

# **P**rologue

In 1985, Saint John Paul II told the Daughters of Charity at the close of their General Assembly, “Come winds or high waters, hold fast to your identity.”<sup>1</sup>

During her entire life, Louise de Marillac had to contend with “winds and high waters.” Firmly anchored in her faith, however, Louise set her course for Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, the Christ who was present in the poorest members of his mystical body. Above all, Louise wanted to be faithful to God’s will and providential plan for her life. She often wondered how she was to navigate safely to this goal when so many obstacles arose and threatened to overwhelm her fragile boat. In October 1655, she wrote to Vincent: “If this is the key that will soon release me from this world, then I truly need to learn how to prepare for it. It is for this reason that I turn to your Charity so that I will not be shipwrecked as I arrive at port, because of my own navigation, but will be guided solely by your directives and the orders of Divine Providence.”<sup>2</sup>

Louise’s surviving letters and meditations enable us to chart her spiritual progress and see how, through the lights and shadows, joys and sorrows of her life, she steadily grew closer to the Lord. In her writings, Louise reveals herself as a woman profoundly influenced by the circumstances of her birth and her family relationships; a woman attentive to the signs of her times; a woman intensively attentive to each person and situation in her life.

Louise also formed keen theological insights as she reflected on her mystical experiences that revealed God’s complete and abiding love for every person. In one example of these insights, Louise noted, “My mind recalled the thought that I had had: that the design of the Blessed Trinity from the creation of man was that the Word should become flesh so that human nature might attain the excellence of being that God willed to give to man by the eternal union that He willed between Himself and His creature, the most admirable state of His exterior operations.”<sup>3</sup>