



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of October 18, 2014,
Feast of Saint Luke

Dear Friends,

THOSE who maintain that God does not act in history will find a stunning contradiction in the life of Saint Joan of Arc. Blessed Wladimir Ghika wrote of her: "She is the saint of supreme trust in the supernatural realities: the presence of God, divine truths, persons living in the next world, angels and saints... Joan teaches us not only to be aware of these realities, but to audaciously lean on them as our primary support in being up to what we must accomplish in this world." The historical authenticity of the events of Joan's life, corroborated by numerous statements from eyewitnesses, is undeniable. Thanks to the records of the trial that condemned her, and of the subsequent trial that reversed the verdict, we are able to retrace Joan's adventure, and to admire the astonishing boldness with which she addressed the most powerful men in the world.

The daughter of simple and honest laborers, Jacques d'Arc and Isabelle Romee, Jehanne (according to the spelling of the time) was born on the feast of Epiphany 1412, according to tradition. The family lived in Domremy, in French Lorraine; the part of the village in which Joan lived belonged to France since 1299. Joan enjoyed a relatively peaceful childhood amidst her brothers and sister, Jacques, Jean, Pierre, and Catherine. She was particularly conscientious in doing whatever she could to help her parents. As she grew up, the girl showed a tender compassion for the poor. She was a good Christian, and often on Saturdays would go to the hermitage in Bermont, on a hill overlooking the village of Greux, where she loved to pray to the Blessed Virgin and light candles to her. Devotion to the Holy Name of JESUS, preached at the time by Saint Bernardine of Siena, also held an important place in her heart.

Yet, since 1337 the kingdom had been plunged in the Hundred Years' War. As they too were descendants of Philip IV by marriage, the Plantagenets of England sought to regain the right to the French crown by force. The country was divided between the Armagnacs, loyal of the legitimate king, and the Burgundians, allies of the English. Troops of soldiers from both sides roamed and pillaged the country, so that one could not sow or harvest without armed escort. King Charles VI fell into insanity. In 1420, in the treaty of Troyes (between Queen Isabeau, the wife of Charles VI, King Henry V of England, and the Duke of Burgundy), the dauphin (the future Charles VII) was disinherited from the throne in favor of Henry V of England. Further, the treaty provided for the unification of the crowns of France and England after the death of King Charles VI. But when the sovereigns of the two nations, Charles VI and Henry V, both



Saint Joan of Arc

All rights reserved

died in 1422, the dauphin was declared king of France with the name Charles VII, while the Duke of Bedford, the regent of England, proclaimed the one year old son of Henry V, Henry VI, as King of France and England.

"Go, daughter of God!"

In 1425, Joan was thirteen years old when, one day around noon, she heard a voice coming from a brilliant source of light in her father's garden. At first she was afraid, but Saint Michael soon identified himself. The divine messenger announced to her that she would receive frequent visits from Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret "to help her to govern herself well". Joan made a vow of chastity on the spot; from then on she introduced herself as "the Maid," that is to say, the virgin. "With the vow of virginity, Joan consecrated her whole being exclusively to the one Love of JESUS: it was the promise that she made to Our Lord to preserve the virginity of her body and her mind well. Virginity of soul is the state of grace, a supreme value, for her more precious than life. It is a gift of God which is to be received and preserved with humility and trust" (Benedict XVI, General Audience, January 26, 2011). From then on, the girl withdrew somewhat from games, went to the church more often, and attended Mass whenever she could. The angel entrusted her with the mission God was giving her—to aid the king to relieve the great suffering of the kingdom of France. Joan knew nothing about handling arms—how could she lead men into battle? She wept at the thought of leaving her family. The angel reassured her: "Go,

daughter of God, go! The King of Heaven will be there to help you; He will provide that which you lack."

At first she said nothing to her parents. In May 1428, taking advantage of a stay at the home of Durand Laxart, a cousin by marriage to whom she had been entrusted, she had herself escorted to the royal garrison in Vaucouleurs, where she implored Captain Robert de Baudricourt to make known to the dauphin that he should not engage in combat before mid-Lent (March 3, 1429), for then he would have help. But she was rudely sent away.

"Better today than tomorrow!"

In October, the English laid siege to Orleans, which had a strategic location that controlled passage of the Loire and protected the regions that had remained faithful to the dauphin. If Orleans fell, the entire kingdom would become English. Joan knew that she had to go there to free the city. "Since God had commanded it, even if I had a hundred fathers and mothers, even if I were the daughter of a king, still would I have gone!" she would later declare. The day after her seventeenth birthday, she left Domremy for good and went again to Baudricourt, from whom she wished an escort to meet the dauphin. She was refused yet again, but Jean de Metz, a squire, noticed her, and asked about her intentions. "I must meet with the dauphin before mid-Lent," she replied, "even if I must wear my legs down to my knees... even though I would greatly prefer to remain with my poor mother... but I must go and do this, for my Lord desires it." When he learned that her Lord was none other than God, Jean promised to take her to Charles and asked when she wished to leave. "Better today than tomorrow," she replied, "and better tomorrow than later." After a pilgrimage to Saint-Nicolas-de-Port in Lorraine, she returned to Vaucouleurs and announced to Baudricourt that the royal army had just been defeated. Impressed, Baudricourt gave Joan, who from that point on dressed in men's clothes, an escort of six men. They left on February 13th.

The route from Vaucouleurs to Chinon was a journey of nearly 600 kilometers through enemy territory. Joan impressed the men with her tirelessness, and her simple purity that lifted their souls. She entered Chinon on February 23rd. Three hundred knights were crowded into the reception hall, but she went straight to the dauphin who was hidden among them in disguise, and told him: "Kind dauphin, I am called Joan the Maid, and the King of Heaven sends you word by me that you will be consecrated and crowned at Reims, and that you will be lieutenant to the King of Heaven, who is King of France." She then revealed to the dauphin a secret known only to him and God. Convinced on the spot, Charles, who was hesitant by nature, would nevertheless test Joan.

The Maid remained three weeks in Chinon. During that time, Charles introduced her to Duke Jean

d'Alençon, a member of the royal family, whom she greeted with these words: "Be most welcomed. The more there will be of the royal blood of France, the better." The duke would later testify that the following day, after the king's Mass, Joan asked the dauphin to freely give his kingdom to the King of Heaven, in return for which God would restore his rights. The dauphin had the Maid questioned by a college of theologians gathered in Poitiers. There, she dictated a letter to the English, whom she invited in JESUS' name to enter into a true peace in justice. She would receive no response. Meanwhile, the questioning rudely tried the young woman's patience. They asked her for a sign of her mission, but she retorted that if she was taken to Orleans, they would see the signs for which she had been sent. At this time she made four prophecies: the lifting of the siege, the sack of Reims, the liberation of Paris, and the release of Duke Charles of Orleans, who was being held prisoner in England. When they objected that God could liberate France without human means, she declared, "The soldiers will fight in the name of God, and the victory will come from God." The judges decided that Joan was a good Christian and that they could have confidence in her. The dauphin then charged her to work to resupply Orleans, under the direction of the Duke of Alençon. At Tours, Joan had a standard made, decorated with fleur-de-lis and "on which was painted the image of Our Lord holding the world: the emblem of her political mission. The liberation of her people was a work of human justice which Joan carried out in charity, for love of JESUS. Her holiness is a beautiful example for lay people engaged in politics, especially in the most difficult situations" (Benedict XVI, *ibid.*).

The "Maid of Orleans"

On April 25th, Joan joined up with the army in Blois. Her first concern was to drive away the women of ill repute, for "battles are lost because of sins", and then urged the men to go to confession. She did not tolerate blasphemies; the Duke of Alençon would later admit that he restrained himself in front of her out of fear of being reprimanded. By the kindness, courage (she would declare she never shed blood, though she was always on the front line), and extraordinary purity shown by her life, Joan accomplished a true mission of evangelization among the soldiers. On the 28th, the Maid was in sight of Orleans (situated on the right bank of the Loire), but, contrary to her intention, they were led along the left bank. The "Bastard of Orleans," (who would later be named Dunois), the head of the stronghold, presented himself before Joan, who dryly addressed him: "Is it you who directed that we take this side of the river, and not go straight to where Talbot and the English are?"—"Myself and others who are wiser gave the counsel, which seemed safer."—"In the name of God, the counsel of the Lord Our God is wiser and safer than yours... I bring the aid of the King of Heaven who, at the request of Saint Louis and Saint Charlemagne, has taken pity on the city of Orleans." At this moment the

wind, which had been against them, turned, and the boats that were to supply the city were able to go upstream and dock. The next day, the Maid was welcomed into the city as a liberator. In the following days, she led a series of quick attacks that were no less than masterstrokes, such that, on May 8th, the English troops left the area. Joan would go down in history as the “Maid of Orleans”.

“He will be crowned!”

On May 13th, Joan met with the dauphin at Tours, and defended the plan for coronation against the advice of the royal counsel. Once the king was crowned, she assured, the enemy’s powers would diminish. On the 30th, they decided to march on Reims. The Loire campaign, under the command of the Duke of Alençon, ensured the security of Orleans. A series of glorious battles ensued: Jargeau, Beaugency, Meung, and Patay, where divine assistance was palpable. In spite of these victories, the dauphin was still hesitant to set out. The army was nevertheless enthusiastic, and Joan was full of confidence: “I will safely lead the kind dauphin Charles and his party,” she said, “and he will be crowned in Reims.” On June 29th, Charles finally set out on a 200 kilometer ride through enemy territory. The towns surrendered one after another without a fight. On July 16th, the English abandoned Reims, which welcomed the king. Throughout the night preparations were made for the coronation the following day. In the grand cathedral, the archbishop of the city, Regnault de Chartres, anointed the dauphin with oil from the Holy Vial, placed the crown on his head, and made him king. From then on, he would be recognized as such by many of the towns through which he passed. Joan rejoiced to see her standard alongside the king: “It had borne the burden; it was just that it should have the honor.” In return for her services, she asked only that Greux and Domremy be permanently exempt from royal taxes.

The very day of the ceremony, in the excitement of the victory, the army of the coronation found itself close to the capital, and the king entered into negotiations for a truce with the Burgundians in return for a promise that Paris surrender. In reality, it gave the Duke of Burgundy time for 3,500 English troops, who had left Calais on July 15th, to get into place to oppose the royal march. The king undertook a series of hesitant countermarches that led him to Compiègne. There, Joan informed the Duke of Alençon that she intended to see Paris closer up. On September 8th, they launched the attack—Joan was wounded in the thigh by a crossbow bolt, but still she urged on the attackers. They withdrew from the moats and left the battlefield for the night. The next day, the king called for his captains. The royal army set out again for the Loire, then was disbanded at the end of September. It would be six years before Paris was liberated.

The royal counsel, jealous of the Maid’s success, persuaded the king to separate Joan and the Duke of

Alençon—they formed too warlike a duo which interfered with plans to achieve peace through diplomatic means. The Duke of Burgundy entered fully into the game of negotiating with the French, while secretly preparing with Bedford to reconquer the towns he had lost. Joan, at first kept far from the king by relatively unimportant missions, was called back by him to be raised, with her family, to nobility on December 29th. In February 1430, Reims and Troyes were threatened by the Burgundians. Joan supported these cities with all her power. Given the king’s inertia, she took the initiative and, at the beginning of April, won Lagny, between Saint-Denis and Meaux. At Lagny, a child who had been dead for three days was resurrected by her prayers. The little boy, who had already turned black, regained enough life to be baptized, then died again and entered into Paradise.

Sold and betrayed

On April 22nd, Joan’s voices warned her that she would be captured within two months. They told her not to worry, and to “willingly accept everything,” for God would help her. The Maid flew to the aid of Compiègne, which was under siege by the Burgundians, and entered the town accompanied by 400 armed men. On May 23rd, after receiving Communion at Mass, she addressed the crowd surrounding her: “My dear friends, I have been sold and betrayed, and will soon be put to death. Pray for me, for I will no longer serve the king or kingdom of France.” That very day, Joan made a sortie, but the action went badly, and during the retreat she was taken prisoner before the gates of the city, which she had found closed. She was ordered to give her faith (her word) that she would not try to escape, but she retorted, “I have given my faith to one other than you, and I will keep my word to Him.” Dragged from jails to dungeons, Joan tried in vain to escape. The first time, she managed to lock up her guards, but was recognized the moment she left the buildings. At Beaufort, she leapt more than fifteen meters from a tower, in spite of her voices telling her not to do so. She was found unconscious. Saint Catherine consoled her, and called upon her to go to confession and to maintain peace in all circumstances. At the end of August, she was sold, and on November 19th, handed over to the English who took her to Rouen; they reached the city on December 23rd.

There the bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon, given orders by Bedford, had prepared his plan: discredit the Maid through a trial for heresy and witchcraft. When the young woman requested the sacraments for Christmas, he refused her them. While according to ecclesiastical law she should have been guarded by women in a church prison, she was imprisoned in a tower, where five English soldiers mistreated her and chained her at night. On February 21st, Joan, who had just turned nineteen, exhausted by nine months of harsh captivity, appeared before Cauchon, surrounded by more than forty assistant judges. Six public sessions took place between then and

Loving the Church to the end

March 3rd. At each one, Joan was barraged for at least three hours with deceitful questions. She asked for defense counsel, a mixed jury of English and French, and the opportunity to attend Mass. Cauchon refused all these requests. During each session, he harassed her endlessly. Joan clearly let it be known that she had promised to reveal nothing concerning her king: "You cannot wish for me to perjure myself... You say you are my judge. Consider seriously what you are doing, for truly, I have been sent by God. You place yourself in great danger." From the 4th to the 9th of March, the doctors met to exploit the answers and prepare the next round of interrogation, which would take place behind closed doors. The questions would revolve around the morality of Joan and around her voices, her submission to the Church, the sign given to the king, and her men's clothing.

In the danger, Joan had recourse to the Lord, to whom she entrusted herself in prayer: "Most sweet Lord, in honor of Your Holy Passion, I implore You, if You love me, to reveal to me how I should reply to these men of the Church." And the saint's replies radiate an inspired wisdom. "Why did God choose you rather than another to liberate Orleans?" she was asked. "It pleased God to do this work through a simple and poor maiden."—"What do you ask of your voices as reward?"—"Only one thing: the salvation of my soul."—"Have you need of confession, since you believe the word of your Voices that you shall be saved?"—"I do not know whether or not I have committed mortal sin... As for going to confession, I want it nevertheless. I think that one cannot cleanse one's conscience too much."—"Are you in a state of grace?"—"If I am not, may God put me there, and if I am, may God keep me there. However, I would be the most unhappy woman in the world if I knew I was in a state of mortal sin."—"Was your hope for victory based on yourself, or on your standard?"—"Neither on myself, nor on my standard; my confidence was entirely in Our Lord JESUS CHRIST."

"Dear brothers and sisters, the Name of JESUS, invoked by our saint up to the last moments of her earthly life, was like the breathing of her soul, like the beating of her heart, the center of her whole life. The 'mystery of the charity of Joan of Arc,' which so fascinated the poet Charles Peguy, is this total love of JESUS, and of her neighbor in JESUS and for JESUS. This saint understood that love embraces the whole reality of God and of man, of heaven and of earth, of the Church and of the world. JESUS was always in the first place during her whole life, according to her beautiful affirmation: 'God first served.' Loving Him means always doing His will" (Benedict XVI, *ibid.*). May this patron saint of France obtain for us this burning love for JESUS, who alone can renew society!

They wanted to convict Joan of heresy, by showing that she did not submit to the decisions of the Church, with which Cauchon and his assistant judges identified themselves. They pressed her: "One day, will you yield to the view of the Church?"—"I yield myself to Our Lord who sent me, to Our Lady, and to the saints in Paradise. In my view Our Lord and the Church are one, and difficulties should not be made about that. Why do you make difficulties about that?" Pope Benedict XVI would say, "This affirmation, cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 795), has a truly heroic character in the context of the Trial of Condemnation, before her judges, men of the Church who were persecuting and condemning her. In the Love of JESUS, Joan found the strength to love the Church to the very end, even at the moment she was sentenced" (*ibid.*).

On multiple occasions, Joan appealed to the judgment of the Pope, but her judges ignored it. After a pretense of a trial, Cauchon sentenced the Maid to be burned alive on the site of the old market. The execution took place on May 30, 1431. Joan received the sacraments, then asked that a crucifix be held before her eyes while she endured the torture. She died thus, looking at JESUS crucified and repeatedly saying His holy Name in a loud voice. The executioners threw the saint's heart, found intact amid the ashes, into the Seine.

After Joan's death, her prophecies came to pass: the Duke of Orleans returned to France, Paris was liberated on April 13, 1436, and the Hundred Years' War ended in 1453 with the capture of Bordeaux. In 1456 a long trial clearly showed Joan's innocence and her complete fidelity to the Church. Beatified by Saint Pius X in 1909, the Maid was canonized on May 16, 1920 by Benedict XV, and named the secondary patron saint of France (Our Lady is the primary patron saint) on March 2, 1922.

Dom Antoine Marie o.s.b.

- To receive the Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey newsletter (free of charge), contact the abbey.
- We gratefully accept the addresses of other potential readers.
- Donations : we are able to accept cheques in \$US, \$ Can., £ Sterling, Euro, Swiss Francs. Credit card donations can be made through our website www.clairval.com

Abbaye Saint-Joseph de Clairval (English ed) ISSN : 1956-3906 - Dépôt légal : date de parution - Directeur de publication : Dom Antoine Beauchef - Imprimerie : Traditions Monastiques - 21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain.

ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL – 21150 FLAVIGNY-SUR-OZERAIN – FRANCE

Fax : + 33 3 80 96 25 29 – email : abbey@clairval.com – website : <http://www.clairval.com/>