

Saint Louise de Marillac

Sr. Paule, DC

Louise de Marillac whose feast we celebrate on May 9th was born in a noble family, the de Marillac family.

Her father loved her very much, but she never knew her mother.

So as child she never knew the joy of family life.

When she was a toddler, her father married a woman who had three children of her own and she did not want Louise to live in the house.

Wealthy families often sent their children to convent schools to be educated. But Louise was sent because she was not wanted in her own home.

She was sent to Poissy, a Dominican convent where her Aunt Louise was a nun.

She received a classical education. She knew Latin, Greek, literature, the spiritual writers of the time. She learned philosophy, theology, scripture, and painting. We have many of her paintings in our motherhouse in Paris.

When her Father died, she was between 12 and 13, she was sent to a boarding house to learn domestic skills because her uncles did not want to pay for her education at Poissy.

Both her classic education at Poissy and her domestic education served her well all her life.

Louise wanted to enter the capuchins, a cloistered community.

She was denied entrance to the cloistered life because of her frail health. She was told that God had other plans for her.

When she was 22, her uncle arranged a marriage with Antoine le Gras, secretary to the Queen mother, Queen Marie de Medici.

Antoine was also of the nobility but of a lower level than Louise's family.

It was a happy marriage. They had one son, Michel.

Louise traveled in social circles and joined the Ladies of Charity, which Vincent had founded in 1617 in Châtillon and were now beginning in Paris.

Her husband became ill in 1625. When he was dying, Louise stayed by his bedside day and night until he died.



Soon after that she met Vincent de Paul. Louise was scrupulous and nervous.

They didn't get on well at first. Both were well educated, but she was refined, and he was a rough peasant.

He reluctantly agreed to be her spiritual advisor.

Eventually, Vincent was able to bring her to see her own natural talents, especially in organization.

He began to engage her in his works of charity.

She became more confident.

Over the years, they became great friends and collaborators.

In 1629, St. Vincent sent her on mission to visit the Ladies of Charity all over France. Wherever the Vincentian Priests gave a parish mission, they started a group of Ladies of Charity and then left. She was sent to see how they were doing. She wrote contracts for them to start hospitals and manage them. She gave them conferences and set them on course to be leaders. The Ladies of Charity prepared women to teach in schools. They were decision makers everywhere they worked.

But primarily they used their leadership in working directly with the poor.

Louise directed some of the Ladies in annual retreats.

She became what today we would call the National Moderator of the Ladies of Charity in France.

In 1633, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac co-founded the Daughters of Charity who, in the beginning, worked with and under the direction of the Ladies of Charity.

Through spiritual direction, Vincent de Paul led Louise de Marillac to set aside her fears and doubts and become a servant of the poor.

Louise de Marillac died in 1660. The women she mentored, especially the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity are everywhere continuing to serve the poor and bettering their lives. Louise de Marillac was canonized in 1934 and has been proclaimed the patroness of Social Work.

As a remarkable woman and leader, she remains a model for women today. As we celebrate her feast day on May 9th, let's ask for her guidance as we follow in her footsteps helping others.