



Training Reflection – May-June 2023 Saint Louise de Marillac’s Pentecost Experience

Reflection compiled by Milagros Galisteo

Introduction

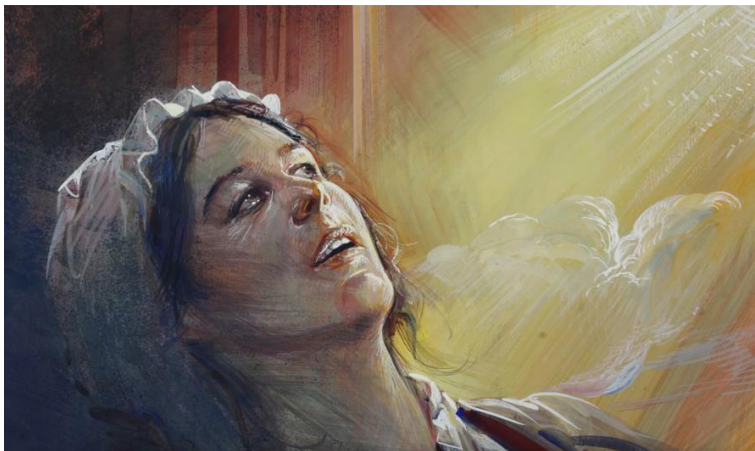
On 9th May, we join the Daughters of Charity, the rest of the Vincentian Family and the Church in joyfully celebrating the feast of St. Louise de Marillac, to whom St. Vincent entrusted the coordination of the first Charities (the first groups of AIC volunteers) from 1629. This feast gives us a valuable opportunity to learn more about a very special event that marked the life of St. Louise, whose 400th anniversary we will celebrate on 4th June: an event known within the Daughters of Charity as the “Light of Pentecost”.

“THE LIGHT OF PENTECOST”

Based on the reflection written by Sr. Françoise Petit¹

Introduction to the theme

“On June 4, 1623, the day of Pentecost, in the church of Saint Nicolas des Champs in Paris, Louise de Marillac was praying, worried about her future even though she was young, married and had a son. Yet she felt deep inside that God had a plan for her.



What was this call? That day, by God’s grace, she understood that there would come a time when she would give herself entirely to God, with others in community, to serve the suffering people of her time, in a way that was special and new during that period. She perceived that consecrated women would serve God ‘coming and going,’ as she put it.

Then, in the course of the years, God, events, St. Vincent de Paul, and those who are poor themselves made clear what the Spirit had inspired [in] her and which became the vocation of the Daughters of Charity.

¹ <https://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/en/une-vie-donnee/lumiere-2/>

We can say that this light has been transmitted to the present day, to take on the colour of our time in the 97 countries where the Daughters of Charity are present". They enable us to participate in their service and witness.

With materials that the Daughters of Charity have prepared and generously share with us (see: <https://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/en/a-given-life/>), we will deepen our understanding of this spiritual moment in the life of St. Louise, which can bring light and hope in this wonderful period of Easter. We can learn more about the origins of the foundation of the Daughters of Charity and celebrate with them this joyful moment for their Company, while also deepening spiritually our charism and commitment as AIC volunteers.

We will become more familiar with some essential elements of St. Louise's thought, using the memory and celebration of this event as a starting point, in order to discern and respond to questions we ask ourselves and situations that challenge us in moments of change and crisis, in which being open to listening to the Spirit can enlighten our action.

Questions for personal and group reflection

- 1) How do we listen to the Spirit?
- 2) To what extent do we welcome the Holy Spirit in order to do God's will?
- 3) How do we understand our service towards people living in poverty in the 21st century?

MARY AND SAINT LOUISE: MODELS OF OBEDIENCE

Based on the reflection written by Sr. Mary Frances Barnes²

"On the Feast of the Annunciation [a key feast in the life of the Daughters of Charity, during which they renew their vows every year] we read the beautiful story in [the Gospel of] St Luke of how the Angel Gabriel came to Mary. In just a few words he explained all that Mary needed to know: she would conceive and bear a child who would be the Son of God! And she says, 'Let it be done to me according to your word!'



How does she accept this mission from God? What sustains her?

She listened to what the angel had to say. She questioned it when she said, 'How can this be?' But she continues to listen and to obey – let it be done to me! Mary says, 'Yes'. A full hearted, completely open, 'Yes'. An openness that was filled with the life of Jesus Christ – literally!

Louise de Marillac struggled to hear what God wanted to communicate to her. She was troubled about her life when she hadn't been able to keep a Vow she made in her youth to enter a Convent.

² <https://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/en/une-vie-donnee/mary-and-st-louise-models-of-obedience/>

On Pentecost in 1623, she says that her, 'mind was instantly freed of all doubt.' It was the gift God gave that she could finally listen to what it was God had in store for her! Her worries seemed to melt away.

Just as in Mary's experience with the angel, she heard things that she couldn't understand – to remain with her husband and that a time would come when she would be able to take vows but yet be in a place of coming and going; that she had nothing to fear from a new spiritual director; and the assurance that it was God who was teaching her.

In this Light of Pentecost, the Lumière of St. Louise, she tells us how she listened! She had struggles yet she was open to listen and to discern exactly what was God's will for her. In her own way she said, 'Let it be done to me according to your Word.'

This 'light of Pentecost' stayed with her all her life. She wrote it down on a paper and kept it close. She remembered it and celebrated it almost as an anniversary. One time, she wrote to St. Vincent



asking to receive his blessing at Mass because, 'The great feast (Pentecost) which is approaching is a powerful reminder for me of all the special graces that His goodness granted to me some 22 years ago, which obtained for me the happiness of giving myself to Him in the way your Charity knows.' (L. 118. To Monsieur Vincent, May 25, 1645)

In 1633 [Saint Louise] finally gathered 5 or 6 young women in her home to help them to learn how to be Servants of the most abandoned in their society and to find Jesus Christ there.

Her home became that place of 'coming and going' that she heard about in the Light of Pentecost. The young women learned how to dedicate themselves to God. They became Daughters of Charity. Louise taught them to take Mary as their model.

In a retreat meditation on Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Louise said, 'Let us take Our Lady as the model for our daily lives and bear in mind that the best way to honor her is by imitating her virtues... We should also imitate her humility which led God to do great things in her.' (M. 33. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin)

Mary is the model of all obedience. She listened to the Word of God and followed it. Louise modeled that same action of listening for what it was that God was asking of her and then following it. It was not always easy. The Yes of Mary and the Yes of Louise were followed by many other times of saying 'Yes' to what God revealed to them."

In our own lives too, as AIC volunteers, we must respond to the mission that Christ has called us to pursue: that of service to people living in poverty.

"We listen to the Word and keep it. Let us ask of God the Grace of fidelity to say, along with Mary and St. Louise, 'Be it done to me according to your Word.'"

Questions for personal and group reflection

- 1) How do I respond in my commitment to service within AIC?
- 2) Do I respond from trust in God's will? What sustains me?

SAINT LOUISE, SERVANT OF PERSONS WHO ARE POOR

Based on the reflection written by Sr. Beata Widełka³

St. Louise was a Servant of the Poor, serving Christ in persons in poverty situations.



Thinking of her in this way reminds us of her profound respect for human beings. The social context of 17th century France in which St. Louise lived was not the height of humanism, it was quite the contrary. And she, certainly with the help of St. Vincent, but also thanks to her innate sensitivity, saw people, those who were insignificant, despised, pushed away, abused,

unjustly condemned, abandoned from the moment of birth – as God's children, and it was that very truth that helped her and the first Daughters of Charity undertake every service.

In the Rules of the Confraternities of Charity, St. Vincent and St. Louise counselled that the Servants of those who are poor should surround them with understanding, love, patience, great respect, care for their lives and health, and above all for their immortal souls.

So the mission of the Daughters of Charity, the AIC volunteers and the whole Vincentian Family would bear immediate fruit if we knew how to remind and sometimes convince the people that we serve that they are God's greatest longing, that they are priceless, redeemed from eternal death with the precious Blood of Christ.

During this season of Easter, resurrected from our weaknesses and deaths with the risen Christ whose love animates our lives and our hope, these truths must dwell deeper in our hearts. I am convinced that this is an effective remedy for any human misery, at any time. If a person remembers who s/he is and why s/he was created, his/her progress from poverty would be faster and more sustainable. Let us help those who have lost decent living conditions to recover them, reminding them that God has given them life and loves them as his children.

The second picture that appears in this theme of Louise as a servant of people living in poverty is the image of an excellent organizer. Regardless of the multitude of means, human resources and situations, it is always possible to undertake a ministry if there is trust in God's Providence first.

Today St. Louise teaches us, anew, to trust in God, to discern situations, needs, organization and cooperation. These are the calls for the whole Church, which we too, as AIC volunteers, are invited

³ <https://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/en/une-vie-donnee/saint-louise-servant-of-persons-who-are-poor/>

to discern and answer, on our journey together with the rest of the people of God in synodality, as we recalled during our recent International Assembly in Frascati (Rome).

May St. Louise help us revitalize our service to our sisters and brothers to whom we are sent and in whose service, our love is tested as well!

Questions for personal and group reflection

- 1) How good is our discernment when it comes to organising these services?
- 2) Are we aware of our journey together and united with the rest of the Church and the contribution of our charism?



“Like Saint Louise, let us listen to the Spirit, let us dare to be more committed, with the men and women of our time, to advocate justice and human dignity, in a spirit of solidarity and fraternity.

Let us give thanks for the life of Saint Louise, for what she transmitted to us and that urges us to reach out to our brothers and sisters who suffer, in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity.”

Sr. Françoise Petit, DC⁴

⁴ <https://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/en/une-vie-donnee/lumiere-2/>



Prayer to Saint Louise

*"Saint Louise de Marillac,
You were tested from your childhood;
you knew the joys and sorrows
of marriage, motherhood and widowhood;
and you were filled with anxiety
in your search for Christian perfection.*

*But you let yourself be touched
by the light of the Spirit
to walk the path of holiness;
to give yourself to the poor;
and to found the Company
of the Daughters of Charity
Servants of the Poor.*

*Obtain for us the grace
of the illumination of the Spirit;
teach us to see in the poor
our Lords and Masters
and to give ourselves to them.
Help us to grow as brothers and sisters,
in gentleness, cordiality and simplicity,
with a spirit of humility,
imitating the humanity of Christ
who reveals perfect charity.
And may we, like you, beloved Louise,
give ourselves completely to Mary,
so as to be, body and soul, given to God.
Amen."*

Imprimatur, Msgr. Pascal Delannoy, 15th March 2023⁵

Images by Nino Musio taken from the video 'Luisa de Marillac, Dall'abbandono al dono'

⁵ <https://saint-denis.catholique.fr/actualites/15-mars-fete-de-sainte-louise-de-marillac> (Original version in French)