

RELIGIEUSES DE L'ASSOMPTION
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10 mars 2016
Feast of St Marie Eugenie

« If we live more in God than self, we will always find in Him a great plenitude of joy and love and infinite opportunities, so to speak, for thanksgiving. »¹

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is always with sentiments of happiness and gratitude that I see the feast of St. Marie Eugenie our Foundress approaching.

The happiness of savouring through her the holiness of a life offered completely to God, a life which has borne fruit. In one way the feast of the 10th March reminds us of our own vocation to holiness. She links us to the Assumption of heaven, especially to all the martyrs, and to the Founders and Foundresses of our great Assumption family. Gratitude for the great faith and love of this woman who was attached to the Lord from the moment he revealed himself to her in a personal way. Faith and love which were the foundation of her life and the source of her confident audacity in undertaking the foundation of the Congregation. Our gratitude for the past is even more palpable in this penultimate preparatory year for the Bicentenary of her birth and that of Mother Therese Emmanuel, during which the last CGP encouraged us to pursue resolutely the crossing to the other side. We want to go forward with confidence, while relying on the faith of our ancestors in the Congregation, drawing our inspiration from them and even more from Him on whom they were anchored, Jesus Christ.

The sacred history of Marie Eugenie calls us to the same experience of totally committing our lives to the will of the Lord, to truth with ourselves and persevering commitment to give him glory by our deeds, even the smallest. Because everything makes sense as long as we live each moment of our lives and live them consciously.

Our vocation as a journey...

As we can say of the whole of our life, our baptismal vocation is a pilgrimage. The call heard in faith by each one is renewed. It mobilises us and leads us in a movement of going out from ourselves to live in relationship, to let the voice of him who calls resound. This was the experience of all our fathers and mothers in the faith, from Abraham down to the Apostles, whose footsteps we continue to follow – all of us, the disciples of today, heirs and heiresses of St Marie Eugenie, travellers searching for a face and a shore.

The following of Christ is lived out with others; it leads us to them, thus offering us the chance of helping one another and of supporting one another in our respective and complementary vocations, as was the experience of St Marie Eugenie. She knew how to perceive the right moment to give the YES, which directed and transformed her life. Once she had made the decision to devote herself to the mission which was entrusted to her, she never turned back. She had promised herself, and promised Fr. Combalot after much resistance: “Our

¹ MME Chapter, 13_Aug_1891, « On the Spirit of the Assumption: praise, love and joy»

*Lord has given me a great attraction for your work, I will willingly endure many things so as to devote myself to it entirely if it comes about..."*²

Love was the horizon, the light and the strength of St Marie Eugenie. We return to her footsteps each year, to remember her so that we may be inspired by her strength of soul, her total commitment, and above all her faith in a future she was far from imagining, a work which we have the responsibility of pursuing today.

A journey towards oneself...

St Marie Eugenie understood her vocation as a path of conversion, she received the grace of a *decided and decisive return to self, which is the beginning of the human journey*. She could be attentive to the Word of God and listen to her own thoughts, letting her deepest desire – to belong wholly to God – emerge. This explains her taste for rereading and her attachment to spiritual accompaniment. She knew equally how to trust her sisters, and in a special way Mother Therese Emmanuel, in a sort of mutual fraternal support, each consistently taking care of the other.

Her writings, evidence of her deep and real listening to God, allow us to retrieve her spiritual itinerary, very marked by a desire for holiness which Fr d'Alzon supported and encouraged. Marie Eugenie has left us the example of a personal journey, lived with honesty and the desire to grow in the truth of this call to holiness received in daily life. It is impressive to see how much time she spent in keeping a spiritual journal in the midst of a timetable already well filled by the demands of her responsibilities, her spiritual exercises, and her great fidelity to the on-going formation given to the sisters through her Chapter Instructions. She was very aware of the importance of laying solid foundations in this period of foundation, even if she didn't take herself too seriously: *"I am not a foundress, but I was the first stone thrown there by the hand of God"*³... *"we are all foundation stones"*⁴. She understood that she must open the path with and for others.

A journey towards others...

While our path of conversion turns us in the first instance towards ourselves, it is also a movement towards others, a going-out to them in questioning or confirmation, an affirmation of what we are. The threads of our humanity intertwine in the response to the personal call which we have all received: to help one another, to support one another in our life of faith and our diverse commitments. For *"if we live, we live for the Lord"*⁵ but also with and for others.

En route for the celebration of the Bicentenary, it is appropriate that we evoke the grace of friendship which united our Mother Foundress and Mother Therese Emmanuel. While giving herself completely to her specific mission in the community, the latter was a strong support and companion on the journey for Marie Eugenie. The meeting of these two women rooted in them a real mutual affection, marked by respect. In this way they were strengthened in the adventure which had brought them together. Their friendly and sisterly companionship is a beautiful example at the beginning of the Congregation.

Despite or because of their differences, our two mothers were a gift for each other, a revelation of the face of God which enabled them also to reveal themselves to each other as they were. Together and with all those who came to join them over the years, they put in place the foundations of the Congregation, placing in common their desires and attractions, their intuitions and their talents at the service of the project of God. Like Marie Eugenie and Therese Emmanuel, we can grow in love through mutual knowledge and support in community, with our friends and with all those who want to journey with us.

² MME, Letter to Fr Combalot, No.3, 14 July 1837

³ Origines IV, p.68 in the digital edition

⁴ MME to MTE, No. 352, 22 March 1851

⁵ Rom. 14:8

A rereading of the journey...

To help us in our own journey, perhaps we could remember the ability of Marie Eugenie for rereading, her capacity to contemplate her experiences and discern in them the work of God. The Church herself invites us to this same disposition of heart, during the celebration of the Paschal Vigil which we will soon be celebrating, a moment of solemn historical remembrance where we re-hear our own history, in that of Israel. It is a way of continuing the grateful rereading of our personal and community lives. Henri Nouwen used to say that *“a life on which one does not reflect is not worth living...”*⁶ The truthfulness of Marie Eugenie’s gaze on herself is an important factor in her human and spiritual growth. Her capacity to live from her great desire for the Reign of Christ and that of bearing within herself the likeness of Jesus made her capable of forgetting self, of giving herself without reserve, of loving beyond what she would have thought possible.

Perhaps we need to come back more often to ourselves, there where God gives us an appointment, so that we can meet him, and find our true “self” in Him, in the silence of a prayerful listening to ourselves which prepares us to listen attentively to others.

The Word of God takes its proper place in such an experience, illuminating, calming and also very revealing. *“Mary kept all these words in her heart and meditated on them in her heart”* (Lk. 2:19)... And Marie Eugenie said of the Gospel that we must meditate on it *“weighing the words as one weighs gold, with great respect and zeal to be conformed to it”*⁷ We can ask, through her intercession, the courage of looking like this at our lives and the grace to take on our own journey of holiness.

This year the feast of St Marie Eugenie enables us to mark a stage in our journey towards the celebration of the Bicentenary. It invites us to thanksgiving for our own sacred history. It is also the opportunity to remember those people who were witnesses of our vocation and of the fundamental and courageous choices of our lives. We can thank them once more for being there at the origin of our choices or for having confirmed and supported them.

Let us also unite our hearts in thanksgiving for the way opened by Marie Eugenie, for what the charism and spirituality of the Assumption have fashioned and developed in us, for what they have made of us. Like Mother Marie Eugenie, let us welcome our personal path of conversion under the merciful gaze of God, in this year when we are called to expose ourselves to the sunlight of his love so that we can radiate it around us.

May the rediscovery and deepening of the spiritual journey and the sacred history of Mother Marie Eugenie and Mother Therese Emmanuel enlighten our own experience of faith with its joys, struggles and lights and stimulate us to walk in the paths opened by them.

In this second year of preparation for the Bicentenary of their birth, may we be given the means to live a greater proximity to both of them!

In communion with the whole General Council, I wish you a happy feast!

Sr Martine Tapsoba
Superior General

⁶ NOUWEN HJM, *Pouvez-vous boire à la coupe que je vais boire ?*, Ed. Gallimard, 2000, p.20

⁷ MME, Notes Intimes, No. 206/01, 18 Feb. 1848, Retreat