



Sixth Corporal Work of Mercy VISIT THE IMPRISONED/RANSOM THE CAPTIVE

**I was in prison
and you visited me.**



Ransom the Captive. St. Bonaventure Church, Raeville. Released to Public Domain by Ammodramus, 2010.

Sometimes people do things that are very wrong. They break the law and hurt other people. Laws are designed to protect people. When someone breaks the law and does serious harm, that person is sent to prison. Prisons are not happy places because the people there are not free. They must stay in prison until their sentence—the amount of time that the law says they must stay in prison—is completed.

People in prison feel alone and unwanted. They know they have hurt people. They know they are being punished. We know that God's Mercy is for everyone, no matter what a person may have done. But God's Mercy cannot help us unless we ask for it.

It is very important to show mercy to people in prison so that they begin to understand that God loves them and wants to forgive them. There are many good ministries that take this message of God's Merciful Love to people in prisons.

It is also important to pray for people in prisons and for those who try to help them.

Sixth Corporal Work of Mercy

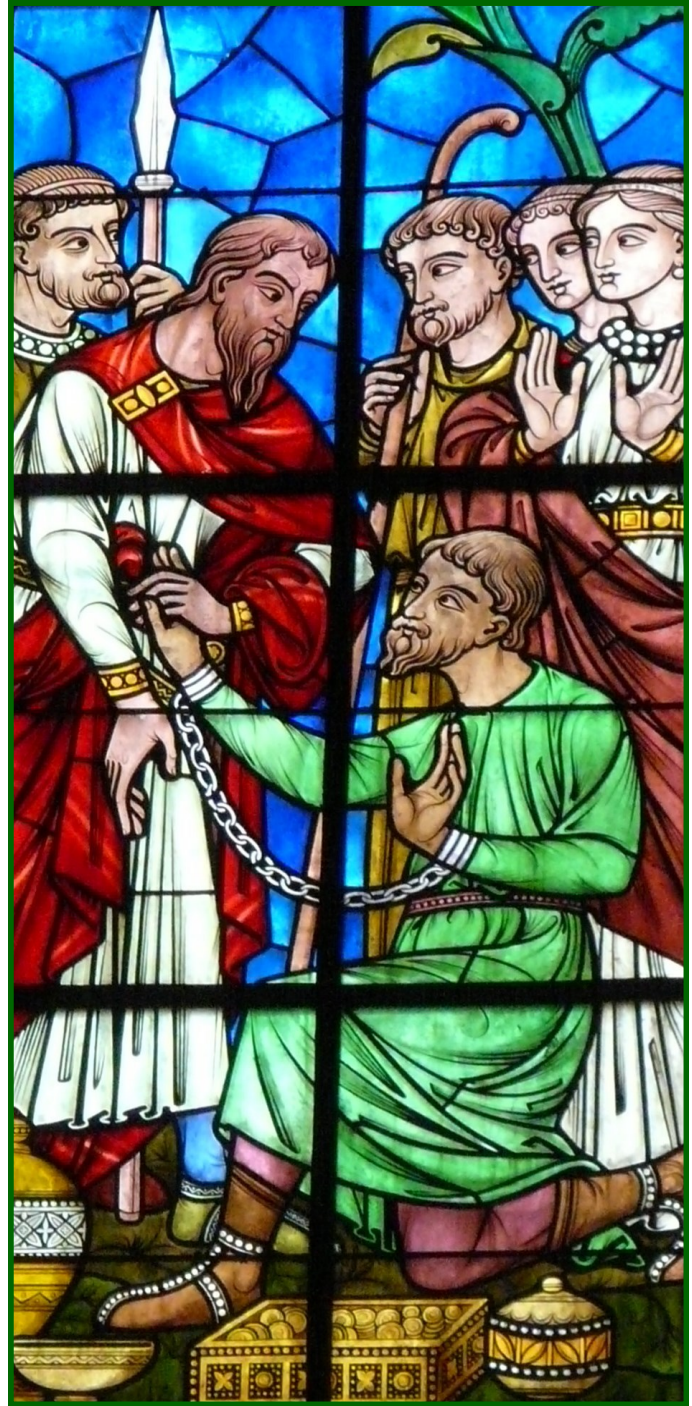
VISIT THE IMPRISONED/RANSOM THE CAPTIVE

In ancient times, it was sometimes possible to pay captors for the release of prisoners. Holding prisoners for ransom was common in the Middle Ages as well. While serving in a war between the warring city-states of Assisi and Perugia, a young Saint Francis was held for ransom for a year in a Perugian prison. From the time of the invasion of Spain in 711 by Moors from North Africa, the areas along the coast of Spain, France, and Portugal were made dangerous by warring factions, pirates, and privateers, who captured innocent bystanders and held them for ransom. Finding the means to free loved ones was a great financial challenge for families but was still considered an important work of mercy.

St. John de Matha founded a Catholic order, called the Order of the Most Holy Trinity, to ransom Christians held captive by non-Christians. St. Peter Nolasco founded the Royal Order of Our Lady of Mercy, known as Mercedarians, who took four vows rather than the usual three [poverty, chastity, and obedience]; the fourth vow was to *take the place of a captive* in order to save the captive's soul. Our Lady of Mercy is also known as Our Lady of Ransom.

These days, it may not be possible to pay to free prisoners from jail, but it is still possible to help save their souls by showing them that they have not been forgotten. Life in prison is lonely and bleak, especially for those who have no one to visit them or write to them. Remembering them helps to show them that God loves them. God is Merciful and loves all His creatures with a love that is not based on our actions but upon His complete Generosity. But God requires that we ask for His Mercy.

Time in prison can be a time of penance for those who have committed crimes and caused others pain and suffering. Or time in prison can become a time of further deterioration, where the prisoner only grows in hatred and feelings of worthlessness. Whether prison time is a period of healing or relapse depends upon showing the prisoner God's Mercy. By practicing this Work of Mercy and taking time to visit prisoners or by



Abraham Ransoms His Brother Lot from Captivity, by Édouard Didron, 1881.

supporting groups that minister to prisoners with our time, talents, and resources, we can make a real difference in the lives of those who have lost their way in life, helping them to return their hearts to the God that loves them.



Saint Katharine Drexel

Feast Day: March 3



Photograph of Saint Katharine Drexel, circa 1915. Public Domain.

Katharine Drexel was born about 150 years ago in Philadelphia, the daughter of a wealthy banker. Her family taught her to share wealth with those in need. Every week, they would open the door of their mansion and give food, clothing, and money to the poor and needy.

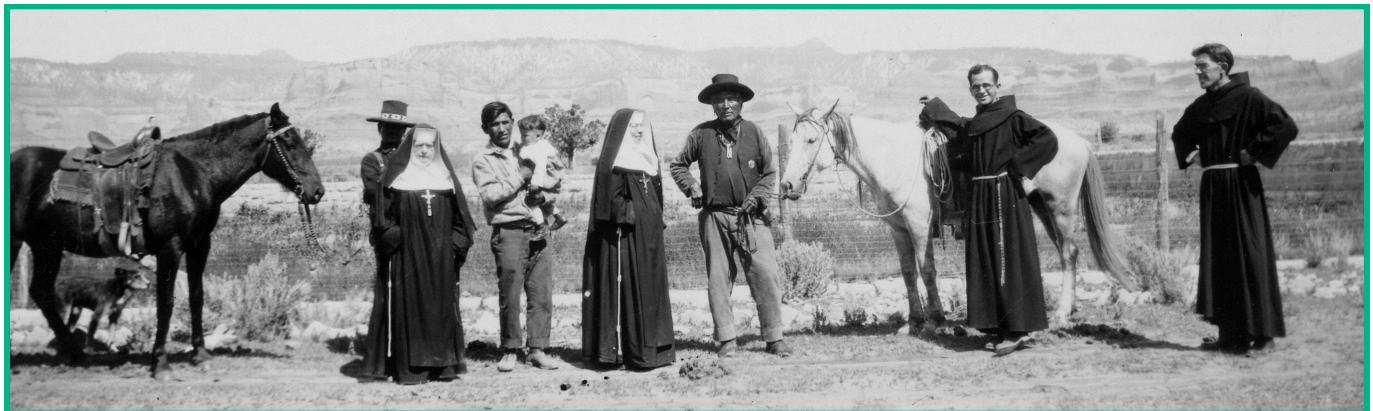
On a trip out West, Katharine saw the cruel ways that people were treating the Native Americans. When she travelled to Rome to meet the Pope, she asked the Pope to send missionaries to help Native Americans. But the Pope surprised her by

asking Katharine to become a missionary herself!

After praying, Katharine decided to dedicate her life and her fortune to helping the Native Americans and African Americans who were treated with cruelty and prejudice. She started a new Order called The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and became the first Mother Superior.

Mother Katharine sent her Sisters and other religious brothers to the places where they were needed most—the West and South. In spite of great resistance from those who did not want to improve the lives of these people, Mother Katharine was able to build over 100 schools and missions to serve their needs. She even donated her own money to build Xavier University, the first college in America to admit African Americans.

In the course of her lifetime, Mother Katharine donated \$20 million of her own money to these causes. She is the patron saint of racial justice and of philanthropy.



Photograph of Saint Katharine Drexel with other Religious Sisters and Brothers Ministering to Native Americans. Public Domain.

Saint Katharine Drexel

Feast Day: *March 3*

Born in 1858, Katharine Mary Drexel was the second daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia investment banker. Her mother died when she was still a baby. Her family taught her the value of philanthropy—other relatives gave vast sums to establish hospitals, homes for the aged, and Drexel University. Her father remarried and had a third daughter who grew up to donate great wealth to African-American education. Each week, their family gave food, clothing, and money to the needy from the door of their own home—even going out to the people most in need—but always as respectfully as possible.

In 1884, her family traveled West, and Katharine saw close up the terrible way Native Americans were treated. When her father died the following year, she asked to join a cloistered convent, but her spiritual director told her to wait. Still mourning the loss of their father, the three sisters went to Europe. At that point, the estate they inherited was worth \$400 million in current dollars.

When Pope Leo XIII granted them a private audience, Katharine asked the Pope to send missionaries to Native Americans out West. The Pope surprised her by asking her to become a missionary herself. Katharine decided to offer herself and her fortune to God, dedicating her life to the cause of the Native Americans and the African-Americans. She established a new religious Order called The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and became the first Mother of the Order. Their first school in Santa Fe was followed by missions on the Navajo and Pueblo Reservations, eventually growing to fifty Native American missions in fifteen states.

Her work among African-Americans was met with great resistance in the South. Georgia even tried to pass legislation banning white people from teaching black children. But Mother Katharine prevailed. In 1915, she used her personal fortune to establish Xavier University, the first college in the United States to admit black people.

When the Ku Klux Klan in Texas threatened to ‘tar and feather’ the Sisters, a thunderstorm destroyed the Klan’s headquarters! Despite such resistance, Mother Katharine established forty missions and twenty-three schools in thirteen states.

After a heart attack in 1937, Katharine retired to her first love: Eucharistic adoration. She died on March 3, 1955, having given \$20 million in her personal fortune to these causes. Declared a saint in 2000, Saint Katharine’s order continues her work today. She is the patron saint of racial justice and of philanthropy.



Saint Katharine Drexel as a Young Woman. Public Domain.



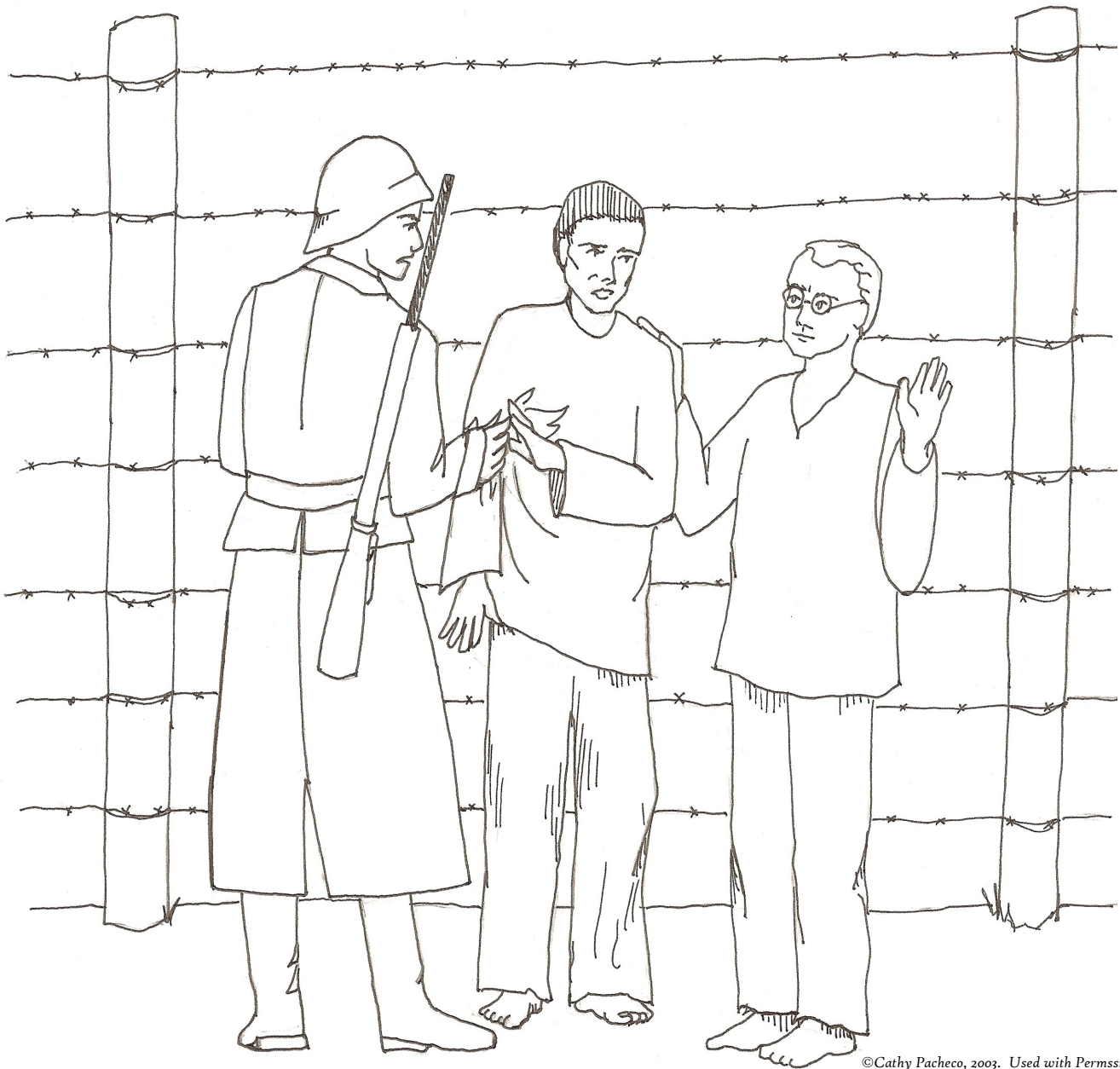
Katharine Traveled to Remote Native American Reservations, circa 1888. Public Domain.



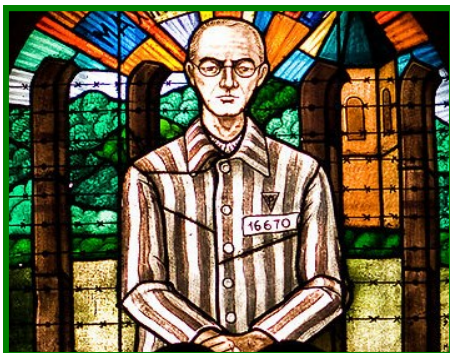
Heroes of Grace® March

SAINT MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

Feast Day: August 14 [Example of “Ransom the Captive”]



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Saint Maximilian Kolbe in his Prison Uniform.
Released to Public Domain by Primariespace, 2008.

Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish priest who loved the Blessed Mother. He was arrested by the Nazis during World War II and sent to prison. The Nazis wanted to execute a young man who asked for mercy. Maximilian took his place. Left to starve in a cold prison, he sang songs honoring Mary and comforted the other nine men dying with him. The man whose life he saved came with his family to the Mass in 2000 where Pope Saint John Paul II declared Maximilian a Saint.

SAINT MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

Feast Day: **August 14** [Example of “Ransom the Captive”]

Even though Saint Maximilian Kolbe’s feast day falls in August, he is included in this month’s line-up of saints because he is an outstanding example of the Corporal Work of Mercy “Ransom the Captive.”

Raymond Kolbe was born in Poland in 1894. His father was a German soldier; his mother Polish. Contracting tuberculosis as a child, he suffered from frail health the rest of his life. As a boy of twelve, he received a vision of the Blessed Mother, who offered him a choice of two crowns: white, symbolizing purity, or red, symbolizing martyrdom. He chose both! The following year, he and his older brother joined the Order of Conventual Franciscans. In 1914, he made final vows, taking the religious name Maximilian Maria.

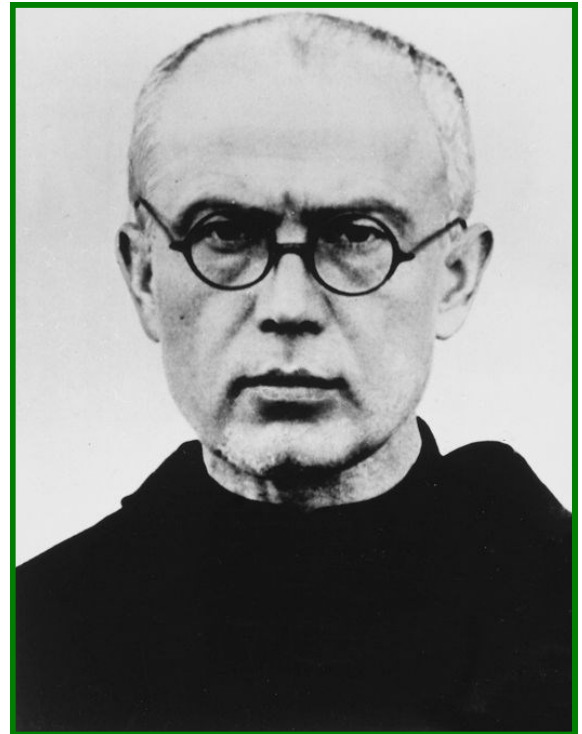
Sent to Rome, he earned a doctorate in philosophy and a doctorate in theology in about eight years. He was ordained a priest in 1918. These were years of political upheaval in which the Catholic Church was attacked viciously. Maximilian decided to organize the Militia Immaculata [Army of Mary], dedicated to converting sinners and enemies of the Church through the intercession of the Blessed Mother.

Back in Poland, Maximilian began to promote veneration to Mary Immaculate. Using the most advanced communication methods of the time, Maximilian started a monthly magazine *Knights of the Immaculata*, with a circulation that grew quickly from 5,000 to 1,000,000 and a daily newspaper with a circulation of 230,000. He set up a Warsaw radio station. So many people wanted to join his new order that Maximilian built the Niepokalanów Monastery near Warsaw, the largest in the world—with over 700 inhabitants. He founded monasteries in Japan, too; the one in Nagasaki survived the atomic bomb blast in 1945. He had demanded it be built on the “wrong” side of a mountain—*saving the building and all its inhabitants!*

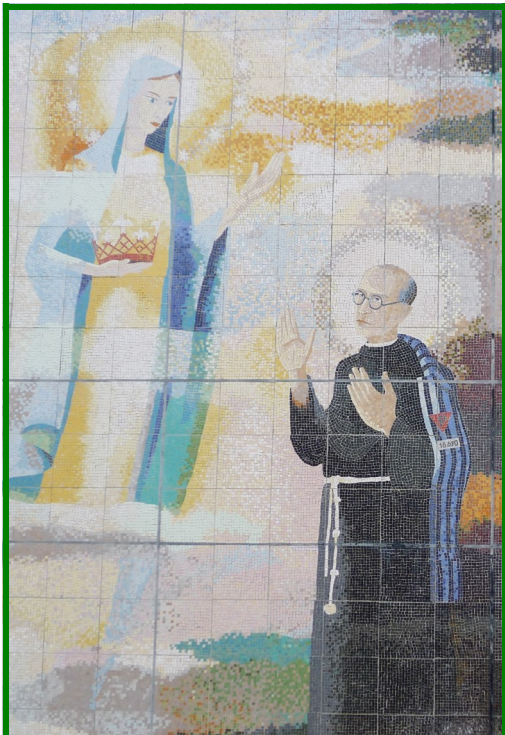
After Poland was invaded by the Nazis, Maximilian’s work went underground but continued to publish the truth. His monastery hid over 2,000 Jews from the Germans. Eventually, the Nazis arrested him and sent him to the prison camp Auschwitz. He was #16670.

When a prisoner from his barracks was found missing, the Camp Commander ordered ten men chosen at random to be starved to death as punishment. When Francisak Gajowniczek, one of the men chosen to die, cried out for mercy because he had a wife and young children, Maximilian stepped forward and offered to take his place. When the Commander learned Maximilian was a Catholic priest, he agreed to the switch. The young father was saved from certain death.

Maximilian supported the other nine men for two weeks in their cold bunker, singing songs in honor of the Blessed Mother. He was the last to die, given a lethal injection on August 14, 1941, by a Nazi doctor who said he had to look away because Maximilian’s face was filled with love and joy. Pope Saint John Paul II declared him a Saint in 1982. At the Mass of Canonization, Francisak Gajowniczek carried up the gifts wearing his own Auschwitz uniform.



Photograph of Father Maximilian Kolbe, 1939. Poland. Public Domain.



Saint Maximilian Kolbe with the Mary Immaculate. Niepokalanów Basilica. ©Fczarnowski, 2010. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Saint Louise de Marillac

Feast Day: March 15

When Louise was a little girl, she lived in French high society. But her father's second wife did not like Louise, so she went to live with her aunt, who was a nun. She attended a convent school and wanted to become a nun herself.

When she asked to join, she was turned down. So Louise married a French aristocrat and had a son named Michel. When her husband became very ill, Louise cared for him for five years until he died.

Later, she decided to help the poor and sick by working with a priest named Saint Vincent de Paul. He helped her start a new Order called the Daughters of Charity. They went to the homes of

sick people to look after them and to hospitals to work with doctors and nurses to help the sick there, too. They helped in orphanages and homes for the elderly.

Louise decided the Sisters should dress in a simple habit. She chose clothes that middle class women wore in those days, with big white hats made of starched linen called cornets. Until 1964, when they stopped wearing cornets, the Daughters of Charity were known the world over by their white hats.

To this day, they are known as women of mercy, bringing compassion to the sick and needy. Saint Louise de Marillac died on March 15, 1660.



St. Louise de Marillac, Toulouse. ©Olybrius, 2011. CC BY-SA 3.0.



St. Louise de Marillac with St. Vincent de Paul and Sisters of Charity. ©GFreihalter, 2010. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Sisters of Charity, by Armand Gautier, before 1895. Public Domain.

Saint Louise de Marillac

Feast Day: March 15



Portrait of Saint Louise de Marillac. Public Domain. 2006 Photograph of St. Louise de Marillac's wax effigy in her glass coffin, Rue de Bac. Released to Public Domain by André Leroux.

“Love the poor and honor them as you would honor Christ Himself.”

Born in 1591, Louise was a “natural” daughter of widower Louis de Marillac, a wealthy French aristocrat. Before he remarried, Louise lived in elite society, but his second wife refused to accept Louise, so she went to live with an aunt, a Dominican nun, receiving an excellent education in the convent school. When she was 12, her father died; Louise went to live with another woman who taught her how to run a house and use herbal remedies. Louise learned to live both among the very rich and with the middle classes.

Louise felt drawn to religious life, asking to join a convent of cloistered Capuchin nuns when she was just 15. She was crushed by their refusal and did not know what to do with her life. Advised to marry by her uncle, she wed Antoine Le Gras, secretary to the Queen, at age 22. They had one son, Michel, who had special needs. She was an attentive wife and mother and a leader in the Ladies of Charity, a group of wealthy women who helped the poor and infirm.

Her husband became very ill and was confined to bed. She became deeply depressed, worried she might not be doing God’s will in her life. Her director (Saint Francis de Sales) encouraged her to wait on God’s plan. She received a vision at Mass encouraging her to stay the course; she also saw the face of a priest whom she understood would become her spiritual guide in the future.

Louise created her own rule, similar to convent life. With intense devotion, she found time to pray, fast, and do penances while caring for her family. When her husband died in 1625, she moved to more humble rooms. There she met Saint Vincent de Paul—and recognized his as the face she had seen in her vision. Gradually, Saint Vincent guided her to find a better balance in her life and discover her true calling. Although the Ladies of Charity contributed many resources to help the poor and sick, these rich women had

neither time nor inclination to give hands-on assistance. Louise realized that what was needed were women who could dedicate themselves in full service to the poor. With Saint Vincent de Paul, she established the Daughters of Charity in 1633. From care in private homes, she organized care in hospitals, receiving the respect of the medical community, allowing the order to serve in orphanages, prisons, homes for the elderly or mentally ill, and even on the battlefield. Louise’s talent for organization drove the Daughters of Charity forward until her death on March 15, 1660. By then, the order had established forty houses in France. To this day, the Daughters of Charity serve the needs of the poor and infirm all over the world.



Painting of St. Vincent de Paul and the Sisters of Charity Caring for Foundlings, by Gomez Moreno, 1907. Public Domain.