

Triumph of the Heart

THE PRIEST AND THE MOTHER OF A PRIEST II

Family of Mary

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Come to our aid and deliver us

*A*t the solemn Holy Mass to conclude the Year for Priests on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 11, 2010, the Holy Father, together with 17,000 priests who had gathered in Rome, consecrated all the priests of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For this special occasion, he had the miraculous image “*Salus Populi Romani*” brought from St. Mary Major to St. Peter’s Square. Pope Benedict XVI repeated the consecration which he had prayed just one month earlier on May 12, 2010, in Fatima. It was precisely in Fatima where God, through

the Queen of the Rosary, called the Holy Father to consecrate the world to her. Pope Benedict rightly said, “*We would be mistaken to think that Fatima’s prophetic mission is complete.*” Therefore, we would like to enclose with this issue the full text of the consecration for you, dear readers, so that you can pass it on to your priests or pray it in their name. In this way, each one of you can help the priests to live their vocation faithfully and make an effective contribution to the realization of the triumph of the Immaculate Heart.

*Our Mother for all time, do not tire of “visiting us”,
consoling us, sustaining us. Come to our aid and deliver us
from every danger that threatens us.*

Excerpt from the consecration

A Converted Priest

Great blessings came forth from the sacrifices and prayers of several French women who made every effort for the conversion of the carefree and ambitious seminarian Jean Jacques Olier (1608-1657). Thanks to their self-offering, this problem child became a great saint and father to a renewed generation of holy priests. That which was possible in the seventeenth century is also possible today through the faith of generous souls. The last few months have clearly showed how much every priest needs spiritual support to live his sublime vocation of imitating Jesus. May this enjoyable example of Jean Jacques Olier and his spiritual mothers give us new courage to strive more fully for the sanctification of priests.

Prophetic words

One of eight children in the wealthy Olier Family, Jean Jacques grew up in Paris, France in the parish of St. Sulpice, a church of which he was especially fond his whole life. Despite his joyful faith, his extraordinary love for Our Lady, his scholastic achievements and impressive talents, he still became more problematic as he grew up.

When his parents became friends with Francis de Sales, the holy Bishop of Geneva, Jean Jacques' worried mother expressed her concerns to her fatherly advisor during one of

his many visits. His response about the boy was prophetic, *"Oh Madam, have a little patience. Don't worry. God is preparing in this good boy a great servant for his Church!"*

He asked them if he could educate Jean Jacques, but the death of the holy shepherd shortly thereafter changed their plans. The day before Francis de Sales' death, he blessed the Olier Family, which was very dear to him, and the then 14-year-old Jean Jacques who would one day accomplish what Francis de Sales always wanted to do—found the first seminary in France. That, however, was all yet to come.

Intervention in a boisterous life

Jean Jacques did, in fact, begin studying theology in Paris because in the depth of his soul he had a deep love for God. At the same time, however, this young man from a prominent family frequented the provocative cabarets and tasteless theaters and arrogantly rode through town in a noble carriage. He had plenty of money because in that time a future priest had the income of monasteries and their estates at his disposition.

This was a dangerous situation for his vocation and God intervened for the first time through the self-offering and sacrifice of a priest mother. It was Marie Rosseau, a holy woman in Paris who had been praying for years to Our Lady for the renewal of the priesthood and who had offered herself for the conversion of the Abbey of St. Germain.

She saw 21-year-old Jean Jacques and four other seminarians at the entrance of a cabaret and decided, immediately feeling urged interiorly, to pray and fast for the five of them. Looking back, Jean Jacques reported how his encounter with Marie Rosseau's glance pressed upon his conscience and he began to fight against his bad habits for the first time. *"I believe I have this holy soul to thank for the beginning of my conversion. ... Then I began to be born for God ... and a desire, an imperceptible affection for God took hold of me, even though I did not entirely give up my sinful ways. Although I could not really love the world any more and I was no longer captivated by it, I still had relapses despite my inclinations to God... and despite the reception of the sacraments until finally the day when I went to Our Lady of Loreto where I was completely taken by grace."*

Healed inside and out

Still full of vanity and ambition, Jean Jacques wanted to learn from the best teachers of his day in order to become a Hebrew professor and make a name for himself, surpassing everybody else in knowledge of the Bible. Therefore, in 1630, at the age of 22 he left for Rome. Once there, he unexpectedly developed a problem with his sight rendering study impossible. Jean Jacques was threatened with going blind and the doctors could not help him.

In his great suffering, he remembered Our Lady and made a pilgrimage on foot, half blind, to Loreto, Italy. In order to do penance, he wore a fur coat in spite of the heat. Although he grew weaker along the way, the exhausted pilgrim felt more and more the presence of Mary. He described it later, *“When I finally caught sight of the church, my heart felt as if it were pierced by an arrow. It filled me with a holy love for Mary.”* In the Holy House in front of her statue,

his eyes were instantly healed. But that was not the only thing: *“Since the wonderful princess always gives more than you ask for, along with healing the eyes of my body for which I had asked, she healed the eyes of my soul which were more important than I knew. ... It was the greatest jolt in my conversion.”*

Transformed interiorly, Jean Jacques returned to France: *“After Loreto, I was in my element whenever I could speak about God. He became the focal point for me.”* Against the opposition of his rich relatives who were pushing for the future priest’s career, he began to proclaim the Gospel on the streets of Paris and to imitate the poor life of Jesus. *“When my mother began to treat me badly,”* he wrote, *“I went more often to the church of Notre Dame, threw myself before the statue of the Blessed Virgin and said to her with a heavy heart, ‘I take you as my mother because my own mother has rejected me.’”*

Where is my place

In this time, Jean Jacques was considering becoming a Carthusian monk, but again a woman helped him find his path. Through the deep prayer of a Dominican nun, Agnes of Langeac (1602-1634), whom he had never met, God clearly showed him in a vision the way he had been seeking: *“I saw the heavens open and St. Gregory on a large throne and, below him, likewise St. Ambrose. Beneath that was an empty seat for a parish priest, and far below that a great number of Carthusians.”*

Jean Jacques understood that he would not work as a pope or bishop like St. Gregory or St. Ambrose, but in a way similar to

a Doctor of the Church on the empty priest’s chair prepared for him. *“Our Lord let me ... understand that on the empty seat of the parish priest ... he wanted a more important and needed order ... an order of priests, from parishes and others who would serve the whole clergy and fill them with holiness.”*

In May 1633, Jean Jacques Olier was ordained a diocesan priest at the age of 25 and shortly thereafter made a retreat with his spiritual director St. Vincent de Paul to prepare for his first mission among the people. The saint had already said to him, *“Christianity depends on priests. A good priest is the greatest thing there is.”*

Agnes of Langeac

During his silent retreat in May 1633, Jean Jacques was still unaware of how the aforementioned Dominican, Agnes of Langeac, had, for the three years before his ordination, been accompanying him on his search for the right spiritual path. Back then, Jesus told the severely ill 29-year-old sister in her convent in the Auvergne Mountains, *“I still need you for a soul that you should win for me.”*

Shortly thereafter Our Lady explained her mission more clearly, *“Pray to my son for a certain Monsignor Olier.”* For the next three years, the holy nun offered all her suffering, tears and prayers as expiation for Monsignor Olier, without having ever seen him.

They did, however, have two extraordinary encounters, which Jean Jacques later wrote about in his autobiography. *“I went on retreat to prepare for my mission in the Auvergne Mountains. I was meditating in my room when I saw this holy soul coming toward me with great majesty. In one hand, she was holding a crucifix; in the other a Rosary. Her beautiful guardian angel held the hem of her choir robe, and in his other hand he held a handkerchief with which he caught the tears in which she was bathed. ... With a sorrowful glance she said, ‘I cry for you!’ This touched my heart deeply and filled me with a sweet sadness. I believed that she wanted to teach me by showing me the crucifix and the Rosary that the cross and devotion to Our Lady were the means of my sanctification and would accompany me throughout my life. ... This holy soul appeared to me again to confirm her first appearance.”*

To give him concrete proof that he was not the victim of deception, Agnes left him her cross

and her handkerchief wet with tears. During his successful mission in the Auvergnés in 1634, Jean Jacques heard for the first time about the holy mother superior of the Dominican convent in nearby Langeac. During his first visit, the prioress, named Agnes, seemed familiar to him, and he said, *“I have seen you somewhere before.”*

“That’s right,” Mother Agnes replied peacefully. *“You saw me twice in Paris, where I appeared to you during your retreat in Saint Lazare. Our Lady gave me the task of praying for your conversion. God has chosen you to lay the foundation for the first seminary in the France.”*

Moved by these words, 26-year-old Jean Jacques visited the prioress, who was only six years older than him, over the next half-year. He began to value her very greatly as a spiritual mother for his priesthood. Agnes too rejoiced to discover how quickly Jean Jacques made progress in the spiritual life. She said to him once very directly, *“In the beginning I thought of you as the child of my tears for whose conversion I was praying, but today I consider you my father.”*

When the missionary was called back to Paris in October 1634, Agnes prayed in tears in the chapel at the end of their final meeting, *“I thank you, Lord, that you have heard my prayers... and that you have let me see the one whom you wished for me to win for your Church through my self-offering.”*

That very month Agnes became sick and died at the age of 32. Her mission was complete as a priest mother for the one who was to begin the renewal and the sanctification of the clergy.

In the heart of the central French Auvergnés, the body of Blessed Agnes lies in the Dominican convent of Langeac. The community of priests from St. Sulpice venerate her to this day as the priest mother of their founder and invoke her for the formation of the clergy.

The love of a true mother

*F*or the time, Jean Jacques held missions throughout France with great success, and he declined a number of offers to be made a bishop. Concerning these fruitful seven years of pastoral work he said, *“I cannot help but think that behind all the wonderful conversions in the country parishes are the prayers of Sr. Agnes, that holy soul who prayed so much for the townspeople’s conversion.”*

Since he knew how much a priest needs spiritual support, he asked at the beginning of each new mission, which always started with adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and a consecration to Our Lady, for the prayers of the simple women in the village. *“I feel entirely dependent on the prayers of modest people. When they pray, the mission is a success, otherwise it isn’t ... and very often a homily’s effectiveness is the fruit of the prayers of the poorest, most unnoticeable lady in the church.”*

Jean Jacques was not yet 30 when he met Marie Teyssonier on one of his mission journeys. Known as Marie of Valence, a lady more than twice his age, she was a Calvinist

who converted to Catholicism and, following the death of her husband when she was only 20, began a life of deep unity with God.

Due to the great mystical graces she received, often being compared to St. Teresa of Avila, Marie became a renowned advisor to influential people like King Louis XIII, Queen Anne of Austria, Cardinal Richelieu and saints like Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul. Marie prayed for diocesan priests every day and immediately recognized Jean Jacques’ vocation in the sanctification of priests. He later wrote full of gratitude, *“Following the death of Agnes of Langeac, God let me meet Marie of Valence. She nurtured for me the love of a true mother ... and after praying for me, assured me that the Lord wanted to do great things through my service in the Church.”*

As a missionary, Jean Jacques often experienced that the main reason for the spiritual decline in the people was the indifference and lack of formation in the priests. Consequently, the desire gradually matured in him to found a seminary for the education of good priests.

St. Sulpice - The first French seminary

*I*n 1642, 34-year-old Jean Jacques acquired the huge, completely dilapidated parish outside of town, St. Sulpice, a stronghold of the Protestants, about which it was said, *“It was the scum not only of Paris, but practically all of France, and it served as a refuge for all free thinkers, atheists and all those living in ... godlessness.”* He started the seminary that same day. In his eagerness, he also gathered the 50 priests living around the parish and formed the exemplary *“Community of*

Priests from St. Sulpice”. Initially, some of the priests thought they might be better off on their own, but Jean Jacques entrusted them to the *“Queen of the Clergy”* and in no time they changed their minds. Gradually he led every spiritual son of the community to do everything with Mary, in Mary and for Mary because he was convinced, *“The Church will never be renewed unless it is one with Mary and shares in her spirit. She is like a sacrament through which God ... gives out his grace.*

The clergy has to draw from this fruitful spring.”

In the first months, hundreds of priests joined St. Sulpice. Even more, French bishops sent their abbots, priors and doctors to Jean Jacques’ seminary where they received a Eucharistic-Marian formation before returning to the diocese. As a result, within 10 years, St. Sulpice—despite serious persecution—became a famous spiritual center for the renewal of France’s whole clergy and thereby the heart of many other new French seminaries. What Jean Jacques’ first priest mother, Marie Rousseau, prophesized was also fulfilled, “*They will come to the seminary from all directions to be formed. Then they will depart like burning,*

radiant lights bringing the Faith everywhere ... until they’ve reached the four corners of the earth. ... They will be the wealth of the Church and a little treasure for Rome.”

*I*n 1650, on the Feast of the Presentation, the main feast for St. Sulpice, Jean Jacques wrote in his memoirs, “*I asked Our Lady what she desired of me and what I could do to please her since I would do anything to make her happy. She honored me by saying, ‘Give me hearts!’ Then she helped me to understand that nothing would make her happier than hearts which served her dear son in the Church.”*

*“My vocation is to seem to be nothing,
like Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
About this, the Lord said to me that we should do what we do
with as little gleam as possible...”*

*He does everything secretly in the tabernacle.
He seems to be much less than a bishop or an apostle.
Nevertheless, it is he who does everything.
He wants to reign in me and to powerfully realize everything through me,
but without attracting attention ... hidden from the eyes of the world.
They are his members who on the outside come forward
but are always dependent on a heart that beats hidden.”*

Jean Jacques Olier

The self-offering of Jean Jacques Olier and his priest mothers brought rich fruit. Countless exemplary priests came forth from the famous St. Sulpice seminary, like the great Marian apostle Louis de Montfort (1673-1716) who studied there for seven years. Today, seminarians from around the world still come to St. Sulpice, which after several changes in location is now in Issy-les Moulineaux outside of Paris. The incorrupt heart of Jean Jacques Olier is also there; his tomb, however, was destroyed during the French Revolution.

A single meeting

Jean Jacques had been running the seminary for five years when in September 1647 he visited the Carmelite convent in Beaune, France during a pilgrimage to St. Francis de Sales in Annecy. Following the advice of his friend Baron de Renty, he met Sr. Margaret of the Most Holy Sacrament (1619-1648) at the Carmel.

The holy Carmelite (see Triumph of the Heart #2) stopped growing when she was 12 years old and was only four feet three inches tall. Through Sr. Margaret, God wanted to make the power of his divine childhood visible for the whole Church. She became famous when, through her sacrifice and prayer, she freed her hometown Beaune from the hands of its enemy and implored for the successor to the French throne, King Louis XIV. What many people did not know, however, was that for years this stigmatized soul prayed and expiated especially for priests and religious. She often carried, months at a time, their inner weight, their pride and doubt, their sins and temptations, and even their suicidal tendencies.

At first sight, this 28-year-old sister recognized Jean Jacques Olier as her spiritual father who, like Mother Agnes, had been shown and promised to her in prayer years earlier. The Lord praised this priest and said, *“He is completely offered to the Child Jesus.”* In fact, the Child Jesus even appeared to him once like a fire coming out of the tabernacle and pervading his heart. The two of them met only this one time, but because of their holiness they instantly felt a deep, wonderful spiritual unity. At once, Sr. Margaret adored in Jean Jacques’ soul the Child Jesus because she

knew, *“he dwells in this heart like in a manger”*. For his part, he recognized intuitively through her pure soul the importance in the spiritual life of being completely childlike before God.

As they were parting, the Carmelite said, *“Venerable Father, my dear Child Jesus, our life, everything that makes up our unity, will perfect and complete the grace he has given to us.”* And so it was! Just a few days later, Jean Jacques wrote in a letter to Sr. Margaret, *“During the Offertory ... I saw your soul come out of the chalice and enter into mine ... so deep that I felt as if I no longer had a soul, that you alone lived in me, my sister, whom I carry inside me, closed in the manger and in the tabernacle of Jesus Christ.”*

Before he left, knowing the preciousness of this unity between their souls, Jean Jacques entrusted to her, like a spiritual inheritance, his most valuable possession: the cross which Mother Agnes gave him with the handkerchief of tears after her second apparition. When Sr. Margaret of the Most Holy Sacrament died eight months later on May 26, 1648, Jean Jacques asked the Carmel to return this special cross to him. How indicative, considering how much the last nine years of this saintly priest’s life was marked with the cross of several illnesses and unpleasant expiatory suffering! Accompanied in prayer by his holy friend Vincent de Paul, Jean Jacques passed away at Easter 1657. Until the end, he continued to speak about and with the Blessed Mother. Indeed, the prediction of Mother Agnes was realized: The cross and Mary accompanied him throughout his life.

After the influential Baron de Renty met Sr. Margaret at the Carmel in Beaune in 1643, he developed a great devotion to the Child Jesus under her guidance. In thankfulness, the nobleman had this statue of the Child Jesus carved for Sr. Margaret. Today the so-called “King of Grace”, before which many miracles have taken place, is in the convent’s church.

Translated from: P.-H. Schmidt, Jean-J. Olier - Ein Leben für die Erneuerung und Heiligung des Priestertums, Parvis-Verlag

*“I have such great trust in the Child Jesus.
I know, he will always answer me.”*

Sr. Margaret of the Most Holy Sacrament

Can you also be a Mother of Sorrows?

Just as the first Eve, the mother of all those who live, lost the grace of passing on spiritual life to her physical descendants through the Fall, so did Mary, the second Eve, united with her Son the Redeemer, suffer for all the graces which she as mother of the living may give to all nations. Countless girls and women, single or married, have followed her motherly example up to the 21st Century, passing on, as priest mothers, spiritual life drawn from Mary’s treasure of grace. Among them is Maria Reinish, who gave the Church a martyr in her priest son Francis.

A martyr true to his conscience

F Francis Reinish (1903-1942), a Pallottine priest from Tyrol, Austria, wrote near the end of his life in his prison diary on death row about his childhood in Innsbruck: “God gave me very faithful parents; they had two boys and three girls. I was allowed to receive First Communion when I was eight; and after that, my mother took me very often to Holy Mass. I clung to her with great love. I was especially excited when my mother brought

me to the glorious May devotions at the Jesuit church. A great love for Mary grew in me, which pushed me to silent meditation.”

Nineteen-year-old Francis had just begun studying law when his mother unexpectedly said one morning as she walked out of church after daily Mass with one of her daughters, “Our Savior let me understand today during the Holy Sacrifice that I will see one of my sons as a priest.” Certainly that would not happen,

though, since both of them were in law school!

Francis, the younger of the two, went to Kiel, Germany for the spring semester in 1923. In March, he made a four week retreat and afterwards firmly resolved, *“I will always be attentive to the voice of God in my heart and listen to my conscience, and I will faithfully follow the suggestions of God’s grace.”*

In the months to follow, he had the opportunity: *“A heated struggle began in my soul. I saw the religious and moral poverty of this large port city. ... A desire broke forth in me to win souls for Christ the King, and in July, I returned home with the decision to become a priest.”*

When his father, court counselor Dr. Francis Reinish, and his mother Maria heard about this, they redoubled their prayers. Francis brought himself to break up with the girl he had been going out with for a year and a half, and in the fall of 1923 he began studying philosophy in Innsbruck. Two years later, at the age of 22, he entered the seminary in Brixen.

He recounts, *“Brixen was a glorious time. Yet in the second year of theology, the final decision for the priesthood, the closer it came, became more difficult each day. ... In the third year of theology, I received minor orders, but the subdeaconate seemed to be an insurmountable demand on my soul. The unreserved surrender for the rest of my life, forever, seemed too much for me. I was close to leaving the seminary. Suddenly, at the beginning of April 1928, everything calmed down and became clear to me. I made the decision to receive the subdeaconate ordination on May 13, 1928.”* What led to this abrupt, noticeable change of heart?

“Many prayers were offered for me and in the middle of April my Dad wrote me a letter, ‘Mother had to undergo a serious throat operation at the beginning of April. She offered all her pain for clarity in your vocation. She was on the operating table for a good hour without anesthesia.’ Truly, a mother has to pray and suffer for her son to become a priest. And once God and Our Lady begin ... they see through to the end. On May 13, 1928, to my great joy and in

the presence of my parents and siblings, I was ordained a subdeacon.”



One and a half months later, on the Feast of Peter and Paul 1928, in St. James’ Cathedral in Innsbruck, Francis Reinish was ordained a priest at the age of 25. He wrote about it later, *“On that day, I promised the High Priest Jesus Christ to love Our Lady and be faithful to the Holy Father. In a quiet moment, my mother gave me a beautiful ordination gift by admitting, ‘In Bozen, on the Feast of Corpus Christi 1903, you weren’t even six months old. As the Blessed Sacrament was being carried through the streets, I stood on the sidewalk with your stroller. When the Divine Savior passed by us, I took you out of the stroller, lifted you up and said: “Dear Savior, if you want to make this child a priest, I offer him to you with my whole heart.” I kept quiet about it and protected it as a secret in my heart. I didn’t want to force you to become a priest. Today is a very special celebration for me because the Savior accepted my offer. Become a worthy servant of the Lord. From now on, I will pray and sacrifice even more for you.’ On July 1, the Feast of the Precious Blood, I celebrated my first Holy Mass in Innsbruck at the basilica ‘Our Lady of the Four Pillars’.*

“My mother had often recounted to us children when we were young how she met our Dad. She frequently saw him as a university student climb up behind the high altar and pray before the image of Our Lady. It was the same image we enthroned in our house altar at the entrance to our apartment, and Mom always had an oil lamp burning there. Dad offered his personal prayers each day before this image. I also celebrated my First Sacrifice at this altar.”

As everybody left the festively decorated basilica following his first Mass, his joyful mother was surrounded by people congratulating her, but her heart grew heavy when a woman came up to her and calmly but clearly prophesized, *“One day he will suffer martyrdom.”* And so it would also be.

That same year, Francis joined the southern German province of the Pallottines. "As a novice priest, I had to give up certain liberties. ... My passion for smoking caused me much suffering. After a three-week-long fight, I thought I had to leave. Since I was too ashamed to leave officially for this reason, I planned an escape. The novitiate was surrounded by a seven foot high wall. The first jump failed. I heard interiorly, 'Stay!' When I reached the Lourdes grotto, I felt as if somebody was holding on to me. My heart ached and I started to cry. The battle had been decided. I stayed. And from that moment on, my passion for smoking subsided."

This experience and other spiritual battles, pivotal for his vocation, made Francis humbly admit, *"As a priest, I feel my complete helplessness and poverty. Many struggles and sacrifices and, even more, numerous helpers who pray and sacrifice for holy priests are needed before your 'humanness' is shed and the priestly essence shines through crystal clear."*

In the years to follow, Fr. Reinish worked with great blessings among the youth and men in the Schonstatt community. He traveled throughout Germany giving retreats, spiritual exercises, and conferences before

When his death sentence was read on the evening before his execution, August 20, 1942, Fr. Reinish replied calm and clear, "The condemned is no revolutionary, no enemy of state or someone who fights with fists and violence. He is a Catholic priest who used the weapons of the spirit and Faith, and he knows for what he is fighting."

After midnight, Francis made his final Confession and gratefully received Holy Communion before being led in the morning to his decapitation. He left his parents, who both died in 1945, his last precious possessions—a cross and the New Testament.

the Gestapo caught wind of him and in 1940 forbid him to speak publicly or preach.

When Francis received orders to report for service in the armed forces on Tuesday, April 7, 1942, three days after Easter, he remembered that in difficult situations his mother would say, *"Always as God wills!"* In his impeccable sense of justice he resolved after an intense fight, *"I will not swear an oath on the flag to Adolf Hitler because God does not want me to."* Nevertheless he knew that this refusal, this conscience objection, would be his death sentence.

A few days later, on April 11, Fr. Reinish went to visit his parents one last time, to share with them his decision and to wish them well. The three of them prayed the Stations of the Cross in the cemetery next to their church. At the 13th station, Francis took his mother's hand and asked her, *"Can you also be a Mother of Sorrows who carries her cross without collapsing?"* She gave the courageous reply, *"If God gives me the strength then I will be able to do it."* Just five days later, the 39-year-old priest was arrested and taken to the Berlin-Tegel prison. During the last four months of his life, he noted once in his diary, *"I remember so well in my parents' last letter, my dear mother added the final words which have soothed me in moments of fear, 'Remain strong, Francis!'"*

A Mother for Priests

Yvonne Aimée de Malestroit (1901-1951)

is among the great mystics of the last century.

It seems that the Lord conceded nearly every supernatural gift to this French Augustinian sister. Above all, however, she distinguished herself through her extraordinary love of God and neighbor; and, therefore, it was no coincidence that upon taking her vows she received the name Marie Yvonne - Aimée de Jésus (Jesus' love). In a special way, Jesus entrusted priests to this expiatory soul, for whom she prayed and offered her suffering.

A unity desired by God

*A*t the tender age of three, Yvonne lost her beloved father. Due to financial difficulties, her mother was forced to give Yvonne to her grandparents. Her grandmother prayed a lot and often told her stories from the life of Jesus and the saints. The wish grew in her to love Jesus above everything and to become a saint.

Her joy was indescribable when at the age of nine she was allowed to receive First Holy Communion on December 30, 1910, in Paris. Fr. Questel, a Jesuit who prepared her for this important moment, recognized her spiritual depth and maturity. Therefore, he proposed that she promise Jesus to pray and make sacrifices for priests every day. *“Ask Jesus that he bind in a special way to your soul the soul of a child who is called to the priesthood, without desiring to know his name or where he comes from.”* Without hesitation, Yvonne made this promise. Thus began her motherhood for priests even though she was still only a child.

Many years later, when 22-year-old Yvonne met Fr. Questel again in 1923, he inquired as to whether she still thought about the promise she made to Jesus at her First Communion. She answered him as if it were obvious, *“Every*

day I have prayed for him, without knowing who he is, and for all priests.” Yvonne was also happy to fulfill the wish of her friend Joan who asked her to pray for her nephew Paul Labutte, who wanted to become a priest. At the age of 24, Yvonne wrote to her spiritual director Fr. Crete S.J., *“Jesus and Mary have assured me that they will bless a very special friendship where I will find support in my hours of suffering. For my part, I will always be a help for him.”* Finally in 1941, when she was already 40 years old, Jesus revealed that Fr. Labutte was the priest for whom she had offered her life in a special way since she was nine years old.

*I*n 1926, five years before his ordination to the priesthood, Yvonne and Paul Labutte met for the first time, without knowing anything about God's future plans for their spiritual unity. When they met again one year later, that friendship began. Paul remembered, *“I knew nothing about her, but I had the astounding intuition that she was a woman who was truthful to the very essence of her being. ... For me, Yvonne became like an older sister in whom I had absolute trust. I asked her for advice. At*

the same time, I was like a younger brother for her to whom she entrusted things from her personal life and from her mission in service of 'Jesus the King'."

From then on they only saw each other once a year in Malestroit, the convent of Augustinian nurses which Yvonne entered on March 18, 1927. Although they kept in contact by writing, they especially prayed and sacrificed for one another. Worried that that something too human might taint their friendship, Yvonne told her spiritual director everything. Fr. Crete reassured her and encouraged her to maintain this unity which God desired. Yvonne and Fr. Labutte gave much more to each other than they were aware. On a few rare occasions God let her see part of this impressive spiritual reality.

*D*uring the Second World War, Fr. Labutte was wounded on the Front. Sr. Yvonne invited him to come and recover in Malestroit. So he spent the months from March to July 1941 in their convent and witnessed many mystical graces which his spiritual mother received during this time. In their conversations, she told him how she was able to help him a number of times through bilocation. She described for him the exact places and situations where he was even though he did not see her. One of these consoling bilocations took place in January 1940 in Wintzenheim, France. Fr. Labutte had a bad cold, and he called Yvonne interiorly for help and asked for consolation, which he received. She told him more than a year later, *"One night, in Alsace, you were in a room, restless and with a fever. I saw the cream colored bed, the gray-green comforter and the shoes under the bed. I recognized your voice when you called out for me, and Jesus said to me, 'Go to him, he is suffering', and I came."* Yvonne was allowed to bring him relief and strengthen him, even though he did not know at the time from where the help came. He rightly said about Yvonne, *"Before*

she even knew me, she was my spiritual mother."

Jesus confirmed Yvonne's motherhood, *"I give him more to you than a child to his mother because you have bought him with more prayer and sacrifice than a mother does for the soul of her child. Guard him; lead him."*

*F*r. Labutte, however, also consoled and supported Yvonne. Two years later, in January 1943, she was remarkably saved from death in an amazing way through the intercession of her spiritual son. Mother Yvonne was a thorn in the side of the National Socialists because in her hospital in Malestroit, everybody found refuge and help, regardless of nationality. She knew she was in danger when she traveled to Paris on January 24, 1943. And, in fact, she was arrested by the Gestapo on the morning of February 16.

When Fr. Labutte was informed of the matter, he left for Paris immediately. Mother Aimée appeared to him in bilocation in the subway and said, *"Pray! Pray! If you don't pray enough ... they will send me to Germany tonight. ... Don't tell anybody!"* Full of concern, Fr. Labutte hurried to the statue of Our Lady in Rue du Bac to plead for the safety of his spiritual mother. Her words echoed over and over in his mind, *"Pray! Pray! ..."*

In the evening, he returned to the convent of the Augustinians and asked to be let into Yvonne's office so that he could pray the Rosary for her. He suddenly heard a muffled noise behind him. Surprised, he turned around and saw Yvonne standing next to her desk, exhausted and with traces of blood on her back. She had foreseen this event years earlier in a prophetic dream: *"I saw that I was in prison and an angel came and freed me."* In the last moment before she was to be led away with the group to be brought to Germany, she was freed by a supernatural intervention and brought home. These two astonishing events show what miracles God can work in people's lives.

No sacrifice was too great for her

*A*long with this wonderful friendship, Yvonne was a spiritual mother for many priests, only a few of whom she knew personally. A few days before her 21st birthday, she heard the voice of Jesus for the first time. Like little Samuel, he called her three times by name. Then he showed her a cross and asked her with a gentle voice,

“Will you carry it?”

“Oh yes, Lord,” she answered.

Jesus continued, *“Accept the trials that I will send you as the greatest grace and greatest favor that I show to the souls I love. Accept them without complaining, without studying their form or duration and without boasting about them. Pay no attention to what hurts or humiliates you. Look to me; I love you.”*

A year later, the Lord showed her a vision of the hardship which would befall humanity in the Second World War.

With a serious, but mild voice the Lord requested her to *“pray, pray a lot, especially for the priests, for the prisoners.”*

The Lord often showed his beloved where people were in danger of deeply offending him. Jesus sent her, for example, to people who had desecrated hosts by stealing them, and gave her the task of taking them back (see Triumph of the Heart #37). He also let her recognize when priests were in danger, and sent her to them to prevent them from sinning. In a letter to Fr. Crete on January 16, 1925, she wrote, *“I went into a church to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament when I suddenly understood I had to go to the priest only a few steps in front of me. I was to tell him he should not go there where he was planning that evening because it would lead him to sin. ... He was very agitated and surprised because he alone knew what he was planning to do. ... He thanked me.”* The same thing happened a second time, *“The poor priest wrote me, ‘You have saved a soul, a priest’s soul. I went to Confession. Madam, it is because of*

you that I did not fall, and I remember it often. ... I know that you are the Lord’s messenger and that you give me strength, courage and patience to make good the evil that I did and sought. Please accept my plea for forgiveness and my deep respect. A. B., priest.” Repeatedly the Lord let his little messenger know things that he alone knew. She wrote once to Bishop Picaud, *“There is a priest in one of the parishes of your diocese ... whose morals cause him great interior suffering. Have the goodness to visit and console him. I saw the priest before me in my thoughts as I was kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and I recognized what a great crisis he was passing through. Help him out of his fear.”* Bishop Picaud visited him and could help him concretely. Yvonne offered her illness and demonic attacks for him.

*T*here were also priests who caused her a lot of suffering. One, for example, believed in her at first, and then defamed her as a fake mystic. Jesus showed her in a vision on July 6, 1923, *“Under the guise of defending God’s honor, he will act against my will and pierce your heart. ... Accept this trial. The trial itself will come during the war and it will help to save the world. ... Remain united with me and pray for the one who wants to destroy you so that he may be your friend.”* When the prophecy came to pass in 1943, Mother Yvonne silently took everything upon herself, without a word of rebellion or justification. She had already prayed for him for 20 years. After four painful months of defamation, the priest begged on his knees for forgiveness.

The last years of her life, Mother Yvonne was completely exhausted from her untiring efforts and numerous illnesses, including breast cancer. Nevertheless she radiated a zest for life and a deep peace to her sisters and those seeking advice.

She knew from her own experience what it meant to be downcast and helpless. Therefore, the words with which she answered a priest suffering from exhaustion and listlessness were so fitting: “What reward would you deserve if you always had the joy of working well? They are not the moments in which you give the most. You experience satisfaction; and it is good to experience this joy in order to continue with a task which is not your favorite. But believe me, whenever you do it without finding pleasure, when you speak without seeing results, when you listen to Confession without meeting a soul, when you simply and conscientiously fulfill your obligations for love of God, then you give, you win and you earn. We all—some more, some less, but we all—have to know the feeling of weariness and exhaustion. ... In no way, however, should this sadden us. ...

I am skeptical when I hear someone boast that he is always successful. That cannot be, or it can only be temporarily. It is not the ordinary way in which God leads souls.”

On January 3, 1951, Mother Yvonne concluded her yearly letter, “We intensify our spiritual life not through an excess of prayers ... but through a greater unification of our will to the will of God.” From this point forward, her headaches and weakness increased. Nevertheless, everyone was taken by surprise when Mother Yvonne suddenly had a stroke, the consequences of which caused her death on February 3. The now emeritus Bishop of Vannes, François Gourvès, reopened the beatification process for Yvonne Aimée on March 25, 2005.

Translated from:
René Laurentin, Yvonne-Aimée de Jésus, *Geschichte einer großen Liebe*, Stein am Rhein, 2000;
F.-X. De Guibert, Yvonne-Aimée de Jésus, „Ma mère selon l’Esprit“, Paris 1997; and
Une Amitié „Voulue par dieu“, Paris 1999

*“I am so happy to be able to suffer for souls, for the priests...
I believe so much in the redemption of souls through suffering...
That is my way, the apostolate that I love.”*

*“The most important thing in redeeming souls is to unite;
to unite our nothingness with his fullness, to unite our activity,
our suffering, our joy and even our smile ...
with Our Lord.”*

Sr. Yvonne Aimée

United through a Suffering of Love

St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968) had many spiritual daughters whom he led on the way of Christian perfection.

For some of them, however, not only was he a spiritual father, but they were his spiritual mothers

through the prayers and suffering which they offered to God.

An Italian expiatory soul Luigina Sinapi (1916-1978), counselor to many important figures including Pope Pius XII, was a support for her confessor and yet still his spiritual daughter.

*L*uigina grew up, the oldest of five siblings, in a well-to-do family in Itri, Italy. Her mother, a deeply pious woman, was especially concerned with her often mysterious behavior. At the age of five, for example, Luigina told her uncle, a priest, that it was completely normal for her to play with the Child Jesus. Mother Philomena decided, therefore, to make a pilgrimage with her daughter to San Giovanni Rotondo to the still young Padre Pio who had received the stigmata only a few years earlier. She wanted to be sure that these extraordinary phenomena were not the influence of evil spirits. The Capuchin priest was able to calm her mother, “*God manifests his will in her.*” He blessed the child and laid his stigmatized hand on her with a great fatherly love. It was the first encounter of these two great souls who, with the years, would become always more deeply united through suffering and selfless love.

At the age of 19, Luigina stood before the most important decision of her life. She was

diagnosed with advanced intestinal cancer and given no hope of recovery. On the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1935, a doctor and a priest came to accompany the dying girl in her final hours. Unexpectedly, Luigina saw Jesus and Mary in a vision, and they gave her the free choice, “*Do you want to die and go to heaven, or do you want to be a sacrifice of expiation for the Church and for priests?*” As in a movie, Luigina saw the fall from faith with which the priests and the Church would be confronted. At the same time, she saw how she could contribute to the reparation through suffering accepted in love. Encouraged by this vision, she gave her “*yes*” without hesitation. Jesus sealed it with the words, “*You will be the mustard seed in the furrows of Rome.*” Luigina was instantly healed.

From that moment forward, a new life started for her. From the outside, her life appeared normal, but there were many extraordinary, supernatural events. Her sufferings of expiation so frequently kept her in bed that she no could no longer keep a steady job.

Carry one another's burden

*I*n her great physical and spiritual suffering, God repeatedly gave Luigina special consolation. She was overjoyed by the frequent visits of Padre Pio in bilocation. She reported,

for example, how he visited her in this supernatural way in the Holy Year 1950 and showed her his stigmata which she had so desired to see. She drew much strength from such encounters.

*T*hese two expiatory souls already knew one another well when Luigina went to San Giovanni Rotondo in 1953, at the age of 37, to ask Padre Pio for advice. She had been repeatedly accused of theft at her job at the post office. Padre Pio reassured her and let her stay in San Giovanni Rotondo for a few days, something she often did thereafter.

Fr. Tarcisio, who lived in the monastery with Padre Pio, soon noticed that these two had a holy friendship and he always looked after Luigina when she came to visit. Once, she entrusted to him that, *“whenever she drives to San Giovanni Rotondo, she asks Jesus to be able to participate in Padre’s suffering, and her prayers are always answered.”* On another occasion, she told him how she and Padre Pio sometimes exchanged sufferings. Therefore, it is understandable that Fr. Tarcisio grabbed the telephone to call Luigina when Padre Pio was doing so poorly in April 1965 that they thought he was going to die. She merely answered him, *“Call me back tomorrow.”*

During the celebration of his last Holy Mass on September 22, 1968, the stigmata which Padre Pio carried on his body for 50 years disappeared. At the end of Holy Mass, he collapsed at the altar, and died early in the morning at 2:30 on September 23. In his agony he repeated over and over again in prayer, *“Jesus, Mary! Jesus, Mary!”*

*T*he spiritual unity between these two was so deep that Padre Pio confided secrets to Luigina. On August 15, 1968, he appeared to her in Rome and said, *“Come to San Giovanni Rotondo.”* Even though Luigina already had an important trip planned, she obeyed immediately. When she made her confession to him on August 23, he informed her that he would die in one month. He added, *“Don’t tell anybody!”*

Understandably, his penitent was very grieved and asked him spontaneously, *“But what will we do when you aren’t here anymore?”*

The next day Fr. Tarcisio joyfully reported that Padre Pio was doing better and was even able to celebrate Holy Mass. Luigina had asked the Blessed Mother that she may take all his suffering upon herself so that he could return to the church and listen to confession. As always, her prayers were heard, but her pain was so great that she could not move.

*W*henever Fr. Tarcisio came to Rome, he visited Luigina, and he frequently found her suffering in bed. That was again the case on August 10, 1967. *“Padre Pio is also sick and suffering a lot,”* Fr. Tarcisio had to report. Luigina then entrusted to the Capuchin priest that she would offer a novena of suffering to Our Lady that Padre Pio would be freed from his illness. The shepherd of souls did indeed recover rapidly, and thanks to the sacrifice of his spiritual daughter and mother, he could resume his priestly work.

Padre Pio answered very mildly, *“You will go before the tabernacle. You will find me in Jesus.”*

Following the death of her spiritual father, it was again Luigina who saw him going to heaven in a vision. She saw how an immense multitude of souls—he had about 14 million spiritual children—rushed toward him from heaven shouting, *“We are saved through you!”* It was only fitting that Luigina had a share in Padre Pio’s heavenly joy since she had also suffered with him for these souls.

Even from heaven, he did not leave his assistant alone on earth. He appeared to her several times, strengthened her and helped her in her

vocation to offer herself to God in expiation for souls. For her part, Luigina confided to Fr. Tarcisio that especially in very painful suffering she always thought about the pain the stigmata must have caused Padre Pio.

“Whenever I thought about Padre Pio’s suffering, I had Christ’s passion before my eyes. In the suffering of Jesus and his servant, I always found the joy, meekness and strength to carry my own pain.”

Translated from: Chino Bert, Luigina Sinapi,
Liebesopfer für die Welt, Hauteville CH 1989

When First Graders Pray...

It is known that Don Bosco (1815-1888), the holy youth apostle of Turin—by the time of his death around 6000 of his pupils had decided for the priesthood—always consciously asked “his boys” to pray in especially great intentions, serious worries or hopeless cases. This charismatic teacher had often experienced the children’s particular intercessory power. With the help of praying children, the famous Irish Poor Clare, Sr. Briege McKenna (see Triumph of the Heart #41), also began her worldwide apostolate among bishops and priests. Through prayer and spiritual advice as well as her healing charisma, she has been able to physically and spiritually help them for 36 years.

That they may become men of Faith

*S*r. Briege was an elementary school teacher in Florida in 1974, when during adoration in the chapel of the Poor Clare’s convent she received an entirely new understanding of the priesthood:

“Jesus gave me an insight back then of what was to come: People would turn against the priesthood and begin to consider it like a job. God also unveiled for me that ... families would no longer see the priesthood as a gift which they would wish for their sons. And rooted in godless and materialistic surroundings ... young men who carried the seeds of a priestly vocation would no longer be capable of hearing and answering the call. God sho-

wed me that there would be a crisis among the priests because the priests would lose their faith in Jesus.

“At the same time, I felt the Lord’s request of me, ‘Go out and ask the priests to believe in me!’ Yes, I should go out into the world and remind bishops and priests of his words, ‘I did not choose the priests because they were holier or better than the others. ... Because of my grace, love and mercy for mankind, I use them that I may become present.’

When I stood up to leave the chapel after nearly four hours, my attitude had changed. ... As for the human limits of the priests, I was much more aware of the necessity to pray for

them so that they may really become men of faith. I decided to start with my first graders through whom I became the witness of the great healing of a suffering priest.

I prayed every day with the little school children and talked to them about the priesthood. Then I met a priest at a prayer meeting who was having a serious crisis and just about ready to give up his priesthood. I promised to have my first graders pray for him. The children agreed right away and they even decided to write him letters. Since I had not told them that his crisis was with his vocation but only had asked them to pray for healing, they thought he was sick or had had an accident. Therefore their letters and drawings showed him in bed with his leg in a splint and bandages around his head.

“After a few months had passed, the priest came to our class. He had the children’s letters and a huge bag of candy with him which, naturally, the children loved. He told them that he had had a tough time and had stopped

talking to Jesus. However, through their prayer he remained a priest and now he was close to Jesus again.

“*Later he told me that the letter of a five year old girl especially touched him. She wrote, ‘I know right now that you can’t do what Jesus wants from you because you are sick, but we asked Jesus to help you. You are something very special to Jesus; we know that Jesus will make you healthy. We need you and we love you. We hope that you visit us when you are doing better!’ He told me that after he had read these lines he thought, ‘This little child understands the value of my priesthood.’*

“Then he started to pray and his life changed. My first graders were very happy, and it was a confirmation for me of what Jesus said in the chapel: priests will be renewed when I find people to pray and intercede for them.”

Translated from: Brieger McKenna,
Wunder geschehen wirklich, Vier-Türme-Verlag,
Münsterschwarzach 1994

Mission of St. Therese

In France, there are currently 6,500 priests and seminarians entrusted to the personal prayers of the nearly 7,000 boys and girls in the Mission of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus.

The prayer movement founded by Fr. Bruno Thevenin in the 1970’s has, through spiritual adoption by the children, already prayed for ten percent of the French clergy, a third of the priests being under the age of 45.

Fr. Thevenin, born in 1946, told us in a telephone interview a little bit about himself and his work for the sanctification of priests which he places under the patronage of Little Therese.

The prayer of a spiritual mother

I spent my childhood on the outskirts of Paris in a parish named after St. Therese of Lisieux. Since our priest did not have a rectory and we owned a large house, he lived with us for three years. We were three brothers; two of us became priests. There is no doubt that our vocations were born out of the generosity and openness of our parents.

“In 1966, when I had entered the seminary of Bayeux Lisieux, a lady named Ms. Louise Charles (photo left), a widow from Lisieux with no children, wrote to the bishop requesting the name of a priest whom she could adopt as a spiritual son. She would pray the Rosary for him and his intentions until the end of her life. The bishop gave her the name of a seminarian—Bruno. And so upon my entrance into the seminary Ms. Charles prayed for me for years without me knowing it and without her knowing who I was.

“After I was ordained in Lisieux in 1974, during the centennial of Little Therese’s birth, I was assigned as a chaplain to the parish where this lady was faithfully praying for me. Of all the people, it was also Ms. Charles who volunteered when I asked my parishioners for someone to help in the sacristy and with my housekeeping. Eventually, she discovered that this Fr. Bruno Thevenin was “hers”, the one whom she had prayed for the last eight years. For 31 years, until her death at the age of 90, Mother Charles accompanied me with her prayers. On November 12, 1997, I celebrated the funeral of this good soul in Lisieux.

“Her spiritual sponsorship of my priesthood gave me the idea that as a catechist I have to motivate my 650 students in the parish and

the college to pray and to sanctify. I thought, “*The children have their place in the Church, and we have to foster their generosity. What Louise Charles did for me, the children should do for other priests—pray! Their prayers have an especially great power over God’s heart.*” So, with a few priests, I called to life this movement of children who pray for the sanctification of seminarians and priests: the Mission of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus.

*W*e are a modest movement of spiritual life which “doesn’t cause any trouble”. Like Therese hid herself in the Carmel of Lisieux to carry the intentions of the world and especially those of the priests, our children are also very hidden, little and weak. And yet they leaven the whole measure.

“It is very important for our faithful children to pray together, because they attend schools where the majority of their classmates no longer practice their faith. Naturally, that makes them uncertain. It is consoling to them, therefore, when they meet others with whom they can share their trust in Jesus.

“Even though some boys and girls consider a vocation to religious life when they come to the Mission, I never initiate a talk with them about it. God is the one who calls. Until now, approximately five percent of the children from the Mission of St. Therese have become priests or religious. All in all, we receive many confirmations of how much this work for the sanctification of priests is desired, loved and guided from heaven by Little Therese.”

Over the last few years, the Mission has spread to over 20 countries and praying children in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania have spiritually sponsored priests as have children in China, Angola, Mexico and the USA.

Excerpt from the prayer to the Mother of Priests

*Mary, Mother of Jesus the High Priest
and Mother of all the priests in the world.*

*You love the priests in a special way
because they are the living image of your only son...*

*Pray that we always have priests who administer the Sacraments to us,
who explain the Gospel to us and who teach us
how to truly become children of God! ...*

*Blessed Mother, obtain for us from the Divine Father
the priests we so desperately need. And since your heart has authority
over him, gain for us, O Mary, holy priests!*

Amen.

Testimonies

*T*o Fr. Thevenin's great joy, numerous children, as well as teenagers and parents, continue to want to be part of the Mission of St. Therese. The nicest thing for him, however, is when the seminarians and the priests themselves ask for the praying support of a child.

Children in the Mission over the age of ten may accept a "spiritual sponsorship" for one or more seminarians or religious. They voluntarily oblige themselves to pray the prayer to the Mother of Priests or a decade of the Rosary for "their spiritual godchild" until his ordination or even their whole life.

Others renew in the name of their semi-

narian, for example, the consecration to Our Lady every week or receive Holy Communion during the week for "their" vocation. Until the deaconate ordination or the solemn profession of vows, they only know the first name of the person they are praying for; however, they may maintain written contact through the office of the Mission. After ordination to the priesthood, they may have direct contact.

The blessings from this mutual prayer apostolate can be seen again and again in letters about the beautiful graces that have been granted. A young seminarian, for example, wrote to the founder, "*Since the earliest years of my childhood, I have prayed the prayer to the*

Mother of Priests. A short time ago, after a year of spiritual formation, I asked my local bishop to accept me as a seminarian. Today, I am the one 'asking' that one of 'your' children pray for me."

One priest found out about the prayer movement for the first time two years after his ordination to the priesthood. *"I wish very much to be the 'spiritual godchild' of a praying child because for a young priest there is nothing more*

beautiful than knowing he is carried by the prayers of others. I'm counting on you!"

Another letter came from Bordeaux: *"Since we met the Mission of St. Therese, we pray the prayer to the Mother of Priests in our family. ... At first we prayed with four, with five, then with six and finally seven children! Now our oldest is starting his second year in the seminary,*

and so this time we are asking for prayers for him just as we continue to pray for all the others in the Mission."

A letter of thanksgiving came from a priest on his third anniversary of ordination, *"Today is the right occasion to say thank you to the Mission of St. Therese. You helped me to reach the priesthood and continue to help me with my beautiful vocation. I am still in contact with my little sponsor. His support through brotherly prayer is one of the greatest joys in my priesthood."*

It is often the case that the children of the Mission are invited to the ordination of "their" seminarian. And later, when the child himself becomes a priest, the former "spiritual godchild" comes to his ordination.

Audrey Stevenson

Fr. Thevenin is convinced:

"The greater and more important the vocation and mission is, the more it has to be prayed for.

Since the priest possesses the whole divine authority, as the Curé of Ars says, he also needs powerful and valuable helpers, among these are especially the children and the sick." Audrey Stevenson (1983-1991)

from Paris was one of these.

*T*he little girl from France—joyful, loving, temperamental and yet obedient—was the second oldest child with two brothers and two sisters. They had a happy childhood in an affluent family. As young parents, Lillian and Jerome, were more or less "Sunday Christians". However, through a family congress and thanks to a priest friend, they quickly grew deeper in their faith.

It was in this time that Lillian met Fr. Thevenin who entrusted her with leading a group of the Mission. Her oldest child, five-year-old Aline, belonged to the group, and, one by one, the rest of the five Stevenson children. As soon as four-year-old Audrey understood that the meetings were to pray for priests' vocations, she was the first to learn by heart the prayer to the Mother of Priests which Fr. Thevenin had

sent them. This prayer enkindled in the child's soul a continually growing ardor to pray for religious vocations.

At the beginning of August 1990, seven-year old Audrey was unexpectedly diagnosed with Leukemia. Fr. Thevenin, to this day a good friend of the family, met her shortly thereafter in the hospital— pale, tired and with aching bones. Rich in priestly experience with children, he explained to Audrey with sensitivity and fatherliness that she is not sick and suffering because she prays for vocations and priests, because there are many children who are sick even though they do not pray. Much more, Jesus had entrusted this sickness to her and asked her to transform it through love into a valuable gift for him. Audrey was mature for her age and understood it very well. When her mother explained to her, “*Audrey ... we are going to do everything the doctors say,*” she responded calmly, “*Mummy, what we are going to do is what Jesus says in the Gospel. We are going to live one day at a time.*”

Her soul's childlike disposition of daily trust helped Audrey to preserve her joyful character and inner peace during the last twelve months of her life despite her fear of chemotherapy. When it became necessary to give her weekly spinal taps, she asked the doctors to always tell her ahead of time. Before each operation Audrey would prepare for 15 minutes by consciously thinking about Jesus in the desert. During the painful treatment, the seven-year-old slowly repeated over and over again, to the astonishment of the doctors, “*for the nuns in Bordeaux who have no vocations, for seminarians, for the vocation of Uncle Mike...*” How much we can learn from this child!

Uncle Mike McLean, the brother of Audrey's mother, had left the seminary in America. Audrey, who never doubted in his vocation, prayed in the hospital especially for him, and knitted him a scarf as a Christmas present. When Uncle Mike finally reentered the seminary in Rome on August 16, 1991, just six days before Audrey's death, she sighed with relief,

“*Ah ..., now I can rest.*” Seven years later, in June 1998, Fr. McLean wore the scarf she gave him as his stole for his First Holy Mass in Baltimore, USA, in thankful memory. He was convinced, “*Audrey saved my vocation.*”

The desire to give for the others was typical for Audrey. For example, following a bone marrow transplant the doctors misjudged her condition and forced her to walk a little bit. She obeyed with great difficulty and said, alluding to St. Therese who exhausted from Tuberculosis made every step for some discouraged missionary, “*Okay, Mummy, I'll walk. But I'll walk for a seminarian.*”

When the doctors could no longer do anything for Audrey, her parents brought their terminally ill daughter home in May 1991, to the great joy of her brothers and sisters. That same month they trustingly brought her to Lourdes, “*We are going to pray to Mary for you to be cured.*” She said with a smile, however, as she was lowered into the bath, “*Mummy, I already know what I'm going to offer my bath for—a young man who doubts his vocation.*” The same month, Audrey and her parents attended a private Holy Mass in Rome with Pope John Paul II. Afterwards, the Holy Father and the sick girl spoke personally for a few minutes; the topic of their conversation remained their secret (photo above).

In June 1991, Fr. Thevenin visited Audrey at home and brought her greetings from the children of the Mission, who were all praying for her. He celebrated Holy Mass at Audrey's bedside. Strongly marked by her illness, she closed her eyes and made a deep thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion.

A few weeks later on August 22, 1991, the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, Audrey was allowed to go to her heavenly home.

Although she was only eight years old, she is an example to this day also for adults how to carry suffering out of love and to offer it for vocations and priests. From Audrey's

sacrifice of love, beautiful fruits have come forth, beginning with her family and relatives: Her older sister Aline (29) lives consecrated to God as a high school teacher in the USA, her

brother Henry (25) is preparing for the priesthood in Rome and also her cousin Paul (24) is following the call to the priesthood.

Fr. Mike McLean is the vicar of a large parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and at the same time a spiritual director at St. Mary's Seminary. He wrote to us in June, "I have indeed become a priest and am daily grateful to Audrey for her continuing role of intercession for me. I am sure that we are never sufficiently mindful or grateful for the powerful help from our heavenly friends ... who have gone before us." Fr. Mike celebrated his tenth anniversary of the priesthood in Rome in 2008. Audrey's brother Henry was an altar server, and on the altar was the "stole" which she knitted for her priest uncle in the hospital.

*First of all I would like to express my great joy
because gathered here are priests from all parts of the world,
in the joy of our vocation and in our willingness
to serve with all our strength
the Lord in our time.*

Pope Benedict XVI
at the prayer vigil on June 10, 2010 for the conclusion of the Year for Priests