



## ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION – 2 MAY 1884

### The Historical Situation

1884, the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation: It was a year during which Mother Marie Eugenie often recalled the beginnings of the Congregation in her Chapters, it was also the year when Lourdes was founded, 26 years after the apparitions. The project had been in existence for ten years; at that time it was a “question of a house of retreat and prayer... fruit of the apostolate of the pilgrimages which is your work,” as Mother Marie Eugenie wrote to Father d’Alzon. Finally, circumstances led us to take over a boarding school belonging to the Benedictines with the monastery they had built opposite the grotto. Mother Therese Emmanuel had a great deal of influence in this foundation.

The Annals note that on the recreation day for St. Catherinie, Mother Marie Eugenie spoke of the beginnings of the Assumption and of the first sisters who had died.<sup>28</sup> On 2 May, she recalled for the sisters, the memory of “:those first days”, by re-reading “All that Our Lord has done for us.”

The Chapter of 2 May we completed by that of 9 May on “Devotion to the Blessed Virgin”, “If we belong to Our Lord, it is with Mary, through Mary and as daughters of Mary.” The chapter of 16 May, on “The purity of the love of Blessed Virgin,” and “This love is the model of our own,” as well as the two chapters on education, 21 and 30 May 1884, also follow the same lines.

On 13 June the word of St. Augustine, “The love of God pushed to the contempt of self” is explained by a passage on the foundation, and the basis of the Congregation. “You must not think it was only the first sisters who were charged to build this city of the Assumption.... You all have the

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Partage Auteuil No. 38, page 8

responsibility of giving example to those who will follow you. You must build on the stone which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

#### Texts from the Archives

The text of several chapters given during 1884, were written on large sheets of paper by the sisters who heard them and then these were seen, revised and corrected by Mother Marie Eugenie, in readiness for printing.<sup>30</sup> There are many corrections to the chapter of 2 May and certain passages were completely re-written.

The re-reading and corrections add to the value of the text as they help us to follow the progress and accuracy of the thought.

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My dear daughters,

We have just celebrated the anniversary of our foundation. Looking back to those first days and seeing all that Our Lord has done for us, I was struck by one thought that I would like to share with you. It is that in our work all comes from Jesus Christ, all belongs to Jesus Christ, all must be for Jesus Christ.

All comes from Jesus Christ. Who else, my sisters, outside of Him who called us, had a clear conception of what we were to be? Neither he<sup>31</sup> who at St. Anne d'Auray had what he believed to be the revelation of a desire of the Blessed Virgin to have daughters consecrated to the mystery of the Assumption, nor those of us who were the first sisters. All contributed something according to their particular ability but the greatest merit was that they were asked to give themselves without reserve, to a plan which unfolded into the unknown.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. The sentence quoted at the head of the chapter of the Rule of Life 1982. and presented in Partage Auteuil No. 37, pages 27-29.

<sup>30</sup> Series No. 1 GA.

<sup>31</sup> Abbe Combalot.

How did our spirit, our greatest treasure, develop? Our spirit, which you all know well and which makes up the particular personality of our Congregation, is above all Jesus Christ, the King of eternity, living in souls and in His Church. It is the extension of His reign within us and in others. It is a strong spirit of prayer, supported on the one hand by the Divine Office where we find the path of the saints

and the devotion of the Church, and on the other hand, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where we enter with Our Lord into the four aims of the divine Sacrifice. There is also the rosary which I so often see in your hands throughout the day, the Way of the Cross which so many of you find time to make. There is also a certain liberty of spirit which encourages us to live a life of virtue, not by constraint nor by minute regulations but by a greatness of spirit which urges us to obedience, poverty, humility, regularity, patience and mortification simply in order to please Our Lord and follow Him so that we will not be second to any other order in the practice of these virtues, and in conformity with our apostolate and Rule.

Then there is the fraternal spirit full of respect and simplicity which is something we draw from the Ancient Orders and from which comes the type of education we offer our pupils.

Who saw all this in the beginning? Who knew that we would have the Divine Office and the Blessed Sacrament exposed on our altars? Who foresaw these things? Our Lord alone knew, and it is under His guidance that little by little, by the Rules we wrote, by the customs we developed, by the graces which were given us, by the sisters God sent us, by the advice and virtues of those whom God placed on our path that all these things were revealed. It is for us not to preserve and develop them.

So much for the spirit. But who sent the sisters themselves? Was it not Our Lord who, from far and near drew them by His irresistible attraction, to His service? Each of you knows this attraction which the Lord places in the depths of a soul and by which He fills and draws it. You know that He puts before our eyes the crown of virginity, that He knows how to develop us with love for His service and for His beauty, the beauty of His infancy, of His Cross, of His holy Gospel, so often scorned today. You also know that it was He who, by His hidden action led these souls to the work He wished to establish. All comes from Jesus Christ.

All belongs to Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important than to fill one's soul, one's mind and one's will with the thought that all belongs to Jesus

Christ. Material things, property, houses, nothing that we use in this world belong to us. We began the foundation in a poor little apartment, then in rented houses. We were only a few young women without a place in the world. God has given us

convents, gardens, boarding, schools, chapels, furniture and objects of art. All comes from Him.

Is it for this reason that we attach ourselves to these things and consider them as our own? Is it not rather, that knowing we belong to Jesus Christ, we know that all these things are His also. It is Jesus Christ who has given them, it is to Him they belong and it is only for Him that we use them. If it pleases Him to withdraw any one of these things, should this worry us? Given the spirit He has given us, should we not rather count ourselves lucky to be able to return to where we began with such fervor?

But let us pass quickly over the possession of material goods and come to people. These also must be for Jesus Christ for those whom we love and who do us good, can also be possessed like property. To be attached to persons more than to property and materials goods is perhaps natural but it is not what God intends for those He has chosen for the extension of His Kingdom.

All must be for Jesus Christ. I have already spoken of the sovereign attraction by which God draws souls. This attraction is the gift of Himself. What a gift! The Incarnation of the Word! In His holy infancy what abandonment, what despoiling, what dependence. To what a state of powerlessness God reduced Himself in order to be given to us. The Gospel is none other than the great mystery of giving. This is the truth, this is salvation, that Christ gave Himself to us, until in the end, He gave Himself more completely still in the Eucharist and when He stretched Himself out on the cross. He gave His life to the last drop of His blood. Who does not feel that it is by this that Jesus Christ called us, by the beauty of His gift, the beauty of His love, of His abandon and generosity?

Has He called you to anything else? No, He calls us to give ourselves as He has given. If in the Incarnation He gave Himself entirely to men, then in the religious life we give ourselves entirely to Him. In His infancy, He holds out His arms to us so that we may become little, obedient and open without

resisting His divine will. What form will your life take? Will He make you an apostle, calling you to work far away? Will He call you to be a victim, stretching you out on a bed of suffering which is your cross? Whatever it is, He expects perfect abandonment from us so that having received all from Jesus Christ, then all that we are is for Jesus Christ to be used by Him and for Him.

Whether we are young or old, let us strive for an abandonment without reserve which will open our souls to an ardent desire for the extension of His kingdom. May we devote ourselves to this with all our strength, following the example of the Apostles of whom we think during this Eastertide. What did Our Lord do when He was risen? He formed His Church, finished preparing His apostles for the apostolate and for martyrdom and armed them to spread the truth, to belong to Him without reserve to be the incarnation of His teaching by spreading it to the very ends of the earth.

The evangelization of the world by the Apostles is a miracle; there is nowhere in the known world that an apostle has not set out to bring the teaching of Jesus Christ. Where did they obtain strength? From their union with their divine Master. They taught the Gospel and they became themselves the living expression of that Gospel. Jesus Christ lived in them and everything in their being proclaimed Him. Let us work to express Jesus Christ in our lives. Let us receive from Him what we are to give to others. Let us abandon ourselves without reserve, striving to contribute, according to our humble means, to extend His reign. Let us strive since we are His spouses, so that we may become His apostles.

These thoughts struck me as I saw what God has done with so little. I leave them for your meditation so that they may bring forth the fruits of God expects. Do you think that God has worked this miracle for nothing? Certainly to make something out of nothing is a miracle. In fact it is a bigger miracle than curing an illness. What a great miracle it is to make something so complete, holy and agreeable to God as a religious congregation out of nothing. Seeing it the prophet exclaimed, "How lovely are your tents, O Israel, how magnificent your battalions." Let us be both faithful and grateful.

Let us respond by working to become those magnificent armies. Let us respond to the miracle and continue it so that the designs of Jesus Christ

may be accomplished by the free commitment of each of us through ardent and generous love. This will open us to all Our Lord may ask of us in the way of perfection, of works of zeal, perhaps of suffering. Let our answer always be made with love and generosity.

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