

## Topic 20: Vincentian Spirituality: Practical Charity, Part 2

**Overview:** St. Louise de Marillac became a companion to St. Vincent. They complemented each other with two very different personalities and skill-sets. Louise was the head person while Vincent was the heart person. What they shared in common was conversion of heart that came through the experience of the poor. Together, they founded the Daughters of Charity, a radical break with previous forms of religious life for women. The Daughters became “Nuns in the World,” and they became the model for all subsequent forms of active religious life for women. Elizabeth Ann Seton brought the spirit and way of life of Vincent and Louise to America. She founded the Sisters of Charity, who expressed the virtue of charity through education, especially of the poor, ignorant, and immigrants.

### Louise de Marillac

- Louise came into Vincent’s life after his conversion.
- Louise’s early life was troubled. She never knew her mother. Her health was fragile. Her husband died in 1625 after a prolonged illness. The limitations of her childhood were always a source of anguish for her. This series of experiences plunged her into a dark night of the soul.
- Vincent became a spiritual guide for her in dealing with her discouragement. Her friendship and collaboration with Vincent became a healing force in her life. Vincent was always there to support her through trials and tribulations.
- Vincent helped her to become less reasoned and more spontaneous.
- Her service to the poor and involvement with the Confraternities of Charity gradually cured her depressed spirit.
- Louise was often restless and anxious. Vincent had a calming effect on her.
- Founding of the Daughters of Charity: Nuns in the world
  - 1) The form of consecrated life begun by Vincent and Louise became the norm for most religious congregations.
- Louise’s Spirituality:
  - 1) The centrality of Christ Crucified in Louise’s spiritual development is evident even in her earliest writings. Louise was able to take her own suffering and bring it to focus on the suffering of Christ on the Cross. She said that Christ is “the source and the model of all charity.”
  - 2) She emphasized the virtues of humility, simplicity, and charity.

(a) The notion of simplicity is reflected in the life she called her sisters to live.

(b) Humility and simplicity were Louise's way of moving into charity.

- She urged her Daughters to be immersed in God, in whose love they would find nothing difficult.
- On the eve of Pentecost in 1642, a ceiling in the motherhouse collapsed. There were no casualties. Louise saw a sign of God's special protection and a call to sacrifice everything to Him.
- When we look to Louise today, we see a woman who was transformed. Her writings present a new vision and speak across the centuries.

### **Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774–1821)**

- The legacy of Vincent and Louise is carried forth by Elizabeth Ann Seton.
- Elizabeth was the first American born woman to be canonized a saint.
- The theme of conversion emerges in her life in a new way.
- Elizabeth was married to William Seton. Her family fell into financial misfortune. William died of tuberculosis in Italy. Elizabeth loved William very much. She was distraught by his death.
- Elizabeth was inspired by the Eucharistic faith of Antonio Felicchi and converted to Roman Catholicism when she returned to New York.
- After experiencing rejection from family and friends, she went to Emmitsburg and founded the Sisters of Charity, modeled on the way of St. Vincent and St. Louise. Elizabeth and the Sisters of Charity established the parochial school system in the US.
- "She lived only for her sisters and for the performance of her holy duties..."
- Vincent, Louise, and Elizabeth exemplify the highest virtue, the most important aspect of walking in the footsteps of Jesus. They show us how to live a life of charity in the context of the world.

### **Review Questions**

1. St. Louise struggled with darkness and depression and identified with Christ crucified. Look at the cross of Christ and identify with the poor and oppressed of the world.
2. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton loved the Eucharist; this is what brought her into the church. Reflect on the Eucharist and its place in your life.

3. Vincent, Louise, and Elizabeth are three very different personalities who find a common ground in charity. How might this be a model for uniting diverse populations within the Church around a common mission?