforehand.”

A printer who had lost his sight was brought by his friend and guide to visit her. He remained cold and surly and was sarcastic about her work. She called in some children and introduced them, asking him to give them from his experience the benefit of his advice regarding their futures. He was touched, and finding this an avenue for helping others, became a frequent visitor.

A woman in mourning, who had just lost her daughter in death, was sent one day by the Archbishop. Sister Rosalie sympathized with her, and then asked her if she would take some bread tickets to a few poor families.

“You can write your daughter’s name on each, and it will be she who gives them.”

The sorrowing mother took the messages, and found other people worse off than herself—a field for work that she set herself to cultivate, and thus secured peace and consolation for herself.

A woman who had given her valuable ring to one of the needy persons she visited came one day to complain, for, when she had called back, the woman, instead of having pawned the ring, was wearing it sparkling on her finger. Sister was plainly amused.

“It is not a serious affair, Madam,” she said, “you must forgive her; perhaps the wearing of this ring is the only pleasure she has had in her life.”

At her desk one day, Sister Rosalie was listening to the story of a poor neighbor, telling of her troubles. Her quick eye noticed that the caller was feeling the cold.

"You are cold," she said, "You need to wear more clothes. Wait till I see." She went off to return with a sound, warm petticoat.

"Put that on, and you will feel better," was all she said. However, as the day wore on Sister Rosalie became pale with cold herself, for she had robbed herself to meet this need.

Among her visitors were bishops and generals, ministers of state and the police. On one occasion in 1852, the Emperor Napoleon III and the Empress came to thank her for her universal charity to the Parisians. As General Cavaignac, the Chief of the Army, was talking to her one day, the Angelus rang from the local church.

"Shall we say the Angelus together?" she asked, and, of course, they did.

REVOLUTIONS AND REFUGEES

Living in the heart of Paris from 1802 until 1856, Sister Rosalie could not escape the Revolutions there in 1830 and 1848. She proved her heroism again and again in these events. In her quarter of the city, the rising was not general in 1830, but that did not prevent her house being used as an ambulance station for the wounded of the regular army and the rebels. She knew many of them on both sides personally through having helped them in her charity through the years.

Her courage, her gratitude, and her reputation are well emphasized in an account of one of her exploits. A certain Joseph Bavcoffe, a compatriot and friend of the Rendu family, who had been an officer of the Polish Lancers with Napoleon in the retreat from Moscow and was now an officer of the National Guard and a benefactor and frequent visitor at the house in the Rue d'Epee de Bois, was reported missing during the July Revolution. His wife came to Sister Rosalie to ask her help. The Sister set off at once alone through the barricaded streets, risking the flying bullets, climbing over the barricades, enquiring for Commandant Bavcoffe. Her cornette was familiar to the rioters and the soldiers,

and admiring her hardihood, they allowed her to pass on. She crossed the River Seine into the center of the city, all in turmoil, and in front of the City Hall was told that the Commandant was among the dead in the square. With help, she recovered him from the heap of corpses, to find that he was still breathing, although riddled with shot in the chest and with the fingers of his right hand slashed off. She had him quickly carried back to his home, where she left him in the care of his wife and children to be fully restored to health.

With the same calm and fortitude, she stopped a gang of incendiaries, who were about to burn down an orphanage, by her very presence and kind words to them. They even organized a guard for the house and the order went out saying, "No noise; these little girls and their guardians must be allowed to have their sleep." It was no ordinary person that could exercise such influence and command such regard and respect.

She gave sanctuary to another notable person in these days. Her friends let her know of plans for attacking and sacking the archbishop's residence, near Notre Dame Cathedral. This was done in February of 1831, when the house was pillaged and the books, pictures, and furniture thrown into the river. The building itself was ruined and partly demolished. Meantime, following her timely warning, Archbishop de Quelen was in the quiet safety and solitude of Sister Rosalie's house in the street of the "Wooden Sword."

Further small uprisings in 1832 and 1834 brought more concern to Sister Rosalie. Some persons took refuge with her and she provided them with means of escape. One was an officer of the Royal Guard, who was sought by the police for his defection from duty. An order was given to arrest Sister Rosalie for her complicity, but the officer appointed to do this remarked to his Chief that this would surely bring on another upheaval in that district, since she was a power to be reckoned with there.

Therefore, the Prefect of Police himself went to visit her. After making him wait whilst she attended to her aged and poor, she asked what she could do for him. He did not want a service, he said, but came to do one.

"You are seriously compromised by helping the escape of an ex-Royal Guard officer. You acted in violation of the law."

"Sir," she replied, "I have no flag; as you know. I am a Daughter of Charity and I try to help the unfortunate everywhere I meet them. If ever you yourself are hunted and ask help of me, it will not be refused."

She was impenitent and clung to her point of view, for she could not think of herself as being in the least way responsible for bringing about any of the common executions or of bringing further misfortune to any of her children.

REVOLUTION OF 1848

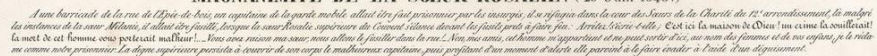
Unrest continued for some years, in greater or less degree, until social conditions in 1848 brought complete lockouts from the workshops. One hundred thousand men were out of work and wages. In June, rebellion reached its height. General Cavaignac was in command of 50,000 regular army troops, who in a few days quelled the revolt in which 16,000 men perished. The General had sent a warning to Sister Rosalie that her quarter of the city would be bombed and offered her and her sisters safe conduct out of the area. She and the sisters gratefully refused his offer, preferring to stay among their poor to assist them in their time of terror.

In these hectic days, a barricade was thrown up across the lower end of the Rue d'Epee de Bois. In an assault against it, an officer of the Mobile Guard, with his squad of men, had climbed over it. They were all shot down except the officer. Before the rebels realized his position, he raced a few yards down the street and into the courtyard of the Sisters. He was followed at once, but Sister Rosalie was there. She stood in front of the officer, facing his pursuers with their rifles.

"You don't kill anyone here," she said.

"Well, we'll take him outside," one of them replied.

The rifles were lowered and the officer's captors departed. A picture that became a common ornament in the poor homes of the Moufflard Quarter represents this incident.



Sister Rosalie was not afraid to be out on the streets in this time of carnage and strife.

“Why should I be safe and run no risk when my children are being slaughtered?” she asked those who urged her to stay indoors.

Archbishop Affre had gone on a peace mission with a white flag of truce to one of the barricades, when he was shot down by a stray bullet and mortally wounded. Her small figure moved around the fighting zones, and whilst other areas were still in battle, peace and quiet came to her district.

“Have I not enough widows and orphans to look after, without you making more?” she asked the men at the crossroads barricade.

CROSS OF THE LEGION OF HONOR

Not only were the people in admiration of her bravery and her zeal in doing good, but the Government also resolved to mark its appreciation. She was cited for the Cross of the Legion of Honour—the highest award of France. This was a trial for her humility, and she strove to have the award cancelled. However, she was duly invested and the Cross was pinned on her collar, amid the great joy and pleasure of her friends and clients in the neighborhood. After that, she would allow no further reference to it, and never wore the decoration again.

Later in 1854, the Emperor Napoleon III called to visit her, when he said, “You do not wear the Cross of Honor I sent you? I will send you another which I hope you will wear.”

He also sent her a gold cross enclosing some relics of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Twenty years of troubled times, of incessant relief works, of sharing the misfortunes and calamities of her disturbed people, lead to that public recognition of her merits. However, her service had been for God in the person of His poor and distressed and it continued for another twelve years.

HER LAST YEARS

As her years of life mounted, her health, severely taxed for many a day, gave room for anxiety. With spells of sickness of varying length during the 1840's, her hand continued to guide all her many undertakings. Around 1854 her sight began to fail and she had to rely in great measure on the attentions of her Sisters. An operation to remove a cataract in 1855 improved her sight for a short time; but then she became totally blind. A second operation was planned, but early in February of 1856, she fell gravely ill with pleurisy. The severe remedies of the time were tried. The remedies gave her reason for keen suffering, which she bore gladly and patiently.

She had always feared death and the Justice of God. Towards the end of her days, she had a dream that impressed her very much. She felt she was at God's tribunal, where she was received very severely and her sentence was about to be given, when suddenly she was surrounded by a crowd of people wearing old shoes and stockings and hats. The crowd showed the clothing to Our Lord, saying, "She gave us all these things."

Then Our Lord turned to her and said, "Because of all these old clothes and things given in my name, I will open the gate of Heaven to you. Come in, and stay forever."

The dream was a reflection of the sound words of Saint Vincent who said, "Those who have loved the poor during life will have no fear of death," and Sister Rosalie gained calm and serene confidence during the latter days of her life.

Her maladies grew worse. She was given Extreme Unction and her last gesture was in making the Sign of the Cross, whilst her last words were, "My poor, my children! When I am no longer here, my God, please do not abandon them."

After a short illness of three days, she gave back her soul to God on the 7th of February in 1856. She was seventy years of age, and now at rest after fifty-four years of ceaseless care and labor for God's poor.

Her life was not mere activity for its own sake, an outlet for personal energy, or the love of command, but it was rooted in her belief of God's truths and promises. Her life was the supernatural growth received from her prayer and meditations and from her fervent use of the Sacraments and practice of the common devotions of her Community. All these things inflamed constant charity and faith within her and she focused all that upon all the events and persons she met while she practiced the corporal works of mercy. She was always mindful of the eternal salvation of souls redeemed by the Blood of Christ.

She lived in extraordinary times, for full fifty years of revolutions and risings and their aftermath, and in the ferment of one of the extraordinary quarters of Paris. How could her life be ordinary, dull, and routine? During emergencies, without notice, new plans and new works had to begin to suit the changing social circumstances.

She was an intrepid soul, breaking her way through obstacles, facing difficulties squarely, winning her wishes and spreading peace. She inherently opposed all evil and promoted charity, friendship, and goodwill everywhere she went. She was forgetful of self and mindful of others, burning with zeal, guided by a well-balanced prudence, and brave and fearless in the tumults of her time where the poor needed her succor. She was tender and patient in her dealings with her Sisters and her restless clients. Moved by supernatural motives and urged by her love of God, the power of her whole life was drawn from the divine sources of prayer, the grace and strength of God, and faithfulness to her religious duties poured out in His Sacraments.

She had extraordinary qualities for her extraordinary life, and it is no wonder that, in February of 1951, the Superiors of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul asked the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Feltin, to undertake Introduction of the Case for her Canonization. This cause is now progressing; a prayer, authorized in Paris in 1936, is printed at the close of this pamphlet, asking God for the Beatification of this Servant of the Poor. (*Note from editor: Sister Rosalie Rendu was beatified in 2003.*)

HER FUNERAL

It was chiefly the poor who buried her. There was no work that day for her friends in the Mouffetard Quarter. All gathered at the parish church of Saint Medard and followed the hearse to the Cemetery of Montparnasse, where she was buried in the vaults of the Daughters of Charity.

Within a short time, some of her friends got leave to give her a special grave where they could visit. It is in one of the cemetery avenues so it may be reached easily. Above it, they placed a slab inscribed:

“To Sister Rosalie from her Grateful Friends - the Poor and the Rich.”

Unknown hands still place flowers upon her grave in gratitude.

PRAYER TO ASK FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF SISTER ROSALIE

Lord Jesus, Whose Divine Heart, Furnace of Ardent Charity, so kindled the heart of the admirable Sister Rosalie Rendu with such a burning love of God and her neighbor, grant, we beseech Thee, that the power of her intercession with You may be shown by such great miracles, that soon, by the Authority of Your Church, she may be recognized and proclaimed Blessed; Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen. (*Note: Sister Rosalie Rendu was beatified in 2003.*)

Nihil obstat

W. M. COLLINS

Censor Dioc.

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