



# Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of April 12, 2015,  
Mercy Sunday

**Dear Friends,**

“OUR life has value only in proportion to our fidelity in accepting and fulfilling the most holy will of God. As we grow older, we understand this more and more, and the soul that loves its God strives ever more to conform itself to God’s will.” These words from the pen of Mother Marie Adele Garnier reveal a soul given completely to God. This gift of herself made her very sensitive to offenses to the Heart of JESUS, and inspired her desire to participate in the redemptive suffering of the Crucified One, in a spirit of reparation for the sins of the world.

Marie Adele Garnier was born on August 15, 1838 in Grancey-le-Château, in the diocese of Dijon, France. At the age of eight, two years after her mother’s death, she was sent to the boarding school of the Celestine nuns in Villeneuve-sur-Yonne. Although pious, she was not always a model child. She herself would later describe herself in this period of her life: “Very difficult, very undisciplined, very happy.” She made her first Communion on May 19, 1850 and received Confirmation the next day. From that moment on, the desire developed in her to please God alone. Back from boarding school, she was only sixteen when a young man asked for her hand in marriage. They became engaged. One day, she heard her fiancé, whose Christian spirit was far too superficial, joke with a friend about his future wife’s piety: “Once we’re married, I’ll get rid of all that.” Adele didn’t hesitate—quickly coming down the stairs, she hurled back at him: “Sir, you will not have to take the trouble—I will never be your wife!” Denials, excuses, a scene of despair—the young man plunged a pair of scissors into his chest. The wound was serious, but not fatal. Adele remained firm—the engagement was off. (The young man later married another woman). Not long after this act of courage, she received some remarkable graces that she would describe in these words: “God attracted me to Himself in so delightful a manner that it seemed to be not of this world.”

## **An intense thirst**

At midnight Mass on Christmas 1862, Adele was favored with a vision of the Child JESUS. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart grew, and she thought she was called to religious life. At the age of twenty-six, she spent a trial period with the Dames of the Sacred Heart in Conflans. However, two months later, her poor health forced her to return to her family in Dijon. There, she received special graces: “When I was in church, often



Mother Adele Garnier

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quite distracted, in any event not at all recollected or fervent, I sometimes felt myself suddenly carried away by a superhuman force that thrilled me—I felt God, I was in heaven. It lasted a very short while, a minute perhaps, and it happened rather often... Always, always, the result was love for God, a thirst for JESUS, and my Communion become more fervent.”

## **An intense thirst**

In May 1868, she joined the Croze family as a tutor at the chateau of Aulne, close to Laval. She remained there eight years, filled with joy at being the sacristan of the chateau’s little chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament was kept. When the definition of the dogma of papal infallibility was announced at this time, a great love for the Vicar of JESUS CHRIST developed in Adele, who later took for her religious name Mother Mary of Saint Peter. One evening in 1869, she suddenly saw appear before her a large Host radiating light, bearing the image of Our Lord revealing His Heart, just as on the medal she would later adopt for her religious family.

But soon there were profound political upheavals: the Papal States were taken over, and the Franco-Prussian War resulted in the end of France’s Second Empire. The insults endured by Christ in the person of His Vicar and France’s misfortunes wrung Adele’s heart. On December 12, 1871, she wrote in her diary: “For France: to pray, expiate, suffer, love!” Throughout the following year, she was tried by great interior anguish.

"It is impossible for me," she wrote, "to find any taste for, attraction to, or consolation in serving Our Lord." In the spring of 1873, she became so despondent that her spiritual director commanded her to ask JESUS for some light and spiritual consolation. She went to the chapel and prayed. As she was leaving the chapel, as she later recounted, "an arrow of love and fire shot from the Tabernacle like a bolt of lightning and struck me in the heart... Wild with a joy that stripped me of reason, I fell as though struck by lightning, and remained in the grip of a rapture I cannot describe." Her director assured her that these graces came from the Lord.

### A wonderful response

After the disaster of the war of 1870, two fervent Christians, Legentil and Rohault de Fleury, aware of the revelations of the Sacred Heart of JESUS to Saint Margaret Mary, launched the idea of building a temple to the Sacred Heart, where prayer would rise unceasingly toward Heaven for the Pope, the Church, and France. In June 1675, JESUS had shown His Heart to the holy Visitation nun, and had told her: "Behold this Heart, which has loved men so much that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, to demonstrate to them Its love; and in return from most I receive nothing but ingratitude; in their irreverence and sacrileges, in the coldness and contempt which they show Me". In response to this sorrowful appeal from the Heart of JESUS, the construction of the basilica in Montmartre, Paris, was meant to express France's repentance and devotion to God and Christ. On July 23, 1873, the National Assembly declared the building of this monument to be in the public interest.

In 1872, after having heard an article read on the plan for a church dedicated to the Sacred Heart, Adele felt an interior voice telling her: "This is where I want you." From then on, this call gently and continually followed her. One evening in September 1874, she clearly felt that Our Lord wanted exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at Montmartre day and night, and she distinctly heard these words: "Go speak to the Archbishop of Paris." With her spiritual director's approval, she went to the home of Cardinal Guibert, who responded to her somewhat ironically that the church had not even been begun, and that her request did not seem feasible to him. Nevertheless, it was the cardinal himself who would later establish the perpetual adoration he had then deemed impossible, and which has not ceased, day or night, since August 1, 1885.

On June 16, 1875, the first stone of the future basilica of Montmartre was laid. That very day Adele offered herself, in union with the worship to Christ in love and reparation that would be rendered there, as a victim to share in the Savior's sufferings in a very special way, through her own life.

Saint John the Apostle writes that by His sacrifice JESUS is the expiation for our sins (1 Jn. 2:2). "The Word became flesh," teaches the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "in order to save us by reconciling us with God, who loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10)" (CCC, 457). JESUS is the victim offered for our sins because He has expiated them and redeemed us through the sufferings of His Passion and death on the Cross. "The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man," declares Saint John Paul II... "Each one is ... called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. ... Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (cf. Col. 1:24); the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things which are indispensable for the world's salvation" (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, February 11, 1984, nos. 19, 27).

### Prayer of reparation

At the end of that year, while the basilica in Montmartre was being built, Adele wrote to Cardinal Guibert: "In this France that He loves and where it has pleased Him to reveal the torrents of love and mercy of which the Holy Eucharist is at once the ocean and the canal, does [JESUS] not wait for souls, the objects of His special mercies, to unite themselves with Him, consecrating themselves forever to prayer of reparation at the foot of His altar, obtaining through their humble supplications a reduction in the rate of sacrileges and a lessening of the contagious spread of indifference and forgetfulness?" She was thereby expressing a request of JESUS: the founding of a new order of women religious dedicated to adoration. She herself began a life of prayer in a little apartment in Montmartre on May 18, 1876. But her health weakened and she reached the point of suffering a veritable martyrdom, relieved only during Mass, during which her soul received comforting graces. As her illness worsened, it became clear that she could not continue to lead this sort of life. Discerning in this the will of God, she left Montmartre the following September 13<sup>th</sup>, with the invincible hope of returning. She stayed with her family for many months, hovering between life and death, before recovering a bit of health. Much later, she would say of this long of trial: "I had periods of terrible sadness and discouragement, at times rather long... I could do nothing but resign myself, hardly saying any prayer but the *Our Father*."

In 1878, Adele went to Lourdes. "On August 15<sup>th</sup>," she wrote, "as I was in prayer before the grotto, the

thought came to me that MARY had led me there to place the initiative and all the future victims under her maternal protection. So, at her feet, I wrote in a few lines a humble offering of the nascent Society, entirely consecrated and dedicated to reparation to the Heart of JESUS, under the protection of MARY Immaculate... I slid the paper in a crack in the rock... It escaped my fingers and fell in a hole where neither eye nor hand could reach." At the same time, one of Adele's friends, in a similar gesture, buried the offering of both their lives in the very foundations of the basilica of Montmartre.

### "What is happening?"

Almost ten years passed. On November 14, 1887, as the priest was giving her Communion, Adele clearly heard these words: "This is the wedding!" She recounted, "I found myself as though stretched out on the Cross, crucified with JESUS, such that my limbs were penetrated by the limbs of JESUS in a manner that can only be understood by experiencing it... I told the Lord, 'My God, what is happening? What are You doing?'—'I am taking possession of you, you are Mine, you are My spouse.'" For a long time, Adele had had a lively devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. JESUS made her understand how, during the Mass, acting through the priest, He is truly our sole and unique Pontiff and Mediator. "JESUS made me understand," she said, "that there is a universal priesthood, absolutely and necessarily united with His. ... that this priesthood is completely interior, and that it only exists when the soul has desired it and has consented in its will to be sacrificed at all times with JESUS... He made me understand that I would have to acquire a very great and perfect purity of heart, soul, mind, and body, so that the victim who would also be the priest with JESUS would not be at all stained. Then He told me: 'The necessary sacrifices, I will help you to do them. The love I will give you. The difficulties I will smooth out. Your afflictions I will take care of—I will take them on Myself.'" "

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that there is a common priesthood of the faithful, distinct from the ministerial priesthood of priests. "The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood... Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. ... For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become *spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through JESUS CHRIST* (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God" (Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 10, 34).

The abundant graces Adele received did not give her a swelled head: "I am still myself," she wrote to her spiritual director, "constantly making missteps that make me feel all the weight of my weak nature, but the thought of my God lifts me up and supports me. I firmly believe that He will not allow anything in the world to separate me from Him." From then on, she judged all things according to the mind of God, and remained calm and peaceful in the midst of trials and contradictions.

### Amen—Alleluia

In 1896, Adele became friends with a young woman, Alice Andrade, then twenty-three years old, who felt destined to join a religious community whose members prayed for the Church and for France. In December, without yet being able to begin leading a communal life, they consecrated themselves together to God and adopted a little rule that ended with "Amen—Alleluia", two words that would become dear to the new congregation. In March 1897, a third companion applied to join the community, and in June, the little group, soon joined by a fourth sister, set up residence in an apartment in Montmartre. They recited the Office together and, as soon as possible, began adoration during the day, and later on, at night. Apostolic works, which were not to harm contemplative life, were foreseen. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, in the crypt of the new basilica, the new religious dedicated themselves to Saint Peter. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, they began wearing, under their secular garments, a scapular of white wool. On the front was the Sacred Heart of JESUS surrounded by a crown of thorns, with the keys of Saint Peter above. On the back was a cross with an "M" for MARY. The budding congregation's motto was "*Gloria Deo per Sacratissimum Cor Jesu*.—Glory to God through the Sacred Heart of JESUS".

On March 4, 1898, Cardinal Richard, the archbishop of Paris, authorized a canonical novitiate to be established—the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of JESUS of Montmartre were founded. Soon the constitutions of the nascent congregation, inspired by the Rule of Saint Augustine, were approved. On June 9, 1899, the year Pope Leo XIII consecrated all mankind to the Sacred Heart of JESUS, the first four religious made their profession. Adele would be known henceforth as Mother Mary of Saint Peter. For her, Montmartre was the center of all her initiative of adoration and reparation for France. But what the Adorers of Montmartre were for France, they were to be for the other countries to which they would be called. Thus the entire congregation became united in prayer for the Church and the Pope, with each house filling a particular role for the country it is in.

In the following months, the sisters acquired a property very close to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. But in 1901, an anticlerical French government ordered the dissolution of religious congregations; the Adorers of Montmartre went into exile in London. On November 21<sup>st</sup> of that year, they took the religious habit

for the first time, consisting of a white tunic, a red scapular, and a black veil, which they had not been able to wear in France. In March 1903, the young community moved to Tyburn, the “mons martyrurum” (“mount of martyrs”) in London. There, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several hundred martyrs—priests, religious, and lay men and women—shed their blood to remain faithful to the Roman Church. In the years that followed, the community endured numerous trials and serious financial problems. Nevertheless, the Providence of the Heart of JESUS watched over them, and one day Mother heard the Lord tell her interiorly, with respect to the congregation, “I do not want it to perish!” In fact, additional vocations made it possible for a house in Belgium to be founded in 1909. However, over a period of years Mother Mary of Saint Peter felt interiorly moved to adopt the Rule of Saint Benedict. In March 1913, favored with a vision of Saint Benedict himself, she was cured of a serious illness and, on January 17, 1914, the sisters adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict. They then adopted a black habit, while maintaining use of the white cowl for offices in the choir.

### Dragging a Cross

The life of Mother Mary of Saint Peter continued to be marked by an almost continuous suffering of soul and body, to the point that when she went two hours without suffering, she asked JESUS if He had forgotten her. She was subject to terrible migraines that kept her from thinking or doing anything. If she did not drink a few sips of coffee when she woke up in the morning, she was unable to work. But, according to the laws of the Church in effect at the time, this relief would prevent her from receiving Holy Communion, since she had not fasted since midnight. Finally after a very long time, she was granted a dispensation from the Eucharistic fast.

Despite it all, by the grace of God, Mother had gained an imperturbable gentleness and an always smiling graciousness; she drew from these dispositions the tact she needed to comfort the sisters who were going through trials. One day she said to a young religious who was particularly tried: “My poor little daughter, I have such pity for you. When you suffer so much, drag your cross on all fours if you must, and then, when things are a little better, try to get up and carry it more valiantly.”

One day in October 1922, Mother Mary of Saint Peter saw herself carried in spirit to Calvary and stretched out, sick and weak, at the feet of JESUS crucified. But there was no Cross. “My good Master,” she said, “I do not see the wood of Your Cross.” — “The wood of My Cross will be in you,” JESUS answered her. This was the announcement of her final illness that would last eighteen months. In the beginning of November, an attack of angina pectoris began, complicated by congestion. From then on, Mother remained bedridden, and could only very rarely attend Holy Mass. “I believe that I will be cheerful up to the final moment!” she declared, in spite of her usual despondency. She offered her sufferings “so that all nations might become Catholic.” On November 15, 1923, on a Host a priest brought her, she saw the Heart of JESUS, alive in the Eucharist. She died peacefully on June 17, 1924.

Today, the congregation of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Montmartre continues its vocation of contemplative life in convents in England, Australia, Peru, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, Ecuador, Columbia, and, since 2013, France. Some sisters from the congregation in Tyburn formed a new congregation in 1947, the Benedictines of the Sacred Heart of Montmartre. Today they service the Basilica of Montmartre and other places of pilgrimage in France.

Marie Adele Garnier wished “to live under the gaze of JESUS, to become inseparable from JESUS, to grow under the Eucharist’s burning rays of sacred fire”. Following her example, and in keeping with the exhortation of Saint Benedict (*Rule*, ch. 72), let us learn to “prefer nothing to the love of Christ”.

- *The Path of Mother Adèle Garnier (1838-1924)*, Gianmario Piga, ed. A.S.H.-O.S.B (2012), Tyburn Convent, 8 Hyde Park Place, London W2 2LJ, England.

Dom Antoine Marie  
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