



## In Memory of Mother Marie Catherine of the Child Jesus, Amélie Doumet

1852 - 1921

### Treasures of the Archives n°12

---

There are many souvenirs of the General Superiors in the Archives. In the spring of 2022, we will celebrate the centenary of the election of Mother Marie Joanna. She was elected “through correspondence”, after a sad episode in the history of the Congregation. Indeed, after the death of Mother Marie Celestine, in August 1921, the General Chapter gathered at Val Notre Dame had elected Mother Marie Catherine to succeed her as Superior General. The latter was carried away by a devastating illness, less than three months after her election. It is in Rome, land of the Popes and heart of the Church, that she rests for eternity. Many texts have been written by the Sisters to commemorate this great figure of the Congregation. Thus, Sister Camille Stanislas put together the memories of Sister Imelda<sup>1</sup>. Through a few excerpts from this text, which can be found in full on the Congregation's website, we are going to discover the personality of Mother Marie Catherine.

#### **The childhood and vocation of Amélie Doumet**

"Born in Cette<sup>2</sup> in 1852, Amélie Doumet had been brought up in Nîmes at the Priory of the Blessed Sacrament... she had grown up in the midst of this Roman movement, of this ultra-montane school of which Father d'Alzon was the living and active spirit. She remained invariably faithful to it. The last years of her education had been spent at the boarding school at Auteuil. It was there that she gave this beautiful manifestation of her astonishing memory. She recited the names and dates of all the Popes from Saint Peter to Pius IX, and at the request of her Mistress, to recite them again backwards this time, that is, from Pius IX to Saint Peter, with the same ease (...) Returning to her family, Amélie seemed ready to follow the common path when she lost a much-loved relative, who was at the same time one of the dearest daughters of our Mother Foundress. She was the first Mother Marie-Catherine, a great nun and a soul intimately and tenderly united to Our Lord. At the hour of Mother Marie-Catherine's death, Amélie, who was then in Nîmes, clearly heard these words in her heart: "You will replace your aunt at the Assumption." She immediately laid down her arms, and when she was able to enter the novitiate on November 11, 1871, we were not surprised to hear Mother say to her when giving her the bonnet: "Be a second Sister Marie Catherine. I cannot wish anything better for the Congregation, for you and for me.'"

---

<sup>1</sup> Gt 3 – Sr. Camille Stanislas

<sup>2</sup> Actually Sète (France)

The attachment of Amélie's family to the Assumption became more concrete when her brother, Father François Doumet, made his profession in the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption and her mother, who had become a widow, entered the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

### **Love of the Church and Attachment to the Successors of Peter**

One of the great characteristics of Mother Marie Catherine was her love for the Church, in particular her attachment to the Popes, which was evident from her youth when on a trip to Rome at the time of the First Vatican Council. "Amélie had made this first trip to Rome which had remained the dearest memory of her youth. It was during the Council, the Church had appeared to her in all its grandeur, and her enthusiasm for her was overflowing. She liked to tell us that, every day, the big event was to follow the Pope on his tour around the city. The driver was given this single instruction: "Follow the Pope's carriage", and then where the Pope got off, we got off (...) The good Pius IX had noticed this enterprising young girl whom he found everywhere and he called her 'my little French girl'."

### **Great apostolic influence**

"At 29, she was Superior first for a few days of the Paris Day School<sup>3</sup> which she founded, and then of Poitiers (...) In 1885, she returned to the Day School and, every day, under her guiding hands, the house was transformed, while the works grew and multiplied. More buildings were added. The chapel, dedicated to Our Lady of Salvation, became the radiant expression of her faith. There were courses for the children who were not boarders, conferences given (...). Retreats for the Children of Mary and for the ladies which augmented the influence of Mother and her beneficent and supernatural action. She was in the fullness of her activity and in all the brilliance of her marvelous gifts."

### **Fidelity to the commitments of her religious life**

"What was first striking was the perfect regularity that Mother Marie Catherine made reign in the convent and of which she gave the first example. Assuming or directing all the works, occupied at the same time with the affairs of the Congregation, constantly undertaking new works, we saw her promptitude in all the Community exercises. When she missed a recreation, it was a "catastrophe" and, to ensure her afternoon prayer, she placed it at the first hour, before visits and business, and, disturbed once, twice, three times, we saw her returning as many times to Our Lord, drawing from there in prayer that patience and that gift of herself of which she has always remained the perfect model."

---

<sup>3</sup> Lübeck

## **Deep and encouraging kindness**

“At that time, she seemed strict rather than good. She was timid which was surprising since she had many gifts, she had a cult for perfection which then seemed almost inflexible, all these causes and others could give her an appearance of coldness, of extreme reserve at least, from which one suffered when one knew her only superficially. But, as one got closer to her, one was touched and delighted by this deep, effective kindness, full of attention and solicitude. One was also comforted and, in a way, gained strength and ardor, by the sincerity and generosity with which she encouraged the efforts made. Only she knew how to draw from each soul, from each intelligence, the maximum fruitfulness. She respected and favored immensely any beneficial initiative! She allowed everyone to act in total freedom and yet she was the soul of each individual action, because one was sure to find by her side all the inspiration and support needed.”

## **Assistant to Mother Marie Celestine and General Bursar in difficult times**

In 1898, “Mother Marie Celestine, elected Superior General, trusted fully Mother Marie Catherine as Assistant General for many years. Then came the terrible years of persecution and exile. No other had struggled like her, none had to suffer like her, and yet, in this cruel hour, all remember with what hope-filled courage she organized all things so as to save what could be saved.”

Indeed, Mother Marie Catherine ensured the resistance at the time of the seizure of the property of Auteuil, securing the possessions and the Sisters. Sister Camille Stanislas continues: "During these painful years, Mother Marie Catherine lived a little in all the houses, assisting Mother General and carrying with her the weight of all the affairs and all the difficulties, and the Congregation knows everything that it owes to this precious collaboration. In the midst of absorbing and tedious tasks, she was nevertheless able to occupy herself with two works which were very dear to her. She put together in a small volume the instructions of our foundresses on the work of the Assumption on Christian teaching, and she took care of abridging the life of Mother Foundress found in the beautiful book of the Origins which is a treasure, but that our children and our friends do not always have time to read. After persecution came war. The first days of August 1814 found her in Paris. Judging that her position as Assistant was to be close to her Superior General, she left for Belgium since communications were going to be broken. When she reached Val Notre Dame, the enemy was in Liege. After two terrible years, she went out with Mother Marie-Celestine to establish the novitiate in a safer place, she spent the rest of the war in France, sharing the country's anxieties and hopes. Then came the new trials. after the victory and its inexhaustible joys, it was the long and painful illness and finally the holy death of Mother Marie Celestine.”

On September 26, 1921, when she was elected Superior General, “the Capitulants had not only recognized her high intelligence, her perfect knowledge of our history and our affairs. they were not only paying a debt of gratitude and admiration; they saw in Mother Marie Catherine of the Child Jesus, the living incarnation of the Assumption...”

## **The last trip to Rome**

Mother Marie Catherine wanted her first trip to be for the Pope who had blessed her election. A beautiful echo of her journey when she was young: "She delighted in the houses she was able to visit on her way: Paris, Bordighera, San Dalmazzo, Genoa. In a few hours she made herself loved and with her, the dear Assistant whom she had chosen, Mother Marie Joanna, whose filial tenderness and vigilance proved delightful. She arrived in Rome on Monday, December 5. The next day, having struggled too much against the illness, she had to take to her bed under the influence of broncho-pneumonia which immediately seemed fatal. From the third day, it was necessary to think of Extreme Unction. Our Mother was astonished but joyful and grateful. She received the sacrament of the dying believing herself to be in full life, but "admirable, it has been said, in her calmness, piety, and simplicity" (...) During this illness which continued to worsen, in the midst of painful suffocations, not once did she fail to welcome every care, every testimony of affection with a beautiful smile which was luminous."

It was on December 15, 1921 that she fell asleep, without apparent trouble, after recommending that we remain faithful to the spirit of our Mothers, to the traditions of the ancient Mothers, to the love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to the love of the Blessed Virgin, to the Office, to the love of the Church, to devotion to the Pope, to absolute submission "to everything that the Church says". She was 69 years old and had given 50 years of her life to the Assumption.

Sister Véronique Thiébaud, Archivist of the Congregation  
Based on the narrative by Sister Camille Stanislas  
Photos: Aurélie Devalliere