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# Spes Unica—Path to Glory: The Canonization of Louise de Marillac

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## Spes Unica—Path to Glory

### The Canonization Process of Louise de Marillac

BY  
BETTY ANN McNEIL, D.C.

This paper<sup>1</sup> describes the process leading to Louise de Marillac's canonization, miracles attributed to her intercession and related information of historical interest to the Vincentian Family.

#### Will and Burial

I commit and willingly abandon my soul into the hands of God, its creator . . . [and] freely leave my body to the earth to await the resurrection. As to the place of my burial, I leave it entirely, under the disposition of Divine Providence, to the care of M. Vincent, whom I beg to remember the great desire I have expressed to be buried alongside . . . the church of Saint Lazare. I also ask that there be placed as soon as possible . . . a large wooden cross with crucifix attached, and an inscription at its foot bearing this title: "*Spes Unica*." For my funeral I declare that I do not wish any greater expense to be incurred than what is usual in the funerals of our deceased Sisters.<sup>2</sup>

Nicolas Lestocq, a priest from her parish, anointed the dying Louise. At her death, her pastor, Nicolas Gobillon, asked to bury this saintly woman in her parish church of Saint Lawrence where she had nourished her spiritual life for years. Saint Vincent de Paul deferred to him. The church was just a brief walk from Saint Lazare, Vincent's residence and headquarters of his Congregation of the Mission. Many Daughters of Charity were already interred in the same church yard.

Funeral arrangements respected Mademoiselle Le Gras's wish about limiting burial expenses; therefore, the sisters placed her earthly remains in a simple wooden casket. The sisters buried their foundress

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<sup>1</sup>At the 1991 Symposium on Louise de Marillac sponsored by the Vincentian Studies Institute in commemoration of the fourth centenary of her birth, a participant asked for details about her canonization.

<sup>2</sup>Comtesse de Richemont. *Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity*. Translated by a Sister of Charity (New York: 1884), 360. This includes an appendix with the text of the will of Mademoiselle Le Gras (15 December 1645).

in the side chapel of the Visitation where she had usually prayed. Gobillon later wrote her first biography (1676). In it he recorded that a noticeable aroma of violets and irises arose from her tomb.<sup>3</sup> The community erected a cross on the exterior wall of Louise's burial chapel near her Daughters' grave sites. This simple cross summarizes Louise's spirituality and faith-filled path to glory. It bore the words *Spes Unica* ["the only hope"], signifying that Louise placed all her confidence in the Paschal mystery of Jesus crucified.

### Preservation of Relics

#### *First Exhumation.*

In 1680, just twenty years after Louise's death, Madame de Miramion<sup>4</sup> interceded with the archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay, to allow the first exhumation of Louise de Marillac's body. The purpose was to safeguard her remains by placing them in a lead casket.

Besides many other witnesses, Louise's granddaughter, Louise-Renée Le Gras, and two Daughters of Charity were present. Official community representatives included Marguerite Chétif, Louise's immediate successor as superioress general, and Mathurine Guérin who then held the office. They testified that "we found only bones and they were of a color bordering on russet, and smooth, without any unpleasant odor at all."<sup>5</sup> Those assisting carefully wrapped the remains in a new sheet and placed them in the leaden casket identified by a copper plaque with this inscription: "Demoiselle Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Le Gras, Secretary to the Queen, Marie de Médicis; Foundress and first Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, died March 15, 1660, aged 68 years."<sup>6</sup>

#### *1755 Translation of Relics.*

Seventy-five years later, the superioress general, Sister Marie-Anne Bonnejoye, announced that the archbishop of Paris had authorized

<sup>3</sup>Nicolas Gobillon, *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras* (London: 1984), 65.

<sup>4</sup>Madame Miramion, widowed at the age of sixteen, consecrated her life and her fortune to the charitable works of Vincent de Paul and served with Louise de Marillac as a Lady of Charity. Louise often visited her home which is now the Museum of Public Assistance. Its interesting collection contains memorabilia from Vincent's projects, including the priestly vestments of Vincent de Paul and identification bracelets of the foundlings. The original admission register has details about the abandoned infants, the foundlings entrusted to Louise and her Daughters.

<sup>5</sup>Sister Elizabeth Charpy, D.C., "The Reliquary of Saint Louise de Marillac," *Echo* (1988):457.

<sup>6</sup>Charpy, "The Reliquary of Saint Louise de Marillac," 458.

another exhumation of Louise's remains. They were to be transferred from the church of Saint Lawrence to the motherhouse chapel of the Daughters of Charity in the faubourg of Saint Denis. In 1755, the relics were solemnly placed in a large oaken chest and reinterred in a vault marked by a black marble slab with this inscription:

Here lies Mademoiselle Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Le Gras, Secretary of Queen Mary de Médicis; Foundress and first Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, Servant of the sick, who was interred in the Chapel of the Visitation, in the parish Church of Saint Lawrence, March 17th, 1660, and transferred to this chapel for the consolation of the Company, November 24th, 1755. True Mother of the poor, model of every virtue, worthy of eternal repose. May her venerable remains remind us of her charity, and inspire us with her spirit!<sup>7</sup>

Following the 1752 canonization of Louise's contemporary Saint Jane de Chantal, some had suggested the introduction of Louise's cause. However, her time had not yet officially arrived. But her reputation for sanctity frequently received popular attention. One example is the dedication of a 1761 publication written about a deceased Daughter of Charity.<sup>8</sup> This could be paraphrased to read: we honor Louise's zeal in our hearts until we may do so publicly with the Church's approbation. As of 1766, superiors cautioned that the unofficial use of the title "venerable" could be prejudicial to the introduction of her cause for beatification. Yet, in 1769 Pierre Collet, C.M., published a revised edition of Gobillon's biography of Louise and referred to Venerable Louise de Marillac.

#### *Threatened by French Revolution.*

Being able to pray in the chapel housing the relics of Louise de Marillac since 1755 was a source of inspiration to her Daughters. Faith and courage became signs of these troubled times for all religious. The French Revolution threatened their mission and survival. The government ultimately suppressed the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The sisters scattered, the motherhouse was sold, and the beloved chapel demolished.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 460.

<sup>8</sup>"La Histoire du Procès de Sainte Louise de Marillac," *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 27 (1920):775.

*1792 suppression of Community.* With scarcely three days notice, the community dispersed and the sisters departed the motherhouse (23 August 1792) to return to their families.<sup>9</sup> Sister Antoinette Deleau, superioress general, had initially remained in Paris. During the Reign of Terror, as a measure of prudence, she later went to live with her family (11 November 1793).

After the fall of Robespierre (July 1794), Sister Deleau returned to Paris where some Daughters had continued to live and serve the poor in scattered areas. A few were near their former motherhouse, which the government had sold as national property. They learned that the new owner immediately planned to demolish the buildings, including the chapel where Louise de Marillac rested.

*1797 Ransom.* Sister Marie-Françoise Wille who was living nearby, helped with negotiations to regain the casket containing Louise's remains. To conclude the transaction, Monsieur Lebrun, owner of the property, signed the following on 25 September 1797: "I acknowledge having received from Citizeness Françoise Wille the sum of sixty livres for a leaden casket that is enclosed in one of wood, as she found it at the site of the Chapel of the former Sisters of Charity. Done in Paris, the 3rd. Vendemiaire, sixth year of the Republic."<sup>10</sup>

The sisters carefully deposited their reclaimed family treasure in the cellar at 9 rue du Faubourg Saint-Martin where some of them were living. This transaction took place on the very day the previous motherhouse was demolished: chapel, seminary and infirmaries! Divine Providence had preserved Louise's relics for the Church and her mission!

*1797 Ingenuity.* Prudence dictated disguise of their treasure, so the sisters built a small chest (60 cm x 40 cm) from wood of the exterior casket and lined it with lead. The vicar general of Paris witnessed the transfer and authenticated the remains, now camouflaged in the newly crafted chest (11 October 1797). An iron box preserved the remaining dust. Attendants removed the original identifying copper plaque, and placed it in the ingenious wooden chest, which they locked and sealed. For safe keeping the sisters took this valuable reliquary to the address where some Daughters of Charity were living inconspicuously on rue des Macons-Sorbonne.

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<sup>9</sup>In 1792 there were 4,500 Daughters of Charity in France and approximately 100 novices, known in the community as seminary sisters.

<sup>10</sup>Charpy, "The Reliquary of Saint Louise de Marillac," 461.

*1800 Reestablishment of Community.* Napoleon Bonaparte perceived that his government urgently needed nurses to care for sick and injured patients in the hospitals. This realization prompted him to issue an order (12 December 1800) stating that "Citizeness Deleau, former Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, is authorized to furnish some students for the service of hospitals."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the government gave a house on rue du Vieux-Colombier to the newly recognized community.<sup>12</sup>

*1802 Translation of Relics.*

Finally superiors decided to transfer the still hidden relics of Louise to their new motherhouse on 4 May 1802. Claude Joseph Placiard, vicar general of the Congregation of the Mission, presided. Sister Claire Massal, sister servant (local superior), presented the treasured chest to the vicar general who verified the seals placed on it in 1797. They transported the relics from the hiding place of five years to the new motherhouse on rue du Vieux-Colombier. After their arrival the sisters venerated them in the chapel before placing them in the retreat room.

*Expansion and Relocation.* This reunion and presence of their spiritual mother brought the blessing of many new candidates and expansion of works for the Daughters of Charity. The revitalized community now required more space, so the city of Paris placed a larger building at their disposal (May 1813). The former Hotel de Châtillon, located on the rue du Bac needed repairs but could provide the additional space required. As the sisters waited for notice of completed repairs and a moving date, they faced an abrupt exodus.

*1815 Translation of Relics.*

Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo (15 June 1815) and the opposing armies were approaching Paris near Saint Denis. The government feared for the safety of young women studying at the house of education for the Legion of Honor at Saint Denis, so officials hastily sent the young students to rue du Vieux Colombier. The sisters followed suit and moved immediately to rue du Bac.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 462.

<sup>12</sup>The government had confiscated this establishment, but it was now free. It was where Jean-Jacques Olier, pastor of Saint Sulpice, established the orphans of the Mother of God (1650). Later while the Daughters of Charity used it as their motherhouse, Sister Rosalie Rendu entered the community and received her initial formation there. In recent years it has served as a fire station.

One Daughter of Charity acted swiftly lest the relics be in danger. Having learned that the soldiers were nearing Paris, Sister Gaubert called a carriage early on 29 June. Removing the sacred relics, this sister departed immediately with her crucifix in hand, ordering the driver to take her directly to rue du Bac. There she arrived breathless but safe, and placed the community treasure in the sacristy of the sisters' new motherhouse. After the other sisters had arrived, and all were calm, superiors had the relics of Louise placed in the retreat room where they would remain for several years until construction of a proper vault in the center aisle of the main chapel (4 November 1824). A large black marble slab marks the site and bears the same inscription as the original tomb with the date of the last translation added. Sisters coming to pray have sometimes noticed the fragrance of violets.

### Initial Stages of Apostolic Process

On 16 June 1882 the Daughters of Charity's General Council decided to initiate the process leading to the canonization of Louise. Coincidentally, the following year (30 August 1883), the Church named Vincent de Paul patron of works of Charity in France.<sup>13</sup>

Antoine Fiat, superior general, finally petitioned (1885) Cardinal Richard, archbishop of Paris, to initiate an ecclesiastical tribunal after two hundred years of private devotion to the saintly Louise. This launched the lengthy process leading to canonization that began with no less than twenty-nine meetings of three to four hours duration—all with manual recording of the voluminous testimony. What a labor of love in the days without high-tech word processing!

On 23 July 1894, after reviewing Louise's writings, the Vatican decreed that nothing opposed proceeding with her cause. It proved a great advantage that the first biography of Louise de Marillac by Nicolas Gobillon (1676), who personally knew her, had provided excellent documentation supporting her cause.

### Venerable

At this time at least 289 letters arrived at the Vatican petitioning Louise's beatification. Cardinals and bishops wrote the pope, also the patriarch of Venice as well as Maronite, Chaldean, and Armenian

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<sup>13</sup>Subsequently, the Church named Vincent universal patron of works of charity. However, he is patron only of those works of charity that emanate from him in any way whatsoever. The idea that he is patron of all works of charity is a popular misconception. See Pierre Coste, C.M. *The Life and Works of Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, C.M., 3 vols. (New York:1987), 3:466-67.

patriarchs, and international leaders, including the Emperor Francis-Joseph of Austria, the president of the republic of Ecuador, and the Duke of Norfolk. Many superiors general expressed their congregations' support, including the Jesuits, Benedictines, Dominicans, and Capuchins. These petitions resulted in Leo XIII's issuing a decree on 10 June 1895, which introduced her cause for beatification. From this point the foundress of the Daughters of Charity became officially recognized as Venerable Louise de Marillac.<sup>14</sup>

The Congregation of Rites issued the decree *Non-Cultu* (11 January 1897) stating that no public cult existed to oppose continuing the process toward canonization. On the day (26 July 1897) of the crowning of the statue of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal at the motherhouse, the Vatican letters arrived, requesting Cardinal Richard, archbishop of Paris, to open an apostolic process concerning the sanctity of Louise de Marillac. Three years later (10 December 1900), because of this investigation, the Vatican affirmed the validity of the process regarding her reputation for sanctity, her virtues, and some general miracles. Finally on 21 December 1900, with approximately 1,586 pages of documentation forwarded to Rome, the Vatican opened the Apostolic Process about Louise's virtues and particular miracles.

Louis Baunard had just completed a new biography about Louise de Marillac based on the painstaking research of Sister Geoffre, D.C., who originally catalogued Louise's writings at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> This provided the basic documentation integral to facilitating completion of the investigation. Pope Pius X issued his decree of 27 November 1907, validating the apostolic process conducted in France by the archbishop of Paris.

### Decree of Heroicity of Virtues

Officials presented the Pope with documentation of Louise's virtue to a heroic degree on 27 June 1911. Pope Pius X issued the Decree of Heroicity of Virtues of Louise de Marillac, widow Le Gras, cofoundress of the Daughters of Charity, on 19 July 1911. This announcement coincided with the feast of her lifelong friend and collaborator Saint

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<sup>14</sup>In 1895 the title "venerable" was given officially to Servants of God at the introduction of their cause with the Congregation of Rites. However, more recently, Rome has reserved this designation to those whose "heroicity of virtue" has been declared or to those officially designated martyrs for the Faith.

<sup>15</sup>Louis Baunard. *La Venerable Louise de Marillac* (Paris: 1904).



Vincent de Paul. The process was now ready to proceed with the investigation of miraculous cures. Simultaneously, the Church recognized another seventeenth century French widow and religious for sanctity, the Venerable Mary of the Incarnation (Marie Guyard), an Ursuline nun of Tours who came to the New World as a missionary in Quebec.

### Beatification

#### *Miracles.*

The Vatican issued the decree of three miracles required for beatification on 9 March 1919. Benedict XV waived the requirement of a fourth miracle for founders/foundresses of religious congregations.

The first miracle that the Congregation of Rites approved was the cure of a young Breton suffering from an incurable disease complicated by meningitis and subsequent deafness, fever, and insomnia. After prayer to Louise de Marillac, he was instantly and completely cured.

The second, in the diocese of Ste.-Brieue, involved Sister Ferrer e Nin, a young Spanish Daughter of Charity from Madrid, who had fallen and dislocated two vertebrae. This sister suffered excruciating pain, violent headaches, and vomiting of blood. When medical care seemed powerless, the sisters began a novena to their foundress. On the last day the pain increased dramatically, then ceased suddenly and entirely disappeared.

Rosa Curlo, a young Italian girl, from Fasano in the province of Bari, at Pouilles received a miraculous cure from an abscess. The area involved had become a running sore and the physicians had declared her case incurable. After having been anointed several times, she prepared to receive the last sacraments again. One night while sleeping she seemed to see a sister removing the gauze dressing, which adhered to the wound. Then the mysterious sister exclaimed, "You are cured!" The patient asked her name and understood the miracle-worker to reply, "I am the Venerable Mother whom you have invoked." When the young girl awoke, she no longer suffered, the wound had healed, the soiled bandage and gauze were lying at the foot of the bed. She had been completely cured.

#### *Decree for Beata.*

The Church made three historic announcements on 6 July 1919. Joan of Arc would be canonized. Four Daughters of Charity and eleven

Ursulines had been declared martyrs for the faith during the French Revolution, therefore they would be beatified as the Martyrs of Arras. The Church attributed three miracles to the intercession of Louise de Marillac who would also be beatified.

Pope Benedict XV referred to the conferences of Saint Vincent with his Daughters of Charity in the decree for Beata announcing Louise's beatification.<sup>16</sup>

As the virtues of the saints are recalled, Saint Vincent . . . loved . . . to recall, especially to the members of the new Society . . . the virtues practiced by their deceased mother. Yet the holy man was too well instructed and his judgment too experienced not to foresee . . . that whatever might be the opinion . . . concerning the sanctity of . . . Louise, public ecclesiastical worship could not be paid her. Therefore until the present time, the Daughters of Charity have faithfully complied with the counsels of their Father and the laws of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The solemnity of beatification for Blessed Louise de Marillac took place in Saint Peter's on 9 May 1920. Both François Verdier, superior general of the Congregation of the Mission and Mother Emilie Maurice, superioress general of the Daughters of Charity, were present. His Eminence James Cardinal Gibbons attended the triduum celebration in Emmitsburg, Maryland (USA).

There was cause for rejoicing throughout France, for the Vatican honored two other French women the same week. The Pope canonized both Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque and Blessed Joan of Arc. A few weeks later the Martyrs of Arras were also beatified.

### *Preparing for Canonization.*

Ecclesiastical and community representatives opened Louise's tomb (29 March 1905) to inspect the condition of her remains in anticipation of her canonization. Louise's body was not incorrupt, but the skeleton remained. Its final exhumation occurred 6 April 1920 with Cardinal Amette, archbishop of Paris, presiding. In the presence of ecclesial and

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<sup>16</sup>On the Virtues of Louise de Marillac." in *Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity* (3 July 1660 and 24 July 1660) (Westminster, Maryland: 1979), 1273-1289.

<sup>17</sup>Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Decree Concerning the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Venerable Servant of God, Louise de Marillac, Widow Le Gras, Co-Founder of the Society of the Daughters of Charity." (Rome: The Vatican, 6 July 1919).

medical officials,<sup>18</sup> the skeleton was completely articulated,<sup>19</sup> dressed and encased in a wax model in preparation for public display and veneration as Blessed Louise de Marillac. Also present were Ladies of Charity, Vincentian Fathers, and provincial superiors of the Daughters of Charity from throughout the world.

### *Canonization*

The decree of the Congregation of Rites, issued 1 November 1933, stated, "Blessed Louise had wrought other miracles: the miracle of her life, the miracle of her works, and the miracle of the heritage she left by the foundation of her large religious family."<sup>20</sup> Pope Pius XI presided at the solemnity of canonization on 11 March 1934. His Holiness declared: "We decree and define saint, and we inscribe in the catalogue of the saints, Blessed Louise de Marillac, widow Le Gras, declaring that her memory should be piously celebrated under the title of holy woman, each year, on the day of her heavenly birth, March 15."<sup>21</sup> What a fitting tribute during the Church's Holy Year of the Redeemer for Saint Louise who had lived an incarnational spirituality so deeply during life!

The two Daughters of Charity miraculously cured through the intercession of Saint Louise de Marillac had the unique joy of personally participating in the canonization ceremonies at Saint Peter's. Forty descendants of the Marillac and Le Gras family also attended, besides Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family from throughout the world. Following the canonization, 1,000 Ladies of Charity opened an international meeting in the chapel of the Leonine College in Rome.

Concluding an audience during the canonization week, Pope Pius XI remarked:

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<sup>18</sup>Sister Margaret O'Keefe, D.C., Visitatrix of the Province of Emmitsburg, and Sister Eugenia Feely, D.C., Visitatrix of the Province of Saint Louis, attended from the United States.

<sup>19</sup>During the articulation process the skeleton rested in the same casket which had held the body of Saint Vincent de Paul during its recent twelve year exile. Due to the political factors of World War I, the community prudently sent the founder's body to the Central House of Ans (Belgium) for safekeeping. It had recently returned to Paris on 30 September 1919, approximately six months before the final exhumation of Louise de Marillac at rue du Bac. See *Remarks on Sister Marie Louise Emilie Maurice* (English edition, no date or place of publication), 171.

<sup>20</sup>[Anonymous] *Saint Louise de Marillac; Mademoiselle Le Gras. Co-foundress of the Daughters of Charity* (Emmitsburg: 1934), 179.

<sup>21</sup>"The Canonization of Our Saintly Mother: The Morning of the Eleventh of March," *Echo* (4 April 1934):140.

We give you the Father's blessing, first to the great and magnificent family of the Charity of Saint Vincent, which covers the world, and whose vision consoles us and calls forth our enthusiasm.

Three centuries ago, our saintly Mother, longing piously to receive his blessing of the Vicar of Christ, wrote kneeling: "Louise de Marillac, . . . servant of Jesus Christ and His members, the poor, . . . very attached by obedience to the Holy Father, and through her longtime desire to receive once in her life, the holy apostolic blessing, does humbly beg Monsieur Berthe, Priest of the mission, to place her in spirit at the feet of the Most Holy Father, . . . so that she may receive from our good God . . . the grace to do His most holy will for the remainder of her days."<sup>22</sup>

Celebrations for this auspicious event also included personages destined for new roles in the community and Church. Attending the joyful celebrations in Emmitsburg were Reverend William Slattery, C.M. He would later become superior general and the first American to succeed Saint Vincent de Paul in this office. Rome celebrated an official triduum. The future Pope Pius XII, then Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli and Secretary of State, delivered the panegyric on Louise de Marillac in the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle. The cardinal reportedly stated that "If they hadn't asked me, I would have proposed."<sup>23</sup>

At rue du Bac, the renovated shrine of gilded bronze now places Saint Louise above the altar into prominent view for public devotion. The artist combined brilliant symbolism to communicate the spiritual gifts of this woman named Louise whose unique feminine journey witnesses a life of ageless faith for all people. The shrine depicts lilies interwoven with Louise's initials, the community seal in an enameled shield, her deep devotion to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit with *Spes Unica* summarizing her embodiment of the paschal mystery. A halo of pure gold crowns her lifelike mask of wax.

Louise's *Spiritual Testament* beams its golden message: "Take great care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great union and cordiality, loving one another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord. Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin that she may be your only mother."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>"Audience of the 14th of March," *Echo* (4 April 1934):185-186. The latest available English text used for quote of Louise de Marillac. Taken from *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts* (New York: Albany, 1991), 408-110. The grace requested in Louise's January 1653 text was granted by Pope Innocent X in 1655.

<sup>23</sup>The Canonization of Our Sainly Mother: The Triduum," *Echo*, (4 April 1934):150.

<sup>24</sup>Upon the Altars. The New Shrine of Our Sainly Mother." *Echo*, (4 April 1934):188. This spiritual testament was recorded by the sisters attending Louise de Marillac on her deathbed. It was later quoted by Gobillon in his 1676 biography.

As a vigilant daughter of the Church, Louise surveys the faithful from her niche in Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. In 1954, Antonio Berti's giant statue of Saint Louise de Marillac filled the last of forty niches reserved for canonized founders/foundresses of religious congregations.<sup>25</sup> Margaret Carol Cassidy, an American graduate student of Pius XII Institute at Villa Schifanoia in Florence, assisted the Italian sculptor in executing this work.

### *Miracles.*

Initially the Vatican documented, investigated, and approved three miracles by decrees. But the cure, which had taken place at Panormus or modern Palermo (decreed 20 April 1932) was set aside for another. Therefore, the Church accepted one cure occurring at Paris (decreed 8 July 1925) and another at Labicum, present day Colonna (decreed 1 February 1933).

Sister Teresa Darracq, D.C., developed dorsal Pott's disease in 1908 and subsequently tubercular spinal meningitis, which over twelve years resulted in paralysis and confinement to bed. After all possible medical assistance had ceased, the invalid and her companions implored the assistance of Blessed Louise de Marillac in two successive novenas. In Paris, only nineteen days after the beatification, Sister Teresa's illness immediately disappeared (28 May 1920). She experienced a surge of new life, and arose from her bed, entirely cured and able to go to the chapel unaided.

Another Daughter of Charity, Sister Veronica Hocevar, with a predisposition to tuberculosis from her youth, developed the disease with complications in several sites. Eventually her heart became involved and her life threatened by the medically incurable condition: pleuro-pericardiac adhesions and insufficient heart action. The patient was gradually worsening and becoming more debilitated. The sisters began a novena to Blessed Louise de Marillac at Colonna on 29 January 1926, and Sister Veronica was instantly and completely cured. She could return to duty and remained in perfect health.

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<sup>25</sup>The Berti statue is eighteen feet tall. In her adult life, Louise de Marillac stood a mere 4'11" tall.

### Patroness

On 10 February 1960, Pope John XXIII commemorated the third centenary of the death of Saint Louise de Marillac, by declaring her patron of Christian social workers.<sup>26</sup>

In a letter commemorating the fourth centenary of Louise's birth, John Paul II told Louise's Daughters that "love for the poor will cause you to work for the coming of a more just society in all continents, so that the words of the psalmist will be fulfilled: 'The poor will receive as much as they want to eat. Those who seek Yahweh will praise him.'"<sup>27</sup> (Psalm 21:27)

Reflecting on the four hundredth birthday of Louise de Marillac, our hearts burn within us as we listen to Saint Vincent de Paul speak about his collaborator's legacy of charity to all who share their vision of serving Christ in the poor. Yes, Mademoiselle Le Gras is praying for you in Heaven and she will be no less helpful to you now than she once used to be, nay, she will be more so, provided you are faithful to God.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Pope John XXIII wrote (20 February 1960) to William Slattery, C.M., superior general, in which His Holiness stated:

When we were fulfilling the charge of Apostolic Nuncio in France, We were frequently inspired to go and venerate the precious remains of these two Saints [Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac], which are preserved in magnificent shrines, one in the Mother House of the Priests of the Mission, the other in that of the Daughters of Charity . . . It was certainly not without the designs of Providence that Vincent found in Louise de Marillac an assistant who resembled him so much, endowed with excellent qualities, of courageous magnanimity in action, raising aloft the standard before a multitude of holy souls, she is the joy and honor of the Church and of the whole human family. "Letter from the Sovereign Pontiff: For the Tercentenary Celebration." *Echo*, (April 1960):197-199.

<sup>27</sup>Letter of John Paul II to Sister Juana Elizondo, D.C., superioress general of the Daughters of Charity (The Vatican, 3 July 1991).<sup>5</sup> This letter was written to commemorate the four hundredth birthday of Louise de Marillac (12 August 1991).

<sup>28</sup>*Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity*, conference #120, 27 August 1660, p. 1289.

My daughters, the respect which you should show each other should be always accompanied by a sincere cordiality, that is to say, by a genuine sense of reverence, the way in which angels respect each other.

*(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, conference #17).*

To leave all things, without the hope of possessing anything, without knowing what is going to happen to you, without any other assurance than confidence in God, is not that the life of Jesus Christ?

*(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, conference #8).*