

Dear friend of Saint Joseph Abbey

"It is impossible to separate Christ from human history. .. is it possible to separate him from the history of Europe? Only in him, in fact, can all nations and all humanity 'cross the threshold of Hope '" (John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, March, 2005). Each saint actualize is the presence of Christ in history. Moved by the dechristianization of workers as France, Saint Léonie Francis de Sales of the arts devoted herself to bringing them back to Christ in their lives and work. She was canonized on November 25, 2001.

Léonie Aviat was born in Sezanne, France, on September 16, 1844, and was baptized the following day. Her father and restore who sign read, "seeds, hemp and linen, haberdashery, grocery: wholesale and retail." a good customer base provided the family with a comfortable living, Léonie was eleven when her parents took courage to the boarding school at the Monastery of the Visitation in Troyes, interesting her to the superior, mother Mary de Sales Chappuis, whom everyone called "the good mother." Of this mother a priest wrote, "she runs the convent and Troyes with admirable wisdom and the most abundant blessings from heaven."

As soon as she arrived, the young girl began to prepare for her First Communion. It was also proposed that she not wait any longer to receive the sacrament of Penance. She made a serious examination of conscience, but once in the confessional, she was overcome by emotion and burst into tears. Father Brisson, who know when or her from a visit to her family in Sezanne, told her, "What? So little girl I gave so many sugared almonds to before is afraid of me? "That was enough to comfort her. From then on, the priest became her guide. Her First Communion, immediately followed by Confirmation, took place on July 2, 1856.

An intelligent and lively girl, Léonie decided to reform her proud temperament according to Saint Francis de Sales advice. Mother Chappuis, are true "mistress of souls," taught the girls to develop the virtues they would need in the world. She knew the potential impact that a young woman who was truly Christian and for letting her vocation as wife and mother could have on society and on the church. Aware of the social condition of factory workers in the region, Léonie wrote, "I feel more joy and climbing on a winding staircase to comfort those who are overwhelmed by sorrow, than in being at one of the magnificent parties" organized to raise money for the poor. In 1860, she completed her studies at the Visitation boarding school. Before

leaving, she revealed her desire to enter religious life to Mother Chappuis, advised her to wait.

A reversal of fortune brings freedom

Léonie's return to Sezanne delighted her parents—cultured, accomplished in piano, and painting, she nevertheless did not disdain the ordinary chores in which her practical sense was revealed. Mr. Aviat proposed an advantageous marriage to his daughter. But the financial reversal of fortune ruined Mr. Aviat, and the suitor vanished. Léonie was free, and she decided to enter the Visitation. "Wait a bit longer—what God has destined you for his not quite ready," Mother Chappuis told her.

Around this time, she entered, a little intimidated, the large workshop of the optician's office in Sezanne, where the young workers were busy. She was overcome by a feeling that was impossible to describe—in an instant, she imagined herself among these adolescents, an older sister advising, encouraging, correcting, or consoling, a worker among workers, a witness of love... the return of an employee bringing her mother's repaired glasses pulled her from her dream, but the feelings remained. Soon after, Father Brisson decided that the moment at come to reveal what he expected to of her. Troyes was an industrial city. About 30,000 workers worked in its workshops, mills, and factories. Most of them were far from the faith and even from respect for religion—when priests were insulted in the streets, it was by workers. In welcome centers, the Father would offer young Christians, particularly those prematurely put to work, the means of escaping the danger of living without God.

At the start of the third millennium, the situation is still similar—there is no longer a place for Christ in the culture of the day. We again find humanity's collective pride building the tower of Babel and claiming to have no need for God. Contemporary man is "tempted to organize his life as if God did not exist; as if God, and all he's transcendent reality, did no exist; as if his love for the human race did not exist" (John Paul II, in Czestochowa, August 15, 1991). Similarly, the second Vatican Council affirmed, "many of our contemporaries seem to fear that the close bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences... But if the expression, 'the independence of temporal affairs,' is taken to mean that creative things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone with knowledge of God will see how false such a meaning is. For the creator the creature

would disappear... when god is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible " (*Gaudium et spes*, 36).

Especially not her!

Father Brisson had created a youth club and reception center for young factor girls on the Rue des Terrasses. To supervise have them, he had to find full- time female assistants, which wasn't easy--he would need souls dedicated to God. When Léonie visited the house with him, she received an interior enlightenment the showed her that her place was there, in the midst of these youths, some still children. She read a review of this mysterious call to her spiritual director who was amazed at what she said--finally, he was the person who could be the foundation stone for the institute he wished to establish! But two trials awaited Léonie. First she would have to leave for family and she feared her father would refuse to let your call. Secondly, the priest gave Léonie a companion, you see when you are whole, despite some good qualities, as persnickety, touchy, and argumentative, exhausting those around her. Leonia rebuild: " but anyone you wish, father, except her! "space however, after a meeting with the priest, she finally accepted this companion.

On April 18, 1866, following an eight-day retreat under the supervision of Mother Chappuis, the two founders of the new congregation moved into the house on Rue des Terrasses where Father Brisson's center was located. The youngest workers were quickly won over by these two young women, distinguished it is open as big sisters. The older ones, at first on their guard, auto them selves to be one over when they saw the two directions happy to share their poverty and the most humble tasks fathered are still interested to Léonie that great organization of the center and it's four attached clubs.

Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis often received the two pioneers in the Visitations parlor and formed them in religious life. "For now you are not called to chant the Office, "she told them; "your primary occupation his work--give ourselves up to it as graciously as possible... your work is for you a continuous prayer. " When the eyes of faith continually look on God, one can see him at work in the world. "Man thus has a continuous awareness that God is at work in everything that happens. If, in the course of the day, man thinks constantly about this mystery, which is silent, living, gentle, and at the same time powerful, or if he feels Him present, he is immersed in real prayer, and he needs only to prolong this prayer and to extend it to everything. To

pray, he does not need to avoid life and its everyday activities, for prayer, on the contrary, will blend with them. And every event, he sees a gift from God, and he orients his life such that it is one with God's action. He is aware of the sanctity of this collaboration, and, from hour to hour, he understands better the meaning of life. Although these thoughts give him a feeling of security, it will not keep him from acting in the world. Thus does life itself become prayer " (R. Guardini, *Initiation into Prayer*).

For me? Why?

So sister Léonie was determined to remain in the lord's presence, even in the midst of the busiest days, which was not easy... she increased her ejaculatory prayers, those brief outbursts of the heart that keep the flame of love burning. One day as she was bringing a factory deliveryman some bundles of patched sweaters, her prayer suddenly escaped from her lips, and she exclaimed, while holding out the package to the good man who understood none of it: " My God, it's for You! "—"For me... this?... Why? " At the memory of this anecdote, the founders would laugh heartily!

On October 30, 1868, the first two sisters of the congregation of "Oblate Sisters of Saint Francis de Sales" received the religious habit. Léonie became Sister Francis de Sales, and Lucie became Sister Jeanne-Marie. These beginnings were disrupted by the war that broke out on July 19, 1870 between France and Prussia. Factory's stopped running and workers lost their jobs. Sister Francis de Sales made great efforts to keep them busy. After the war, droves of Alsatian immigrants who wished to keep their French nationality arrived in Troyes. The Sisters spared no trouble to welcome them. But the overwork exhausted Sister Frances de Sales, and she entered a difficult period. She entrusted herself to Saint Francis de Sales, her patron saint, who comforted her. Her retreat to prepare for her religious profession took place in great peace. "To forget to myself completely" became her ideal. On October 11, in the company of Sister Jeanne-Marie, Monsignor de Ségur, who said., who said to them, "my dear children, your relations with god must be characterized by a great tenderness, your love for him must be more gentle, more noble, more tender and any other religious order... " Four postulants then receive the habit. Father Brisson was radiant—the congregation's future was on track.

On September 20, 1872, Sister Frances de Sales was elected Superior General. Fourteen religious from the Sisters of Saint Mary of Loretto had been received a bit earlier into the budding congregation; before his death the chaplain had suggested this union in order to get his sister's out of a difficult situation. Father Brisson accepted this merger despite the risks represented by this sudden influx of a significant number of already formed religious with their own institutions. The new Mother General thus found herself heading the swarm of 34 religious and she took charge of two additional institutions, in Paris and Morangis.

A mysterious unction

A ceremony of religious clothing and profession was prepared for January 29, 1873, the feast of Saint Francis de Sales. However, one of the postulants suddenly was struck with an abscess in her heel bone, which made her suffer terribly and kept her from receiving the habit. A novena to the saint was begun. The evening of February 9, Mother Francis de Sales applied a second class relic of Saint Francis de Sales to the sick foot. The pain finally subsided and the young sister went to sleep. In a dream, she saw a venerable prelate who applied an unction of oil on her foot. She was amazed when she awoke—she was in fact cured. . .

The arrival of numerous locations made the community considered new foundations. Having been dedicated to young working girls, the Oblates proposed the same Salesian dedication to more well-off girls, in boarding schools. Father Brisson and his party founded the congregation of Oblate Fathers of Saint Francis de Sales, dedicated to teaching. The houses of the Father Oblates also multiplied and required the sisters' presence. In 1875, Father Brisson obtained approval from Rome for the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales. The same year, Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis, before her death, predicted to Father Brisson that the lack of understanding on the part of the new bishop that the city of Troyes would soon welcome would make him suffer greatly.

On October 8, 1879, the Foundress's mandate was completed and the former Superior of the Sisters of Loretto was elected general. Sister Frances de Sales was quite happy to give up her position. With no ill will, the new Superior showed a lack of consideration toward her predecessor. Sister Francis de Sales' sisters noticed it, but the slighted one, whose only ambition was to be in the last place, did not complain and offered it all up in silence. However, faced with the scope

of the responsibility, the Superior resigned and 1881. Sister Louise Eugenie was then elected; she sent Sister Francis de Sales to Paris to establish the Oblates' practices at the boarding school on Rue de Vaugirard, as well as to rescue this establishment from a perilous financial situation. It was difficult for her to be uprooted from the work with laborers, to which she had devoted fifteen years of her life, yet she obeyed generously for the love of God.

She was received quite coldly in Paris. What was his reformer going to do? Straightening the school's and finances meant restrictions that gave rise to countless oppositions. The students themselves were resistant. Sister Saint Francis de Sales took up her favorite weapons; prayer, serenity, and kindness... Soon everyone, calmed down. She showed herself to be an exceptional educator. The Sisters were the first to feel the effects of her influence, for she was convinced that the apostate's fruitfulness flowed from harmony in the community. "Let us not forget that charity must be as it were an act of hope for what others can become with the help of our fraternal support." Pope Paul VI would later say (*Evangelica testificantio*, June 29, 1971, no. 39). As to the children, Sister Francis de Sales advised, "act from patience, gentle firmness, and prayer. When a child's heart is won over to you, you can ask anything, and she will do it... Never make anything, even something important and serious, into a big issue." Nevertheless, the foundress put first the awakening of her charges' faith and their preparation for First Communion.

However, in Troyes, relations between Father Brisson and the Bishop were deteriorating. The prelate of wanted to restrict the two Congregations to his diocese, and he submitted the Sisters to interrogations that upset some vocations. The father went to Rome to plead his case. It would be 1888 before harmony returned between the Bishop and Father Brisson.

My little way

On September 15, 1884, sister usual money, Sister Frances de Sales' is first companion, was elected Superior General. The new Superior General's attitude: to her peer was unpleasant. Sister Francis de Sales struggled with temptations: "Obtain for me," she asked the late Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis, "the grace to overcome the difficulties I am feeling, to entrust myself to our Mother Jeanne-Marie." "One day, coming across a young sister in difficulties, Sister Francis de Sales told her, "I am going to have to take advantage of my little experience. God has allowed us, Sister Jeanne-Marie and me, to have

the most opposite temperaments that you can imagine. And yet here we have been on good terms for many years, haven't we? Well, if I have been able to manage it, it's because I've made it a habit to never approach my neighbor without glancing at Our Lord. Try my best way — I can assure you that it is good."

At the end of the 1889 school year, Sister Francis de Sales was replaced as the head of the boarding school on Rue de Vaugirard. She suffered deeply at having to leave the school. Upon her return to Troyes, she resumed a leadership of the Works, an undertaking in which she found prejudiced minds and endured numerous mortifications, about which she complained to no one. " Oh, if you knew, "she would later say," how happy it is for the soul to suffer only between God and one's self! "

One evening in September, 1893, Sister Francis de Sales, who had come to Paris for the Congregation's General Chapter, distinctly heard a voice whispering in her ear: " You will be superior, for I want to control everything! " Astonished, she turned around—she was alone in the room... The senior Sisters were full of praise for this foundress, who had grown in their eyes through years of selfless devotion. The Mother showed such great kindness to those who had made her suffer that a sister exclaimed, "My Mother, truly all one has to do is offend you to be the object of your affection and special care from then on!"

[Helping Hand](#)