

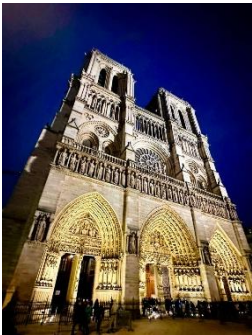


Chapter – 10 March 2026 Marie Eugenie's Experience at Notre-Dame



Very dear Sisters and Friends:
I wish you all a very happy feast of Saint Marie Eugenie!

I am delighted that this year we gratefully commemorate the 190th anniversary of **Marie Eugenie's conversion experience at Notre-Dame Cathedral**. This was not simply a moment of personal consolation



or spiritual insight; it was a profound encounter with the living God, mediated through Father Lacordaire's Lenten preaching in 1836, that reoriented her heart and reshaped her future, leading her to rediscover her Christian and religious vocations. Here, the Notre-Dame Cathedral itself is not incidental as it evokes tradition and consecration, embodies continuity with so many generations of Christians, and it shaped Marie Eugenie's dream of a life totally given to God and His mission. It is a wonderful grace that on this 10th of March, we – Sisters, students and mission partners in France – have the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist of the feast in the cathedral.

For our reflections this year, I shall thus focus on Saint Marie Eugénie's God-experience at Notre-Dame—an encounter that became the decisive turning point in her life. Saint Marie Eugenie talks about this experience in different ways. Several key insights stand out in her descriptions.

The first thing that captures my attention is that Marie Eugenie makes the distinction between being "touched by God" earlier at Holy Communion and "**hearing God's voice**" at Notre-Dame: "God had... first touched my soul at my first Communion, but I did not understand it. It was at Notre-Dame that I began to hear His voice."¹ The Lenten sermons at Notre Dame provided an opportunity to interpret and awaken in her the experience of God. The earlier implicit grace has now become explicit and more real.

About her experience at Notre-Dame, Marie Eugenie writes to Father Lacordaire: "Grace was waiting for me there. Your words answered all my thoughts, explained my instincts, completed my understanding of things, rekindled in me the idea of duty and the desire for good which were ready to wither in my soul; they gave me a new generosity, a faith that nothing could ever shake."² Marie Eugenie experiences **grace** as an **interior awakening or illumination**. She describes Lacordaire's sermon as God's voice answering her questions, clarifying her thoughts, explaining her instincts, and completing her understanding. This points to a God-experience characterised by inner clarity and integration: confusion gives way to meaning, and instinct and intellect are reconciled with faith engaging the whole person. God is experienced as one who knows her interior life and responds directly to it. Her experience is not a single emotional moment but a steady process of conversion: a revival of duty and moral desire, renewed generosity, and a faith that, she believes, "nothing could ever shake." God is encountered as a restoring and stabilising force, reorienting her life toward good when it was "ready to wither." It became her **foundational experience of God**.

In her Letter to Father Picard, Marie Eugenie speaks of the foundations of her **Christian vocation**: "My resolution from that time on was to become a serious and true Christian, not in the manner of the world,

¹ Saint Marie Eugenie's Letter to Father Picard, No. 1509, dated 8 November 1862. This text also exists in the archives of the Fathers of the Assumption under the number CL.DL N° 103.

² Saint Marie Eugenie's Letter to Father Lacordaire, Vol. VI, No. 1501, dated 13 December 1841.

but in the manner of the Gospel.”³ Her God-experience at Note-Dame leads her to a radical redefinition of Christian life. Her resolution is revealing that encountering God means conversion—rejecting superficial religiosity and embracing Gospel seriousness. God claims the whole life.

In her letter to Father Lacordaire, Marie Eugénie also alludes to the awakening of her **religious vocation**: “Although (...) my first thoughts of religious vocation hardly elicited more than a smile from you, ...I was truly converted and had conceived the desire to give all my strength, or rather all my weakness, to this Church which, in my view, was the only one on earth that possessed the secret and power of good.”⁴ Here we encounter a spirituality in which God works through limitation and fragility. Vocation is awakened not by human certainty but by humility and interior surrender. Although she acknowledges her initial hesitation— noting that her first thoughts about vocation were met only with a smile—she nevertheless undergoes a profound interior conversion. Her experience of God does not lead to triumphal assurance, but to a humble offering of self: “to give all my strength, or rather all my weakness.” It culminates in the firm conviction that the Church alone “held ... the secret and the power of good.” God is not encountered apart from ecclesial communion; rather, faith matures into a committed belonging, inseparably united to the life and mission of the Church.

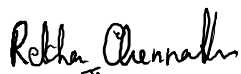
As a committed religious, Marie Eugénie continually returned to this grace-filled beginning. In times of uncertainty, struggle, or discernment, Notre-Dame remained a **spiritual touchstone** – a place of memory and renewal, where her courage was restored and her vision clarified. It grounded her fidelity and sustained her hope, reminding her that her mission was not her own initiative, but God’s work entrusted to her.

In reflecting upon these foundational experiences, we are invited to do more than recall the narrative of her life. We are summoned to go back to the **original grace** that sustains our Christian and religious callings – to attentive rereading and discernment of the resonance of God’s voice within our own histories. Which experiences have shaped our faith and clarified our vocation? Which moment, place, or season awakened within us an awareness of God’s love and God’s call – whether to discipleship or to religious life? In what moments have we encountered the God who transforms, who sends forth, and who faithfully sustains?

What is your foundational experience of God? Identify and share an event or experience that transformed you, or one you return to when you face difficulties and questions.

By returning to the moment of our foundational grace – both personally and as a community/family (schools, social centres, or places of ministry) – we allow ourselves, like Marie Eugénie, to be continually renewed in faith/zeal and steadfastly recommitted to the mission entrusted to us in the present moment of our history. Within these sacred beginnings lie the spiritual resources we need today—sources of healing, renewal, and hope that build up a society ever more just, peaceful, and deeply rooted in the Gospel. Let us strive to make Saint Marie Eugénie smile upon us!

With all my affection and prayers!



Rekha M. Chennattu, RA
Sister General

Auteuil, 5 March 2026

³ Letter to Father Picard, No. 1509, dated 8 November 1862.

⁴ Letter to Father Lacordaire, Vol. VI, No. 1501.