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Chapter Fourteen: Sister Rosalie's Reputation for Sanctity

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CHAPTER XIV

SISTER ROSALIE'S REPUTATION FOR SANCTITY

FUNERAL, REPUTATION IN PARIS AND BEYOND, CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION, BEATIFICATION

Sister Rosalie was buried from the church of Saint-Médard on 9 February 1856. She was 70 years of age and 54 years of vocation. Nearly her entire life as a Daughter of Charity had been spent in the Mouffetard district. Thus, it was not surprising that her "beloved poor," who had waited hours in line to view her mortal remains and pay final tribute to their "Mother," would close their modest businesses or leave their work to accompany, to her final resting place, "the woman who, for such a longtime, had been the instrument of Providence... in their lives."⁷⁰⁵ According to Sister Saillard, who was present, they numbered 60,000.⁷⁰⁶ Others place the number at 40 or 50,000.

The accounts of the ceremony are nearly identical. We will rely on newspaper reports following the funeral and especially on Melun, as he was in attendance. Descriptions in later biographies are based on his. Amidst his grief and personal sense of loss, his eye recorded for posterity all that was happening around this humble Daughter of Saint Vincent as she left the Mouffetard district for the last time. He recounts the extraordinary event:

At 11 o'clock, the cortège left the house; ...the clergy of Saint-Médard, joined by a large number of ecclesiastics [and representatives of religious orders], walked at the head [of the procession], preceded by the cross [which was permitted to be on public display because of the occasion]; the girls from the school and the workshops honored the works of their Mother; the Sisters of Charity surrounded the casket [that had been] placed on the hearse of the poor, as Sister Rosalie had requested, so that Saint Vincent

⁷⁰⁵ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 67.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

de Paul could recognize her, to the end, as one of his Daughters. They were followed by the municipal administration and the [administrators of the] Bureau of Public Assistance of the XIIth arrondissement. Behind them, crowded together, was one of those multitudes that can neither be counted nor described, from every level of society, every age-group, and every profession; an entire people with its rich and its poor; its intellectuals and its workers; everything in it that was most illustrious and most obscure; all mixed in together, all mingling and expressing in diverse manners and different words the same sorrow and the same admiration. All came to express their gratitude for a service rendered or to praise... [Sister Rosalie] and to convey their last respects. One could say that the holy deceased had made an appointment, around her coffin, with all those she had visited, assisted, and counseled during the long years of her life. Moreover, she still exercised the influence of her presence and her words over them, as these men [and women], belonging to the most widely [diverse sectors] of society, separated by their education, their ideas, and their positions, who perhaps never met until now except to clash, were united that day in the same thought and the same recollection.⁷⁰⁷

Sister Rosalie's funeral was a testimony to her genius for uniting men and women, who had little else in common, in the pursuit of the Vincentian mission of service to those who were poor. Melun describes this exceptional scene in a very polarized society, "Factions vanished; hatreds dissipated; passions were stilled. There were only brothers [and sisters] and children who were accompanying their sister and mother to her final resting place."⁷⁰⁸

The funeral procession did not go directly to the church. Instead it made a rather long detour through the quarter known as Sister Rosalie's "diocese," so she could bid a final farewell to the streets

⁷⁰⁷ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 246-247.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

she had walked and the district she had so deeply loved. And all along the way, those who could not be part of the funeral cortège lined the streets or stood in doorways or at windows with their children, "...bowed their heads, made the sign of the cross, and whispered a prayer."⁷⁰⁹

Those who were present for the funeral procession as it passed through the streets of the Mouffetard district and were there to honor Sister Rosalie for all that she had come to mean in their lives, understood why the shops and factories were closed; why workers had left their employment; why municipal authorities, including the Prefect of Police, as well as Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud and his wife, and the mayors of several other Paris arrondissements; the pastors of many parishes of the capital; representatives of religious congregations; and the leadership of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, represented by Emmanuel Bailly and Adolphe Baudon, president of the Society, had come together for the occasion. Visitors could have quite reasonably believed they were witnessing a state funeral.

The only dissonant note was the object of all the attention, a simple, unadorned, wooden casket on a hearse used to transport the bodies of those who were poor to their equally poor resting place. This demonstrated that this was not an example "of human glory or a worldly triumph. What was happening before their eyes was something that earthly ideas cannot explain."⁷¹⁰

The procession finally reached the church of Saint-Médard where the Funeral Mass was celebrated by the pastor, Abbé Jean-Joseph Falcimagne, who had been a close collaborator of Sister Rosalie and had administered the last rites to her. At the end of his sermon, he said, "in a voice that betrayed his emotion" that of all the works in which Sister Rosalie had served those in need in the Mouffetard district the Day Nursery was "closest to her heart. He then invited those in attendance to a sermon on this subject the following Friday at the church of Saint-Roch."⁷¹¹

The doors of the small parish church had been closed earlier so as to leave room for the Daughters of Charity who wanted to bid a final farewell to Sister Rosalie. According to newspaper accounts of the funeral, they filled one side of the nave. The final prayers were

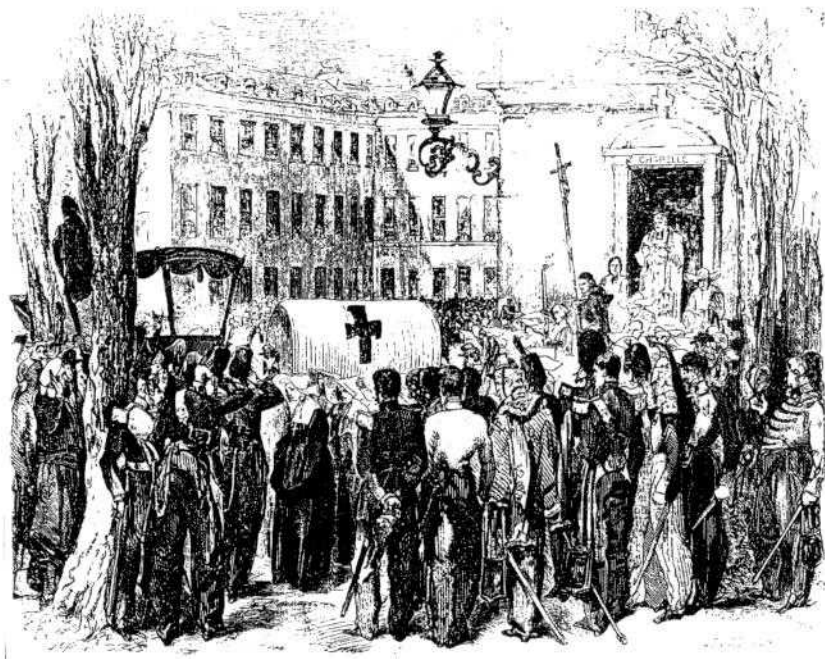
⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ P. de Selle, in *La Gazette de France*, 10 February 1856, 1.

offered by Abbé Surat, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Paris, whom the archbishop, Monseigneur Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour, sent as his representative.

As Sister Rosalie had been awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor, there was a military honor guard surrounding the catafalque. A Cross was placed on the pall but it was not hers. The sisters refused to put it there although they had placed it on the coffin during the two days of her wake. They obviously felt that having it on public display during the funeral would be as great an assault on their superior's humility as the reception of the award had been. However, as during her lifetime, she was not to be allowed to pass unnoticed or to receive the simple burial of a humble Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul, which was all she ever aspired to be despite the accolades of the wealthy and powerful as well as her "beloved poor" that enveloped her. The Cross placed on her coffin belonged to one of the administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance. It was perhaps a fitting remembrance of Sister Rosalie's exceptional gift for collaborating with the public sector, whatever the politics of the moment, even the most anti-clerical, for the good of those who were poor.



Crowd outside the church of Saint-Médard for the funeral of Sister Rosalie.

Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

After the Funeral Mass, the same procession proceeded to Montparnasse Cemetery. Sister Rosalie was laid to rest among many other Daughters of Charity, exhausted, as she was, after giving their lives to God in the Company for the service of those in need. When the ceremony ended, the Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement, Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, who had been Sister Rosalie's friend as well as her collaborator for 40 years, spoke to the mourners. He expressed, with a combination of eloquence, Christian consciousness, and public awareness, the sentiments of all. We cite him textually:

Gentlemen,

Recollection and prayer would have, perhaps, responded with greater dignity to the sentiment of this great mourning.

Indeed, we understand that there is no language worthy of the universal regret united around this grave, of all those present, and this self-impelled crowd. Neither will the majesty of the funeral nor the ever-transfixing spectacle of the grandeur and power placed before us by the Divine Will which is leading us to this inevitable rendezvous.

However, we are accomplishing a pious duty by expressing the final farewell and the manifestation of tender respect of the XIIth arrondissement at Sister Rosalie's grave. If her name and works belong to the Christian world, if all of France lays claim to them, if Paris is proud of them, it is in the XIIth arrondissement that she devoted herself; it is in our midst, in the poorest quarter, among the greatest miseries, that, for more than fifty years, she placed her happiness and found glory by assisting and comforting us.

This is neither the time nor the place to recount her very full life. A single phrase sums it up – born for the world, she lived for charity. A worthy Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul, she wore the habit of her Order in such a way that, difficult as it may appear,

she made it still more respected and more loved by the people.

She lived our civil struggles in an attitude that was true to her Christian mission; one could say that, during each trial, her influence solidified yet more as her charity became more ardent.

An august hand had placed the Cross of the Legion of Honor on her bosom. Her humility would not allow her to leave it there. She thought it could appear that so much merit and virtue was accomplished for our worldly recognition. Her recompense was not of this world.

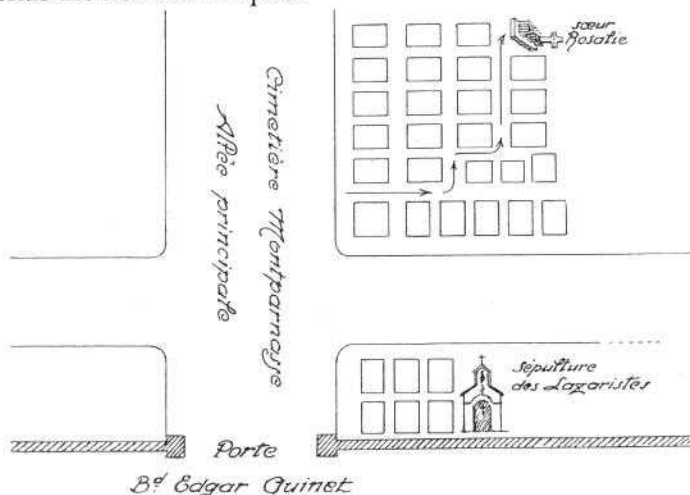
Indulgent and firm, accessible and respected, she joined an understanding, which made it a kind of public function, to the movement of charity. Reliable for advice, zealous to serve, we admired in her the decisiveness of the administrator and this fertility of resources to do good that shone in the heart of the woman. She had received from Heaven, this gift of privileged souls, this power to draw others, whence came forth a part of her strength. She became the depository of secret donations and the source of so many blessings coming from her hands.

We can say that Sister Rosalie's name will be united to public gratitude so long as it will please God to bequeath to us the tribute of suffering and the cult of Charity. You have seen how she filled with her spirit and animated by her great soul, those institutions on which the hope for a better future of our indigent families rest, the Day Nursery, the Shelter, the School, and the Ourvoir. These are the treasures enclosed in the walls of this holy house of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, noble threshold, watered by so many tears of gratitude and which our beloved Empress and Emperor did not hesitate to cross. Desolate threshold

today that Sister Rosalie left only to exchange her too brief existence for eternal life.

Sister Rosalie, farewell! Pray for us!⁷¹²

Following the mayor's discourse, the mourners left the cemetery to return to their elegant homes or miserable hovels, their hearts heavy with the awareness that Sister Rosalie, who had been such an integral part of their lives for so many years, was no longer with them. Some could not bring themselves to depart so, when the gates were closed at dusk, they remained outside them praying to her. A few months later, because of the crowds that continued to visit her grave and to place flowers on it, her remains were transferred to a new resting place, one that was closer to the entrance to the cemetery, so that it would be more accessible to those coming to pray there. This was not a Daughter of Charity vault. Rather, Sister Rosalie was now buried alone. This was highly unusual and one has to wonder if those responsible were not thinking of her future Beatification, which would entail the exhumation of her body. A stone was placed on the grave bearing the inscription, "To our good mother Rosalie, her grateful friends the rich and the poor."



Sister Rosalie's Montparnasse gravesite location from main cemetery entrance.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris

⁷¹² Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, "Discours prononcé sur la tombe de Sœur Rosalie, le jour de ses obsèques," 9 February 1856, in *Inauguration du Buste de Sœur Rosalie* (Paris: 1856), 36-38.

Throughout Sister Rosalie's life there were those who spoke of her as a "saint." The wake and funeral, however, seemed to concretize this view among believers and non-believers alike. The days following her death saw numerous newspaper articles on her. Some were simple obituaries. Nonetheless, even these brief accounts acknowledged that those who were poor had lost their "mother" and the woman who had been the incarnation of "Providence" in their lives for better than half a century. In presenting these newspaper accounts at the time of the Process of Beatification, Léonce Celier, Inspector General of the Archives of France wrote:

These eulogies, by their very nature, can be suspected of omissions or exaggerations; however, if one takes into account their number, their unanimity, and their origin, as several appeared in newspapers hostile to the Church, one finds there, at the very least, proof of the admiration that the charitable action of the Servant of God called forth in every milieu.⁷¹³

Some of the articles published after Sister Rosalie's death were longer. They gave details of the public outpouring of respect, love, and gratitude that accompanied Sister Rosalie to her final resting place, as well as details concerning her life. As early as 8 February, *L'Univers*, the principal Catholic newspaper of the era, directed by Louis Veuillot, announced her death and urged readers to join in the tears and prayers of the unfortunate in their time of loss. On 9 February, the news appeared in *Le Constitutionnel*, a leftist publication; *La Gazette de France*, a Catholic newspaper with legitimist leanings, supporting the Bourbons dethroned in 1830 (it would publish more in-depth articles on Sister Rosalie in the 10 and 12 February editions); *Le Journal des Débats*, predecessor of today's wide circulation Paris daily, *Le Monde*; *La Patrie*, another wide circulation daily but directed toward the working classes (the latter also published a longer article in the 11 February edition, both under the by-line of Alfred Tranchant); two smaller papers, *Le Siècle* and *Le Pays*, published the obituary and information concerning funeral arrangements.

On 10 February, *Le Moniteur Universel*, official organ of the Empire, *L'Union Catholique*, and *L'Univers* all published longer tributes

⁷¹³ Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio, Sommaire*, 32.

to the woman whose loss so profoundly affected those most in need in the poorest district of the capital. *Le Moniteur Universel* referred to Sister Rosalie as a "holy woman;" *L'Union Catholique* as a "pious and worthy woman." The article in *L'Univers* was by the publisher, Louis Veuillot. Among other accolades, he wrote, "The population of the quarter greeted... the mortal remains of this humble and illustrious virgin, who was, for a half-century, the consoling angel for all types of human misery and the perfect model of that marvelous work of faith we call a Sister of Charity."⁷¹⁴

On 11 February, Léon Aubineau published a long eulogy on Sister Rosalie on the first page of *L'Univers* and *L'Union Catholique*. He provided numerous details about the funeral and went on to speak of Sister Rosalie's virtues:

We cannot consider giving a simple overview of Sister Rosalie's works. It suffices to say that, endowed with a prodigious capacity for action, she spent her days solely occupied with her neighbor, without a single moment of rest other than the time she consecrated to prayer. [This time of prayer] is not the period during which she worked the least efficaciously at her daily tasks. We will not speak of her virtues as a religious, her humility, or her love for her Congregation. To see her as she appeared in the midst of the world, we can discern the depth of her heart [and the] spirit of self-sacrifice and humility in which this active charity took root.⁷¹⁵

All this public acclamation would undoubtedly have distressed Sister Rosalie. However, in his article in *La Gazette de France* of 12 February, P. de Selle, speaking for himself and his fellow journalists, was unapologetic for the general praise the press was according Sister Rosalie. She had carefully avoided acclaim during her lifetime but she could not escape it in death. He wrote:

The Saint-Marceau district has just witnessed the extinction of a life that was as great before God as

⁷¹⁴ Louis Veuillot, in *L'Univers*, 10 February 1856, 1.

Note: This article appeared in *L'Union Catholique* on the same day.

⁷¹⁵ Léon Aubineau, in *L'Univers* and *L'Union Catholique*, 11 February 1856, 1.

it was humble before the world. Sister Rosalie, the mother of those who were poor and the consolation of all those who suffered, died 7 February... From her resting place with the angels, where she has gone to receive the warranted recompense for her great merit, may she forgive us for the publicity we are according her name. God allows the saints to remove themselves from public veneration while they are on earth. However, the splendor of their virtues betrays them after their death and shines around their memory to serve as a beacon to guide us along the perilous routes of life.⁷¹⁶

Three articles came a bit later: Eugène Rendu's on 16 February in *Le Messager de la Charité*; Sylvain Caubert's in *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, 24 February - 2 March 1856; and Alexis Chevalier's in *Les Annales de la Charité*, February 1856. In his article, Eugène Rendu described his cousin and collaborator's funeral and recounted some details of her life. He also called for a biography of Sister Rosalie:

We hope that a life of Sister Rosalie will be written. A life that was so humble and so great, so obscure yet so striking, such a life needs to become known. So many secret treasures, so many hidden virtues, so much good buried in grateful memories must be revealed. For the glory of Christianity, this extraordinary authority invested in a Daughter of Charity, this prodigious ascendancy of a modest servant of the poor, which reached the highest levels of society, must be explained by the daily merit of a life of self-giving, poverty, and sacrifice. Sister Rosalie was a force. One after another, those in positions of power fell under the spell of the irresistible magnetism she was able to exert from near and far. All paid homage to her superior virtue.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁶ P. de Selle, in *La Gazette de France*, 12 February 1856, 1.

⁷¹⁷ Eugène Rendu, in *Le Messager de Charité*, no. 102, 16 February 1856, 1.

Sylvain Caubert, a longtime collaborator of Sister Rosalie, paid tribute to her saying, "May one of the oldest friends of this holy woman, ...the most humble and most devoted soldier in her large army, be allowed to add a few flowers to the crown already covering her grave."⁷¹⁸ Nor did he hesitate to address her in prayer, "Holy Sister, who art in heaven, forgive us for having broken the silence you imposed for so long; and see in this vast outpouring [of homage] by your Daughters, your companions, your poor, and your friends, only the triumph of religion and charity."⁷¹⁹

Alexis Chevalier's article confirmed the fulfillment of Eugène Rendu's wish for a biography of Sister Rosalie. After expressing his respect for the deceased, Chevalier announced that the founder of the *Annales*, the Viscount Armand de Melun, would be writing a life of Sister Rosalie.⁷²⁰

It is not at all surprising that Melun would do so. He knew Sister Rosalie very well. As we have seen, she had been his mentor and support for 20 years. However, he also knew her companions and some of her other collaborators, thus eyewitnesses were available to him. Moreover, he had the necessary talent and, although his life was a busy one, he could take the time required to accomplish such a task. He may very well have made the decision to do this the day of Sister Rosalie's death, as he knelt beside her remains and "wept and prayed" with the sisters of the house.

In the preface to his work, published in 1857, Melun wrote of the seminal idea leading to his biography, "The very day of Sister Rosalie's funeral, amidst universal mourning, a thought occurred to some of her friends. They promised, as a means for alleviating their grief, to put together all they remembered of her life and present their recollections [to each other]. This book is the fulfillment of that promise."⁷²¹

While Melun had weekly direct contact with Sister Rosalie, he did not limit his work to his personal recollections. He contacted many of Sister Rosalie's friends and collaborators, particularly the Daughters of Charity who had shared their community lives and ministry with her. He took detailed notes during the interviews because "...he was

⁷¹⁸ Sylvain Caubert, in *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, 24 February - 2 March 1856, 124.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷²⁰ See Alexis Chevalier, in *Les Annales de la Charité*, February 1856, 127-128.

⁷²¹ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, IX.

serious about the exactitude and the sincerity of his account. He learned the sayings he repeats from those who heard them. The facts he reports were recounted by participants or witnesses. Moreover, his personal remarks are the fruit of a long and respectful friendship with the person whose life he is writing. [This] friendship must be considered the guarantee and safeguard of his work."⁷²²

Nonetheless, Melun felt obliged to submit his manuscript to the scrutiny of the Daughters of Charity. We have already seen that Sister Costalin was among them. However, there were others. In December 1856, Melun wrote to a certain Monsieur de Lambel saying:

I have gleaned from the mouths of the Sisters everything that could be harvested from this field in which I am the lowly reaper. Finally, yesterday, I took my courage in both hands and, despite snow, rain, and sleet, I went to Chartres and spent four hours reading my book to Sister Constance and asking her about her recollections. She had practically nothing to add to my treasure troth. However, she made my trip worthwhile by telling me, from the bottom of her heart, that while listening to me she thought she could see Sister Rosalie once again. Sister Félicité from Ménilmontant and Sister Louise from Val de Grâce told me the same thing.⁷²³

Beyond the grandiloquence of some of the eulogies, there are certain elements that recur like a leitmotiv in all of them, including Melun's biography. To name a few: the charismatic Sister Rosalie lived a largely hidden life; her earthly existence was marked by heroic action during revolutions and cholera epidemics, nonetheless, she fulfilled her vocation of servant of those who were poor as a humble Daughter of Charity who, united to God, performed the ordinary acts of a dedicated life extraordinarily well; she became a light shining in the darkness of grinding poverty; and, she loved and respected all her friends and collaborators, especially her "beloved poor." Caubert,

⁷²² *Ibid.*, X-XI.

⁷²³ *Letter of Armand de Melun to Monsieur de Lambel*, December 1856. Archives of Viscount Armand de Melun. Cited by Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 307.

perhaps, best articulated the secret of her remarkable magnetism that called forth personal dedication in so many others, both rich and poor, when he wrote:

...[Sister Rosalie] sought only to remain hidden and small and to conceal her merit, stepping back so that others might be in the limelight. Whatever she did, in her eyes, it was never adequate or done well enough. Someone said to her, "Mother, look at your influence. No one [is ever in the situation of] regretting having refused one of your requests. For you, to ask and to obtain are synonymous." [She responded,] "What merit do I have in that? People are so good to me. All the gratitude goes to God and to those who deign to make use of me as an instrument."⁷²⁴

Melun's close relationship with Sister Rosalie for so many years revealed the nature of her sanctity to him – the humble performance of the ordinary done extraordinarily well. As a Catholic intellectual, he most likely also knew that, if the Church was ever going to raise her to the altar as a saint, it would not be because of her heroism on the barricades or even during the cholera epidemics but because of her virtue in carrying out the simple acts of daily charity. Melun, of course, speaks of Sister Rosalie's courage in dangerous situations. However, these episodes play only a small part in his biography which appeared in 13 editions, the final one coming out in 1929. Melun presents her as he knew her, as a "Daughter of Charity and only that." The final two paragraphs of his *Life of Sister Rosalie, Daughter of Charity*, read:

...Through a rare exception, men [and women], who reserve their applause for the ostentatious and resounding, admired obscurity and silence in [Sister Rosalie]. They glorified the humility of simple duty and preferred the perfection of work without pretension. Briefly put, they judged [Sister Rosalie] as God Himself did.

⁷²⁴ Caubert, *La Semaine religieuse*, 126-127.

To accomplish ordinary things as well as possible, this was the rule and aim of Sister Rosalie's entire life. Today this is her merit and her glory in the eyes of God and the world. It will be the great and salutary lesson of her story.⁷²⁵

With the passage of time, eulogies written on the occasion of Sister Rosalie's death, and even Melun's biography, may well have slipped into the obscurity of libraries and researchers' notes. Perhaps, fearing this, some of her friends sought to raise more permanent memorials to her. The Mayor of the XIIth arrondissement was not satisfied to honor Sister Rosalie with a graveside eulogy. On 16 February 1856, only a week after her death, he wrote to the Minister of State and the Imperial Household seeking authorization to have a bust of Sister Rosalie sculpted by the artist Hippolyte Maindron. He also asked the minister to provide a block of marble for the work, which the sculptor had agreed to do gratuitously. By an ordinance of 28 June 1856, Emperor Napoléon III authorized the mayor to place the completed work in the assembly room of the town hall.



Marble bust of Sister Rosalie by Hippolyte Maindron,
located in the Museum of Public Assistance, Paris.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

⁷²⁵ Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 263.

The dedication of the bust took place on Monday, 22 December 1856, in the same assembly room where other benefactors of the XIIth arrondissement were likewise memorialized. Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, assisted by the Mayor of the Xth arrondissement and Viscount Armand de Melun, presided. In his discourse, the Mayor, Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, remarked that, in these modest surroundings, the inhabitants of the Saint-Marceau district were according Sister Rosalie "a sort of local tribute without fanfare which... respects the touching simplicity of [her] life." He then added, "You are aware that what is most enlightened in religion, most tender in pity, and most angelic in charity [all] come together in this admirable Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul."⁷²⁶

Although the ceremony itself was simple, the attendance was impressive. It included, in addition to the Daughters of Charity, members of the Rendu family; the Director, doctors and administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance; officials of French education; a justice of the peace; the Prefect of Police; and the Dean of the church of Sainte-Geneviève.

The bust took a circuitous route before reaching the Museum of Public Assistance on the quai de la Tournelle, where it has been on display since 1934. From the year of Sister Rosalie's death until 1880, the bust remained in the assembly room where the mayor had put it. In 1880, however, the anti-clerical municipal councilors, profiting from the anti-religious decrees of Jules Ferry, Prime Minister and Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, ordered it removed to the attic of the town hall. The diatribe justifying the removal of the bust appeared in *Le Figaro* of 30 August 1880. Desmet finds this whole affair so ridiculous that he refuses to cite it.⁷²⁷ Be that as it may, the bust was soon taken from its hiding place to the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and placed in Sister Rosalie's tiny office. It did not remain there very long as the Daughters of Charity were expelled from the house within days. Not wanting to see Sister Rosalie's work vanish, some Catholics of Paris raised enough money, in five days, to purchase a new location for the sisters at 32, rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. By October 1880, they were able to reopen the school and, not long after, all the other works of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. The new site would be called "Maison Sœur Rosalie."⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, *Inauguration du Buste*, 16.

⁷²⁷ See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 295-296.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-298.

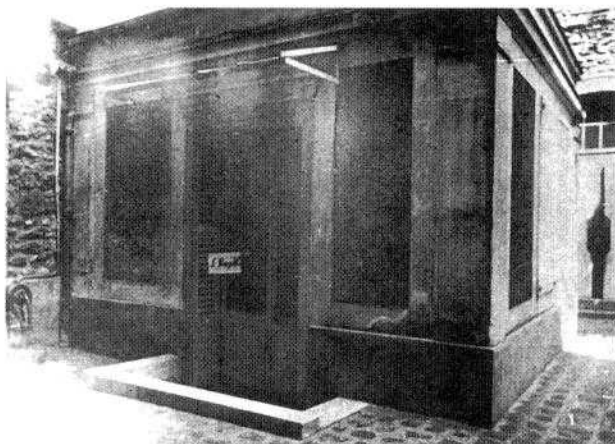
Somehow, Sister Rosalie's little office remained where it was, albeit in poor condition and disuse. One way or another, it had survived moves, construction, political unrest, and two major wars, as a silent reminder of the woman who, for half a century, had made the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois the command post for the service of those in need in the Mouffetard district. Following the celebration of the centenary of Sister Rosalie's death, Henri Desmet, C.M., approached officials of the Bureau of Public Assistance and the city of Paris, expressing his desire to see the office restored and refurnished with the humble objects Sister Rosalie had used and which were then at "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. Father Desmet hoped to see it subsequently open as a museum in memory of Sister Rosalie. His wish was realized on 1 October 1962 because "Paris remains faithful to all those who have loved and served her; to love and to serve was the rule that directed Sister Rosalie's entire life."⁷²⁹

If the attendance at the Dedication of the Bust was impressive, the group assisting at the Dedication of the Museum, "Sœur Rosalie," was even more so. Included were, Jean Benedetti, Prefect of the Seine; Pierre-Christian Taittinger, President of the Municipal Council of Paris; Édouard Frédéric-Dupont, Vice-President of the National Assembly; Monsieur Damelon, Director General of the Bureau of Public Assistance; four Municipal Councilors; Marcel Candille, Director of Documentation Services and the Archives of the Bureau of Public Assistance; Cardinal Maurice Feltin (1949-1966); and representing the Daughters of Charity, Sister Suzanne Guillemain, Superioress General (1962-1968). While all the speakers spoke glowingly as well as knowledgeably of Sister Rosalie, 106 years after her death, it was, perhaps, Marcel Candille who best expressed the significance of the event for Sister Rosalie, the city of Paris, and the Bureau of Public Assistance when he said:

Today, by dedicating this museum, "Sœur Rosalie," ... the Bureau of Public Assistance of Paris honors itself and, at the same time, it rejoices at invoking one of the purest figures of our own history and the moving history of Parisian charity. We must say that, if

⁷²⁹ "Discours de Pierre-Christian Taittinger, Président du Conseil Municipal de Paris," in *Inauguration du Musée "Sœur Rosalie"* (Paris: 1962), 25.

the objects gathered here are simple, this is less a commemorative museum than a museum of example, example for all those who, like us, share the vocation and the duty to come to the aid of physical and moral suffering as well as misery.⁷³⁰



Photograph of Museum "Sœur Rosalie" commemorating Sister Rosalie's office/parlor.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

The museum has finally given way to construction, but the furnishings from Sister Rosalie's little office are now on display in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris.

As for the building on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, it was partially demolished in 1903. In 1904, a new shelter for the elderly was built. It was taken charge of by the Bureau of Public Assistance and run by lay people. It continued, however, to be named "Hospice Sœur Rosalie."⁷³¹ At this time, the bust was transferred to the Bureau of Public Assistance. It found a permanent home in the museum on the quai de la Tournelle because it was considered "one of the most significant works in the collection." Neither the city of Paris nor the Bureau of Public Assistance will allow Sister Rosalie to be forgotten.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ "Discours de Monsieur Candille," in *Inauguration du Musée*, 12-13.

⁷³¹ See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 298.

⁷³² "Discours de Monsieur Candille," in *Inauguration du Musée*, 12.

The Church of Paris, however, did not want to be left out of the effusion of admiration showering down on Sister Rosalie. Thus, in 1859, Abbé Le Rebours (1822-1894), pastor of the church of the Madeleine, who had been a collaborator of Sister Rosalie, wanted to continue her work and perpetuate her memory in the quarter where she had labored. He purchased land on rue de Gentilly to build a chapel in honor of Saint Rosalie of Palermo, Sister Rosalie's patroness. Once completed, the chapel was confided to the Congregation of the Mission. In 1861, a workshop for boys was opened near the chapel. This was followed by a workshop and school for girls and a school for boys. In 1867, the complex was expropriated to permit the construction of the short (34 meters) but wide (110 meters) "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie" (rue Mouffetard is only 7 meters wide but considerably longer, 605 meters).

In 1867-1869, the money obtained from the expropriation was employed to rebuild the chapel and the works on what is now the nearby Boulevard Auguste Blanqui. However, the funds proved to be inadequate so the chapel was not completed as designed. Nevertheless, Abbé Le Rebours wanted to be certain that future generations would remember Sister Rosalie. Therefore, he had a stained glass window placed behind the main altar depicting her presenting a model of the chapel to her patroness, Saint Rosalie of Palermo. The Vincentian priests were expelled in 1903 but returned in 1922. Diocesan clergy ministered there in the interim. In 1963, the chapel became the parish Sainte-Rosalie. Georges Allain, C. M., was named the first pastor. The Congregation of the Mission left definitively in 1971 to be replaced by diocesan priests. The church and parish buildings were completely restored in 1985. It remains a thriving parish to this day and Sister Rosalie's memory is very much alive there.⁷³³ Interestingly enough, despite strong waves of anti-clericalism over the years, no one has tried or at least no one has succeeded in having the name of the neighboring "Avenue de la Sœur Rosalie" changed.

⁷³³ *Sainte Rosalie de Palerme à la Place d'Italie*, a brochure produced by the parish of Sainte-Rosalie.

Note: The brochure outlines the history of the parish along with brief biographical sketches of Saint Rosalie of Palermo and Sister Rosalie. The same information appears on the parish website, www.paroisse@sainte-rosalie.org



Stained glass window in the church of Sainte-Rosalie.
Courtesy of Sister Marie-Geneviève Roux, D.C.

Nor was Sister Rosalie's reputation for sanctity limited to Paris. Not surprisingly, it remains in Confort, due in no small measure to Sister Costalin who, after Sister Rosalie's death, obtained permission from her superiors to establish a house of the Daughters of Charity on the site of Sister Rosalie's birthplace and committed her considerable inheritance to this endeavor. In her testimony, Sister Marie-Louise Wicquart, Sister Servant in Confort at the time of the 1953 Diocesan Process of Beatification, said:

During her lifetime, Sister Rosalie wanted the poor of Confort to be assisted. She wanted a house of charity to be built in Confort. After her death, the Servant of God's wish was realized by Sister Costalin who supplied the funds necessary for the construction of the building.... It was completed in 1860.... This establishment brought security to the population. We

have a hospice for 40 elderly, out of a population of 300, and an orphanage for 30 children.⁷³⁴

The work in Confort went beyond service to the elderly and orphans. Sister Wicquart explains, "...because of these establishments, Sister Rosalie was [the instrument of] Providence for this entire region. The Daughters of Charity minister to those who are sick and those who are poor. The house also serves as a dispensary and we sometimes go quite a distance to [treat] those who are ill."⁷³⁵

Sister Costalin was also instrumental in the construction of a parish church and a boarding school for boys run by the Christian Brothers. Thus, Sister Rosalie became the protectress of her native village long after she left it definitively at the age of fifteen.

According to Charles-Louis-Marie Baussan, in his 1913 biography of Sister Rosalie, Sister Costalin approached the then Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert (1871-1886), to obtain his authorization to have Sister Rosalie's body transferred to the cemetery of Confort. She met with stony silence. She tried again in 1886 with the support of Monseigneur François-Marie-Benjamin Richard de la Vergne. He had been a seminarian at Saint-Sulpice in the early 1840's and was appointed Bishop of Belley in the Gex region in 1871. At this time, he was coadjutor archbishop of Paris and would shortly succeed Cardinal Guibert as Archbishop of Paris. According to tradition, the 83 year old Cardinal Guibert listened attentively and then responded:

The body of Sister Rosalie is part of the treasure of the Church of Paris of which I am guardian. On the day she will perhaps come forth from the tomb which the Poor and the Rich of this great city have erected in her [honor], she must have the joy of finding herself in their midst and hear them, before all others, call her Saint as they did during her lifetime.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁴ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 14.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ Charles-Louis-Marie Baussan, *Une fille de saint Vincent de Paul au quartier Mouffetard. La Sœur Rosalie Intime* (Paris: 1913), 149-150. See also Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 300-301.

It should be noted here that Cardinal Guibert's remarks were made in 1886, 30 years after Sister Rosalie's death. They offer strong proof that her memory and her reputation for sanctity were still alive in the city where she had devoted her life to the service of its most needy inhabitants.

In Chapter XII, we spoke in some detail of Sister Rosalie's sometimes strained relations with her superiors. We will not return to this. It suffices to point out here that the General Superiors and General Councils of both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission were conspicuously absent from her wake and funeral. In his 1953 biography of Sister Rosalie, which he wrote at the request of the then Superioress General, Sister Antoinette Blanchot (1946-1953), Henri Desmet, C.M., put forth this appeal as his justification for adding his work to the already existing biographies. He wrote in his preface, "The only excuse for our audacity is [to be found in] the deference we owe to a desire coming from on high."⁷³⁷ In the body of the text, however, the usually laudatory Desmet is sharply critical, albeit only briefly, of the General Superiors and General Councils of both Congregations at the time of Sister Rosalie's death. After recounting the wake and funeral and the extraordinary outpouring of esteem that characterized the entire event, he adds, "What spontaneous homage from all sectors of society! Sister Rosalie's superiors had nothing to do with it. They distanced themselves from this ovation."⁷³⁸

A certain level of disapproval accompanied Sister Rosalie to the threshold of eternity and beyond. Recognized as a saint by those who knew her best, nearly a century – 1953 – would pass before the Daughters of Charity would join with the archdiocese of Paris to initiate the long Process of Beatification that would ultimately culminate on 9 November 2003 in Rome with the proclamation of Pope John Paul II declaring her, "Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu."

This change in attitude toward Sister Rosalie did not occur overnight. There were incremental steps. As we mentioned previously, each year the Daughters of Charity put out *Notices* on some of the more outstanding sisters who had died during the course of the previous year. Sister Rosalie's life was not included in the 1857 *Notices*. Perhaps the first sign of a wide-ranging shift in the Company's view

⁷³⁷ Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 10.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

of her is to be found in the *Notices* on sisters who had received their initial formation as Daughters of Charity from her. We have already seen an acknowledgement of Sister Rosalie's influence as a formator in the *Notice* on Sister Lenain, thus we will limit ourselves here to two others, one on Sister Virieu, the second on Sister Tissot.

Sister Virieu (1818-1890). As noted earlier, Sister Virieu was a postulant formed by Sister Rosalie in 1850 and went on to establish the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland in 1855. At first this date seems to be impossible as Sister Virieu pronounced her vows for the first time on 8 September 1855. However, according to her *Notice*, Father Étienne had followed her progress from the day she began her postulancy with Sister Rosalie in 1850 and did not hesitate to name her Sister Servant the day following her vows. She left for Ireland with her three companions on 5 November 1855. She was 37 years of age and five years of vocation. Her work there was exceptional. She died in Dublin in 1890. It is her postulancy that is of interest here. In her *Notice* we read:

Without being deterred by any obstacle, [Sister Virieu] began her postulancy in May 1850 in the house of the parish of Saint-Médard where Sister Rosalie Rendu was the Sister Servant. Throughout her life, Sister Virieu enjoyed speaking to her companions of the lessons she had learned in this school of charity, simplicity, and poverty. Among them was the story of the pitiful little worn-out desk her Sister Servant used. Thinking she was doing something wonderful, the postulant wanted to replace it with a modest writing desk. The sisters she confided in willingly agreed to the exchange. How great was their disappointment when good Sister Rosalie, upon seeing the new furniture, burst into tears. To console her, they had to immediately return it and give the cost to the poor. Such examples could only engrave themselves deeply into a heart like Sister Virieu's. They provided the momentum that would accompany her throughout her life as a Daughter of Charity.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁹ "Sister Virieu," *Collection des Notices*, 1891, AFCEP.

Sister Tissot (1826-1899). Sister Tissot's testimony for Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification contains some already cited information that likewise appears in her *Notice*. Here, however, we also find a judgment of the period she spent under Sister Rosalie's guidance and on the value it contributed to her future life. We read, "Placed after the seminary at the house of charity of Saint-Médard, Sister Tissot had the happiness of being at the school of Sister Rosalie who communicated a great understanding of those who are poor to her. Our dear Sister gave many proofs of this later on."⁷⁴⁰

In the Archives of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, there is a volume entitled, *Golden Book of Daughters of Charity, or A Simple Glimpse of the Most Beautiful Notices of Sisters Who Returned to God during the First Three Centuries of the Little Company – 1633 to 1870*. The text is undated although it obviously appeared after 1870. Sister Rosalie is included. Each entry presents the deceased sister as a model of some virtue prized in the community. For Sister Rosalie it is "Model of devotion to those who are poor." In speaking of her tireless service to the desperately poor population of the Mouffetard district, the author points out:

...she nourished [the inhabitants] by her faith; by her charity, she compassionated with [their] weaknesses; lifted [them] up from all [their] falls; encouraged [them]; and assisted [them] beyond the imaginable. Such was the power of her action on behalf of those who were poor that she raised them up to the rank of Children of God. [As for those who were] rich, [her action] led them to bend over [the poor] with the heart of a brother or sister.⁷⁴¹

Sister Rosalie's *Notice* also quotes from Melun and announces, in a note, that his life of Sister Rosalie, as well as Baussan's, are available in the shop of the Motherhouse. The *Notice* speaks of Frédéric Ozanam and Sister Rosalie's role at the origin of the Society of Saint Vincent de

⁷⁴⁰ "Sister Tissot," *Collection des Notices*, 1900, AFCEP.

⁷⁴¹ *Livre d'or des Filles de la Charité ou Simple aperçu des plus belles Notices des sœurs retournées à Dieu dans les trois premiers siècles de la Petite Compagnie*, vol. 1, de 1633 à 1870 (Paris: n.d.), 202.

Paul. Her "tireless charity" is acknowledged and there is recognition of her as "the living image of Divine Goodness."⁷⁴²

In the later years of the XIXth century there was clearly a softening of disapproval, accompanied by general acknowledgement of Sister Rosalie's extraordinary devotedness to God, the Company, and those who were poor. Testimony was also gathered from persons who had known her.

In the early XXth century, Father Collard, in his interview with Father Verdier, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (1919-1933), of whom we have spoken earlier, asked, "How is it that, until now, nothing has been undertaken in favor of the Beatification of Sister Rosalie whose reputation is worldwide?" Father Verdier gave the response that others before and after him offered. He alleged that, "until the Beatification of Blessed Perboyre and the General Assembly of 1890, it was believed that the family of Saint Vincent should refrain, out of a spirit of humility, from introducing Causes of Canonization." By way of exception, Louise de Marillac's Process [of Beatification] had begun a few years previously [1886].⁷⁴³ Father Verdier, who was, without doubt, favorable to Sister Rosalie, admitted that "like all pioneers, she was ahead of her time," and that this could have been a cause of some of the disapproval directed towards her.⁷⁴⁴

Be that as it may, any move toward Beatification was still a long way off. Nonetheless, articles on Sister Rosalie began to appear in the internal organ of communication of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, in February 1926. There was another brief entry in 1944. The articles became much more frequent in the years leading up to and following the opening of the Diocesan Process of Beatification in 1953. There were ten from May 1951-March 1956.

The May 1951 *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère* announced that, at the 21 February 1951 meeting of the General Council of the Daughters of Charity, the decision was made to ask the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Maurice Feltin, to open the Informative Process in view of Sister Rosalie's eventual Beatification and to appoint a Postulator of the Cause. According to the Minutes of the Council Meeting, "...the Council recalled that Sister Rosalie Rendu has continued to be venerated in the Community, the diocese, and well beyond.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 204.

⁷⁴³ *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 78-79.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

Numerous graces are attributed to her intercession. She is a beautiful model of the Daughter of Charity to present for imitation to persons of the present time."⁷⁴⁵ A letter from William Slattery, C.M., Superior General (1947-1969), informed Sister Antoinette Blanchot, Superioress General (1946-1953), that Cardinal Feltin had willingly agreed; he had named Abbé François Guédon, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Paris, as Postulator and had asked the Congregation of the Mission to name a Vice-Postulator. The choice fell on Raymond Chalumeau, C.M. The announcement of the opening of the Informative Process was to be made in an October issue of *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*, and would ask anyone in possession of letters, writings or recollections of Sister Rosalie to send them to the Postulator. The sisters were asked to send any documents they might have to the Motherhouse. Any cure attributed to Sister Rosalie, accompanied by medical records, was also to be sent to the Motherhouse.

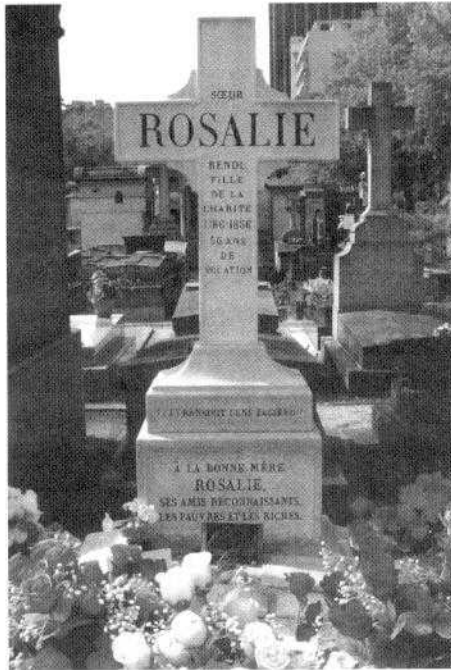
Cardinal Feltin's Ordinance of 24 December 1951 officially opened the Informative Process. An earlier Ordinance, dated 18 December 1951, appointed a three member Historical Commission to collect and review all of Sister Rosalie's writings as well as any texts written concerning her virtue. The members of the commission were, Guillaume-André de Berthier de Sauvigny, C.J.M., professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris; Ferdinand Combaluzier, C.M., Archivist of the Congregation of the Mission; and Léonce Celier, member of the General Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Inspector General of the Archives of France. Both ordinances appeared in January 1952 issues of *La Semaine religieuse de Paris*. Sister Blanchot had them reprinted, as was required by Canon Law, in the February 1952 *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*.⁷⁴⁶

For nearly a year, letters of Sister Rosalie were received and examined. It was at this time that Bon-Sauveur of Caen and the families of Monsieur Colette de Baudicour and Cyprien Loppe sent copies of their correspondence with Sister Rosalie. By an Ordinance of 18 December 1952, Cardinal Feltin named the members of the Tribunal that would pass judgment on the work accomplished. The members were, Canon Guédon, president; Canon Lecestre, assistant judge; Canon Dubois, assistant judge; Leonard Peters, C.M., Assistant

⁷⁴⁵ "Excerpts of Council deliberations for 21 February 1951," in *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, February 1951, 270.

⁷⁴⁶ *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, February 1952, 40-42.

of the Congregation of the Mission, Promoter of the Faith; Canon Barthélémy, notary; and Abbé Censier, supplemental notary. The official Diocesan Cause to pass judgment on Sister Rosalie Rendu's reputation for sanctity; on the question of any public cult of her; and on her writings, took place at Saint-Lazare, 20 January-17 February 1953. There were 11 meetings. Sixteen witnesses were deposed. The three members of the Historical Commission, after having carefully examined Sister Rosalie's writings, reported their findings to the Tribunal. The members of the Tribunal were also obliged to go to Montparnasse Cemetery to ascertain the condition of the grave. They were astonished to see fresh flowers on it almost a century after Sister Rosalie's death; and they were even more surprised to find people kneeling there to pray to Sister Rosalie. They also learned the Montparnasse Cemetery Register listed all the graves by number with only the names and dates of birth and death of the deceased. However, there is a text by the entry for Sister Rosalie, "27 July 1856, transfer [of the grave] authorized because of her exceptional service to the people of Paris."



Sister Rosalie's gravesite in the years prior to her Beatification.

Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

The closing session of the Diocesan Process took place on 11 June 1953. Cardinal Felin, Sister Blanchot, her Assistant, and the Director General of the Daughters of Charity were present. All official documents were duly signed and sealed. Father Chalumeau was to present them to the Congregation of Rites in Rome on 23 June 1953. At the final meeting, Cardinal Felin expressed his hope that Sister Rosalie would soon be raised to the altar.⁷⁴⁷

The Cause did not move forward in the immediate future. Notwithstanding, the centenary of Sister Rosalie's death was commemorated. Cardinal Felin celebrated Mass for the occasion at Saint-Médard. The houses of the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Paris organized special distributions of food for those who were poor to mark the occasion. On 23 December 1955, the President of the Academy of Science, Humanities, and Art of Lyons, in the Department of l'Ain, wrote to Sister Francine Lepicard, Superioress General (1953-1962):

Among the historical and religious figures that are dearest to me, Saint Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie are among the most moving and most beautiful. This is well known around me. Moreover, a number of persons have asked me to commemorate this venerated Sister of the Poor and my compatriot. [At this time,] I serve in the diocese of Belley as Professor of History at the Catholic University of Lyons.

Thus, first, I will lead my colleagues of the Academy Grasset in l'Ain on a pilgrimage to Confort, probably in June; second, I will write two articles for the newspaper, *L'Echo-Liberté*; third, I will prepare two longer studies for publication in the reviews, *Visages de l'Ain* and *Cahiers Grasset*; finally, I will give a conference to the venerable Academy of Lyons and, perhaps, one to the public of Lyons.

Signed: Canon André Chagny⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁷ See *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, October 1953, 270-272.

⁷⁴⁸ Letter of André Chagny to Sister Francine Lepicard, 23 December 1955. Cited in *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, March 1956, 100-101.

On 7 February 1956, the "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, welcomed Sister Lepicard and a group of elderly from the "Hospice Sœur Rosalie," for a dinner with the pastor of Saint-Médard and his assistants. Among the elderly present, the oldest of the group recalled that, when he was a very young child, he had heard of Sister Rosalie from his grandfather.

The largest celebration was also held, fittingly enough, at the "Maison Sœur Rosalie" on rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire on 12 February 1956. The attendance was as notable as it had been for the Dedication of the Bust. Present were: Monseigneur Jean-Marie Villot, Auxiliary Bishop of Paris and Secretary of the French Bishops; Monseigneur André-Jean-François Defebvre, C.M., recently expelled from China; Paul Castelin, C.M., Director of the Daughters of Charity; Sister Francine Lepicard, Superioress General, and her Council; the Visitatrix (Provincial Superior) of the Province of Paris; Édouard Frédéric-Dupont, deputy and municipal councilor of the VIIth arrondissement; and members of the Rendu family.

The children of the school, however, were the center of the celebration with their skits and songs. If there had to be a celebration in her honor, this would surely have been the part dearest to Sister Rosalie's heart, as service to children was a predominant aspect of her ministry to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district.⁷⁴⁹

Sister Rosalie's Cause of Beatification opened in Rome on 24 November 1953. After the approval of the Decree on Sister Rosalie's writings on 1 February 1974, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints turned the study of the Cause over to the Historical Commission by a rescript of 15 March 1974. Additional research and the preparation of the *Positio super virtutibus et fama sanctitatis* was confided to Étienne Diebold, C.M., under the direction of Monseigneur Giovanni Papa, General Vice-Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Father Diebold had also been charged with the preparation of the *Positio* for Frédéric Ozanam's Cause of Beatification, likewise under the direction of Monseigneur Papa, which he completed only in 1980. This task left Father Diebold little time to work on Sister Rosalie's *Positio*. During this time he became ill. He died on 19 September 1991. On 7 June 1985, Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., was appointed to write the

⁷⁴⁹ See *L'Echo de la Maison-Mère*, March 1956, 101-102.

Positio for Sister Rosalie's Cause. He submitted the completed work to the Vatican in 1993.⁷⁵⁰

The juridical validity of the Diocesan Process had been recognized by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints by a Decree of 20 January 1992. The *Positio* was carefully studied to determine whether the Servant of God had practiced the theological and cardinal virtues to a heroic degree. The Congress of Theologians of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints agreed that she had done so. This was confirmed by the Cardinals and Bishops on 20 February 2001, during their Ordinary Session. Pope John Paul II concurred and called for a Decree on the Heroicity of Sister Rosalie Rendu's Virtues. On 24 April 2001, the Holy Father solemnly declared:

It is determined that the Servant of God, Sister Rosalie (baptized Jeanne-Marie) Rendu of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, has practiced the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and courage and their related virtues...

Given in Rome, 24 April 2001.⁷⁵¹

Sister Juana Elizondo, Superioress General (1991-2003), represented the Company of the Daughters of Charity in this vital step leading to Sister Rosalie's Beatification.

While all these aspects of the lengthy and complex Process of Beatification were progressing favorably, there was one vital area in which there was little movement until the summer of 1997. Sister Rosalie's Beatification required a miracle recognized by Rome. In her testimony in 1953, in response to a question asking if she knew of any graces obtained through the intercession of Sister Rosalie, Sister Wicquart spoke of a cure attributed to Sister Rosalie:

...I know only the favor obtained by one of our sisters from rue des Meuniers in Paris. When she was at the house on rue du Foin (in Paris), the superior [there] at the time came to Confort every year to accompany the children at vacation time. One of the sisters of rue

⁷⁵⁰ See Yves Beaudoin, O.M.I., "Présentation du Rapporteur," in *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, VI.

⁷⁵¹ See *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 7-8 (July-August 2001): 272-277.

des Meuniers was paralyzed. She could no longer walk. The superior, who had great devotion to Sister Rosalie, had a novena of prayer started and the sick sister was cured instantly during the novena. This cure has been recognized medically.⁷⁵²

The sister in question was Sister Thérèse (Louise) Béquet. Born 15 September 1910 in the Côtes d'Armor, Louise was the daughter of François-Marie Béquet and Louise-Françoise Le Briquier. She entered the seminary of the Daughters of Charity in Paris on 6 March 1936. In 1937, she was placed at the service of those who were poor in the Paris area, where she remained her entire community life. Her health was fragile from the beginning but this never prevented her from wholeheartedly giving of herself as a teacher to those who were poor.

Sister Béquet's health problems worsened in 1939. In 1942-1943, the first joint pain began in her left hip. In 1946, the pain became more intense, accompanied by stiffness of the left hip and difficulty walking. The same trouble walking continued in 1948-1949 but new symptoms appeared, muscle weakness of the neck and left shoulder; severe headaches; back pain; balance problems; limping; and vomiting. After a stay at Saint Joseph's Hospital, Paris, her physician, Doctor Thomas, told her that her spinal fluid was no longer circulating normally and diagnosed her with "syringomyelia," a disorder in which a cyst forms within the spinal cord. Since the spinal cord connects the brain to nerves in the extremities, this condition was thought to be producing Sister Béquet's symptoms. Dr. Thomas recommended radiation of the spinal column twice a week.

The treatment did not alleviate her condition. On the contrary, she became sicker and sicker. Sister Béquet was experiencing total paralysis of her left leg and partial paralysis of her left arm; paralysis of her right leg and contractions of the tendons of her right arm and hand; blindness of the left eye; and the inability to remain standing. At the beginning of January 1952, she had to be brought to her classroom in a wheelchair. By 16 January, she had to stop teaching completely. "The paralysis worsened: I was taken to class in a wheelchair. I was completely bent over and could not see my pupils. They were so overwhelmed by my condition that they were never better behaved." From then on, she was unable to go to school.

⁷⁵² *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 15.

Urged on by the superior, Sister Anne-Marie Laugier, the sisters, the children, as well as other persons, began a novena, praying for Sister Béquet's cure through the intercession of Sister Rosalie. Sister Laugier even promised to take her sick companion to visit Sister Rosalie's grave. On 31 January, Sister Laugier told her not to rise before 9 o'clock. Sister Béquet went to bed, but the night was a bad one. The next morning, however, everything changed. Sister Béquet recounts her extraordinary experience:

...I got up at the designated time and I could stand up straight. "This is impossible," I thought. While dressing, I realized I was standing straight. I was walking and walking! I asked myself, "What will the others say?" I wanted to leave my room but then I thought it would be better if I waited.

The first sister who came saw me dancing and said, "Are you are crazy?" "No, I am cured," [I responded].

[Sister Laugier] had just returned from the market. [Once she realized what had happened,] we went to the chapel to thank Sister Rosalie and planned to go to her gravesite on 2 February.

As for my pupils, when they saw me, there was dead silence. One of them came up to me and hugged me. Then she said, "It is Sister Thérèse." They ran through the quarter shouting, "Sister Thérèse is cured." In the afternoon, the courtyard was filled with parents who could not believe their eyes.

It was the First Friday of February so, with the sister of the Day Nursery, I began my pilgrimage to Sacré-Coeur of Montmartre. We climbed to the basilica, on foot of course... my companion was tired, but not me! I remained kneeling until we went back down and then took the Metro home. The next morning, I rose at 5 o'clock and have continued to do so since

my cure. I am 87 years old [1997] and am still "hale and hearty."⁷⁵³



Sister Thérèse (Louise) Béquet, D.C., in 1997 at age 87.

Courtesy of the author

As we have seen from Sister Wicquart's testimony, Sister Béquet's cure was well known among the Daughters of Charity as early as 1953. Moreover, it was sudden, complete, enduring and attributable to the intercession of Sister Rosalie. These are necessary elements for a cure to be considered a miracle. In this case, the criteria seem to have been met. Establishing Sister Béquet's complete medical dossier, however, presented some seemingly insurmountable hurdles. Then, on 22 May 1997, Doctor Ennio Ensoli, Consultant to the Sacred

⁷⁵³ Sister Thérèse Béquet, D.C., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no.12 (December 2003).

Note: The article in *Echos de la Compagnie* is a transcription of the testimony of Sister Béquet, given in the presence of Roberto D'Amico, C.M., Postulator; Léon Lauwerier, C.M., Vice-Postulator; and Sister Marie-Anne Latscha, D.C., Assistant to the Vice-Postulator, on Monday, 18 August 1997, at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. Sister Béquet was also interviewed at the time of the Beatification. She sometimes added details that were not part of her original testimony. We have included them here. The above synopsis of Sister Béquet's medical condition was prepared by Michelle Loisel, D.C., at the author's request.

Congregation of the Saints, agreed to re-examine Sister Béquet's illness and cure. To this end, he submitted a lengthy and detailed questionnaire to ascertain the facts. In 1997, Sister Béquet, who would die on 11 June 2006, was well able to discuss her symptoms and cure, and to assist in this process. Also, on 22 May 1997, Roberto D'Amico, C.M., Postulator General for Causes of Canonization for members of the Vincentian Family, wrote to Paul Henzmann, C.M., Archivist of the Congregation of the Mission, telling him that Dr. Ensoli thought that "chances were good for obtaining a favorable result from the Vatican doctors concerning the miracle benefiting Sister Béquet." He also sought Father Henzmann's assistance in preparing the necessary documentation for the diocesan inquiry "super miro," that is, "concerning the miracle."⁷⁵⁴

All went as hoped. The Decree of Approbation of the cure of Sister Béquet as a miracle attributable to Sister Rosalie, issued by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, was read in the presence of Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square on 12 April 2003. Sister Juana Elizondo, Superioress General, was again in attendance as representative for the Daughters of Charity. The final obstacle to the Beatification of Sister Rosalie had been overcome. One hundred and forty-one years after her death, this woman whose reputation for sanctity was well established during her lifetime, would finally be raised to the altar. The date was set for 9 November 2003.

During the days prior to the Mass of Beatification, members of the Vincentian Family began arriving in Rome. Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General (2003-present), describes the scene:

This Beatification is also a great family celebration for us. Members of the Vincentian Family have come from the four corners of the world to be here in Saint Peter's Square. There are about 4,000 of us: Daughters of Charity; Vincentian Fathers [and Brothers]; the International Association of Charities, A.I.C. [Ladies of Charity]; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; as well as the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups; not to mention members of Sister Rosalie's family; and of course, Church representatives from the dioceses of Paris and Belley-Ars.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ Letter of Roberto D'Amico, C.M., to Paul Henzmann, C.M., 22 May 1997, ACMP.

⁷⁵⁵ Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 487.

The celebration began with a prayer vigil in the parish church of Saint Joachim on 8 November 2003. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., Superior General (1992-2004), gave a homily in which he spoke of Sister Rosalie's message for today:

Tonight, my brothers and sisters, I ask you to meditate with me on the life of this wonderful woman. The Church holds her up before us as an example of what it means to be a genuine servant of those who are poor. Reflect on her practical charity, her tenderness, her fearlessness, and her faith. Love her in the beauty of her life and in her remarkable works. As the Church beatifies her here tomorrow, I think tonight of Shakespeare's eloquent words:

*When she shall die,
Take her and cut her out in little stars,
And she will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with the night.*⁷⁵⁶

The eve of the Beatification was also marked by Mass at the church of Saint-Louis-des-Français. Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris (1981-2005), presided. In his homily he said of Sister Rosalie:

The mystery of the Redeemer, the central and most hidden mystery of our faith, is the source of that love which enabled Sister Rosalie to go to the poor in the way Vincent de Paul did. When she said she was going to meet Christ, it was Christ, in her, who was going to meet the poor. It is precisely this love which means we can no longer speak in terms of borders but in terms of the greatness of the gift.⁷⁵⁷

The day ended with a dinner for 80 guests hosted by the French Ambassador to the Vatican and his spouse. The French

⁷⁵⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene II, slightly modified. From transcript of Robert P. Maloney, C.M., in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 491.

⁷⁵⁷ Jean-Marie Lustiger, in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 493.

government was represented by the Minister of Transportation, Gilles de Robien. In his talk, he spoke of Sister Rosalie's close collaboration with civil authorities for the good of all in need. As Monsieur de Robien represents civil government and its views of assistance for its less fortunate members, we cite him more extensively:

As Vice-President of the National Council for towns and urban development since 1998, I have a special understanding of the way Sister Rosalie worked for the poor by using all the help the State and society could provide but also by creating, at the grass-roots level, and against all odds, an irreplaceable network of personal presence. At a time of great political instability during which religious institutions had their fierce detractors, Sister Rosalie never wavered. She used every bureau of public assistance that existed but avoided all pointless disputes that might in any way prevent her setting up or maintaining a movement to help and support those who were poor. For two centuries, the State has provided long-term services; it will never be able, however, to dispense with individual, private, and civic initiative, especially when unexpected circumstances call for emergency aid.

Concretely and free from any form of ideology, Sister Rosalie devoted herself to reconciling the different classes of society and to working for the recognition of each person's dignity, in the face of scorn, mistrust and exclusion on all sides... She recognized only two categories of people: those who need to receive help and those who can, should, and above all, need to give it. In bringing together two worlds that wished to ignore each other and making people meet in such a way that it was impossible to say who brought greater benefit to the other, Sister Rosalie, in a simple but extraordinary way, was able to promote an experience that proved contagious! She was one of the founding figures of Catholic social action, as we can see from her contacts with Frédéric Ozanam or

Félicité [Robert] de La Mennais in 1833. Even if she preferred to remain pragmatic and close to the action, as we would say today, her influence extended to the intellectual and political circles of her time.

...we have not finished drawing, from Sister Rosalie's convictions, the intuitions which allow each person to discover his or her role in the society of the epoch. By a different route, she came to develop a delicate conscience akin to that of the young magistrate of the era, Alexis de Tocqueville, who discovered American democracy while studying that country's penal system. He was a visionary who could anticipate the symbolic concept of "a democracy where people are close to each other through listening, sharing, and commitment," one which has confidence "in governing a country at the local level."

Recently, in the church of Saint-Médard... there was a poster announcing the Beatification of Sister Rosalie which said, "The visage of Sister Rosalie, for whom charity was the first concern, responds to the needs of men and women of our day. Today, more than ever before, people feel the need to love and to be loved. The paradox of our modern society, intoxicated by ever more sophisticated means of communication, is this: the poor are not so much people who have nothing as people who have nobody with whom they can share." Allow a Minister of the Republic to go one step further and say, "The most important way of building a friendly society whose members are united and show solidarity, is by putting concern and compassion for other people into the hearts of our fellow citizens." May Sister Rosalie find many to emulate her!⁷⁵⁸

On 9 November Pope John Paul II solemnly beatified Sister Rosalie Rendu in Saint Peter's Square. That morning, under a Roman

⁷⁵⁸ Gilles de Robien, in *Echos de la Compagnie*, no. 12 (December 2003): 495-496.

sun, thousands of pilgrims gathered to witness five Beatifications. In addition to Sister Rosalie, the Holy Father also declared Blessed:

- Valentin Paquay (1828-1905), Priest of the Order of Friars Minor (Belgium);
- Juan Nepomuceno Zegrí y Moreno (1831-1905), Priest and Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Mercy (Spain);
- Luigi Maria Monti, (1825-1900), Priest and Founder of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Conception (Italy);
- Bonificia Rodríguez Castro (1837-1905), Religious and Foundress of the Congregation of the Servants of Saint Joseph (Spain).⁷⁵⁹

The Beatification, properly so called, took place after the penitential rite of the Mass. During the Liturgy of the Word, each Postulator and bishop, of the place represented by the candidates, addressed the Holy Father and asked him to beatify the future Blesseds presented to him. Cardinal Lustiger presented Sister Rosalie. Pope John Paul II then solemnly proclaimed "Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu" and set 7 February as her feast day.



Unveiling of Sister Rosalie's portrait during the Beatification in Saint Peter's Square on 9 November 2003.
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

⁷⁵⁹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, No. 46, 12 November 2003, 1.

Immediately following the Holy Father's declaration, the portraits of the newly Beatified, hanging from the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica, were unveiled one after the other, from left to right. Sister Rosalie was in the place she always preferred, last.

The Holy Father then gave his homily, "The Church is composed of living stones held together by the cement of charity." In it he spoke of the newly Beatified saying, "The saints are, in a special way, the precious stones of this spiritual temple. Sanctity, the fruit of the unceasing work of the Spirit of God, shines forth in the new Blessed." Pope John Paul II then spoke of each newly Beatified. Of Sister Rosalie, he said:

In an era troubled by social conflicts, Rosalie Rendu joyfully became a servant to the poorest, restoring dignity to each one by providing material help, education, and the teaching of the Christian mystery, [urging] Frédéric Ozanam to place himself at the service of the poor. Her charity was inventive. Where did she draw the strength to carry out so many things? In her intense prayer life and the continuous praying of the Rosary, which she never abandoned. Her secret was simple: to see the face of Christ in every man and woman, as a true Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul and like another Sister of her epoch, Saint Catherine Labouré. Let us give thanks for the witness of charity the Vincentian Family gives unceasingly to the world!⁷⁶⁰

The ceremony ended with the Angelus after which Pope John Paul II addressed each language group represented by the new Blesseds. The celebration for the Vincentian Family, however, did not end there. The following morning, 10 November, Cardinal Lustiger presided at a Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of Blessed Sister Rosalie at the church of Saint Gregory VII. Monseigneur Guy-Marie Bagnard, Bishop of Belley-Ars, the region in which Sister Rosalie was born, who had led a pilgrimage to the Beatification, concelebrated. In his homily, Cardinal Lustiger mentioned one of Sister Rosalie's virtues that he considered capital, her ability to adapt and to change. He said:

⁷⁶⁰ John Paul II, in *Ibid.*, 8-9.

...it is the strength of the Redeemer which animated Sister Rosalie and which allowed her to tirelessly face unheard of changes. During her 50 years in the Mouffetard district, many things changed. Many things changed in the political and social life of this era as it also did in the intellectual life and the manner in which people lived their lives. Sister Rosalie was not attached to her work. Rather, she worked to accomplish the Will of God.⁷⁶¹



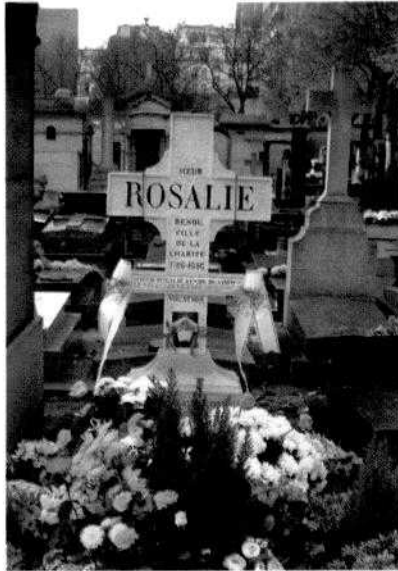
Sister Evelyn Franc, D.C. (left), and Sister Juana Elizondo, D.C. (right), leaving Saint Peter's Square at conclusion of the Beatification Mass.
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

Thus ended three days of celebration in honor of this simple, humble Daughter of Charity who never sought to draw attention to herself but accomplished ordinary things extraordinarily well and was beatified so that her message could reach yet more persons desirous of sharing her Vincentian Mission of service to those who were poor. One week later, the celebration moved to Paris where those who had kept her memory alive for nearly 150 years could honor their "Mother."

⁷⁶¹ Lustiger, *Echos*, 506.

A joyous Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-Paris on Sunday, 16 November, at 6:30 P.M. Once again, Cardinal Lustiger, who had been an integral part of the entire Beatification celebration, presided. This was different, however. This was his diocese and his flock crowded into the cathedral to honor a woman whose "diocese" had been the city's poorest quarter and whose flock had been her "beloved poor." These were the people to whom she belonged. Her reputation for sanctity was passed from generation to generation of Parisians, many of them descendants of those whom Sister Rosalie had served. The Mass included a presentation on her life as well as the Cardinal's homily, and a final expression of gratitude from the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Evelyne Franc.

The previous Tuesday, 11 November, which was a holiday in France, allowed hundreds of people to come and pray at her grave and place flowers on it. A craftsman had made a wooden plaque, to suspend from the stone cross marking her grave, proclaiming "Blessed Sister Rosalie." This inscription would eventually be engraved on the stone. Those who loved her for so long, however, could not wait. Her long-awaited Beatification had to be proclaimed as soon as it was officially allowed.



Gravesite immediately after Sister Rosalie's Beatification.

Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

Life returned to normal. Sister Rosalie, however, is not forgotten. People still continue to come to her grave and also to the little side chapel in her honor in the church of Saint-Médard. One of the more touching examples of this uninterrupted devotion was related to Sister Marie-Anne Latscha, D.C., Assistant to the Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Beatification, by a group of persons who voluntarily tend the grave. They said that one day an old man, who was obviously very poor, approached the grave. He asked why there were so many more flowers. When they told him that Sister Rosalie had been beatified, this man, who perhaps never went to church, leapt for joy and, running from the cemetery, shouted to every passerby, "Our Mother is beatified; our Mother is beatified."

Throughout Sister Rosalie's life, and after, the words "light" and "fire" have frequently been used to describe her. Vincent de Paul told his Sons and Daughters, "If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame."⁷⁶² Sister Rosalie was a light of hope in the darkness of despair. All her love for God, for those who were poor and those who were rich, for her friends and collaborators, for her sister companions, and for the Company came forth from her heart of fire.

Prior to a Beatification, the body of the candidate is exhumed. This was done for Sister Rosalie on 17 October 2003, in the presence of all the required civil and religious authorities. Sometimes the remains are intact, as was the case for Saint Catherine Labouré; others are skeletal, as with Saint Louise de Marillac. When Sister Rosalie's coffin was opened, it contained only "mixture," an ash-like substance. In the ash, there remained the cross from her side rosary, symbol of her spirituality which, like that of Louise de Marillac, was centered on Jesus Crucified; a few beads recalling her devotion to the rosary that, as the Holy Father would point out in his homily, a few weeks later, she always had with her. In addition, there was a little bit of fabric from the sleeve of her Habit and a piece of her apron, the sign she never set aside, symbols of "the Daughter of Charity, totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor."

Blessed Sister Rosalie was, indeed, on fire with love. Thus, in the end, she was completely consumed by the fire of Divine Love.

⁷⁶² CED, 12:307-308.