

SUNDAY DAYS OF PRAYER

JULY 17, 2022

MARIAN HOUR

1. Rosary – 2. Consecration to Marie-Paule – 3. Conference

Simone and Marie-Paule: Models of a Spiritual Friendship

Simone, a deeply Marian soul, was Marie-Paule's cousin, with whom she was very close. They both grew up together and shared the same ideal of spiritual life, as a result of which a very beautiful spiritual friendship developed, in particular when Marie-Paule's spiritual director stopped giving her direction in 1959. It was in Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross that Marie-Paule found the lights for her spiritual life but it was in Simone that she found an open, compassionate heart sharing the same ideal.

Marie-Paule herself expressed the importance of this friendship in an exchange of letters with Simone. She wrote: "My very dear Simone,

"There are moments when a soul really has need to get outside of itself. If it is good to unburden oneself to the heart of Mary and that of her divine Son, it is also most salutary to go to a sister soul and to confide to her the state of one's own soul, just as Christ himself did to Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And there are even those things which cannot be expressed verbally, but must be made through confidential outpourings in a letter." (*Life of Love II*, pp. 172-173)

The friendship each one had for the other was really centered on God, and these few excerpts from letters Marie-Paule wrote to Simone bear witness to this.

"For a long time, I desired someone who was able to uplift herself above the ordinary trivial things so that I could converse with her. And behold, the same ideal attracts you. Therefore, we will be able to drink from the book from Saint Teresa of Avila and talk about it together. How happy I finally am." (*Lettres de Marie-Paule à sa cousine Simone*, p. 36)

"How I love you, dear little one. I love you even more because I see that God is purifying you in His fashion." (*Id.*, p. 46)

"Do you know why I love you? It is because you are pure and we feel so much the love of Mary and the Eucharist in you..." (*Id.*, p. 76)

"I feel you so close to me, even closer because I feel that Mary is inspiring you more than ever. Your letters bring me words of comfort which I look for even in my abandonment to the divine will." (*Id.*, p. 95)

Events would contribute to purifying their friendship. Marie-Paule recounted:

"I want you to know and be quite convinced of this, that the desire to unburden oneself is truly shared and, unfortunately, very often held back because of circumstances. We really cannot reproach God because of what He does for the good of our souls. Let us take advantage of this, then, to love Him, He

who is a bit jealous of the affection we have for each other. On the other hand, He knows very well that our desire is to uplift ourselves to Him by holding each other by the hand." (*Id.*, p. 139)

Marie-Paule would also provide very valuable assistance to Simone in her ascent to God, reassuring her by showing her the purifications God was permitting in her life. She enlightened Simone on the state of spiritual aridity she was experiencing.

"Stand firm, my dear; the days when nothing goes right, when spiritual coldness is added to the aridity and the discontent, they become meritorious if, in all humility, we show our nothingness, our wretchedness, to our Love. Those trials are often worth more than when we feel a satisfaction, a joy in prayer, a sweetness of the heart because, in the first case, it is Jesus who receives since we are giving, whereas in the second, it is Jesus who gives and we who receive. Hang on, my dear; after the periods of sterility will come the great moments of love which make us forget the thorns that hurt us. Then, with 'your' Mary, you will mount, even if you think you are going down." (*Id.*, p. 138)

In a period of doubt Simone was going through, Marie-Paule reassured her: *"It is not surprising that doubts are assailing you. Virtue comes out of this even more victorious. Should I tell you that those moments of worries, of doubts, are also the most cruel ones for me; they are even worse than the calumnies and the humiliations because, you know, doubts undermine the very foundations of the edifice which is faith. And it is only through faith that we must advance. I must tell you that these doubts which are cropping up show me where you are in the ascent of perfection. So, it is the famous night of the spirit infiltrating the night of the senses which will be completed once you will be detached from all that is material."* (*Id.*, pp. 48-49)

The trials Simone experienced, her generosity both on the material level and the time she took to support Marie-Paule with her letters, help us understand what Marie-Paule wrote concerning her cousin Simone.

"Simone passed through the Work of the Co-Redemption as Simon of Cyrene passed in the Work of the Redemption, leaving in it the fragrance of a life won over to the love of the Father and of Mary, our Mother." (*Id.*, p. 319)

Even if, as of 1969, Simone is no longer really present in the narration of *Life of Love*, Marie-Paule would say that she was a basic element in the spreading of the Marian Work we are familiar with.

“And Simone continues along her path of a light of God, knowing that the bonds Mary wove between us for her Work of Love served to fix permanently the backdrop, the luminous colors of which illuminate a little everywhere the base of love and charity which solidifies every work of God accomplished by His servants and handmaids. What a self-effacing role, lived in the silence of her life given over to God, for Him alone and for Mary, without even thinking of the spreading of a message. It was normal to live in this way the very pure joys of a communion of souls that quiver at the infinite reflections of spiritual beauties. Thus, Simone left a permanent mark on this backdrop because, in her, there shone a very special beauty which Heaven took hold of to illuminate the base of its Work of Love.” (Id., pp. 319-320)

May we find in these letters the model of what a true spiritual friendship ought to be in which two sister souls, more and more detached from themselves, support one another to ascend always higher to God. The following words from Marie-Paule lead us to reflect on the importance of such a friendship:

“Can there be a sweeter, purer and more spiritual affection than the one that evolves under the high patronage of a marvelous Madonna! If everyone could experience the savor of noble and pure friendships and if everyone wanted to live of them, the face of the earth would rapidly change and charity would be well practised because then true love would be at the base of every act of charity.” (Id., pp. 98-99)

Father Serge Lépine

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EUCCHARISTIC HOUR

1. Rosary – 2. Vespers – 3. Conference – 4. Invocations – 5. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

Marie-Paule’s Precious Friendship with Simone

Marie-Paule and Simone grew up together and they were bound together by a friendship which was almost hereditary. After having lost sight of each other for many years because of the direction each of their lives had taken, the two cousins would come together again in 1957, at the time of Marie-Paule’s separation. This is when the bond of friendship became even stronger.

Between the months of May 1958 and March 1969, Marie-Paule addressed numerous letters to her dear cousin. Their very pure friendship and a complete understanding of the other helped them to bear the trials and tribulations which befell both of them.

In some of those letters, Marie-Paule underlined just how valuable her friendship with Simone was, as well as the joy she felt when she was in this latter’s presence. Here is one example of this: “I am thinking of our too-short conversation of this afternoon. When you left, I would have liked to have held you back, have kept you longer, but it seemed that you had to go. I think our souls were thirsting for spirituality. If you only knew how anxious I am for your holidays... Our door is wide open to you for as long as you will be able to come.” (Letters de Marie-Paule à sa cousine Simone, p 62) That was during the summer of 1959 when Marie-Paule was living with her children at her brother Claude’s cabin.

When Marie-Paule arrived at Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, without knowing how long she would be staying there, she felt the need to express to Simone how dear this latter was to her: “I am happy,” she said, “and in this happiness, there is only one thing missing and that is your presence.” (Id., lp. 165)

I think it is necessary to mention here that it is mainly the exchanges on the spiritual level which rendered their friendship even stronger and more intimate. Of course, during our life, we must be vigilant concerning the danger of certain friendships. Saint Teresa of Avila warned her Sisters to avoid the natural movement which, all too often, prompts them to like the most imperfect of their Sisters because they pay too much attention to these latter’s external qualities. “We must not accept to let our hearts become the slave of anyone, except of Him who redeemed us with His Blood.” (St. Teresa of Avila, Oeuvres complètes, pp. 603-604)

With regard to those friendships in which two persons like to be in each other’s company simply to exchange on trivial things instead of talking about the love we have for God, “it is

rare that such friendships have as a goal to help each other love God more.” (Id.)

This wise advice concerning friendships is also very necessary for us. Obviously, however, not all friendships belong to that category.

As we have seen in Marie-Paule’s letters, solid friendships do exist. On the other hand, it is quite likely that persons, being very strict with regard to religious matters and not giving enough consideration to the depth of some of Marie-Paule’s letters to Simone, will judge them too hastily, seeing in this friendship too much human attachment, too much affection. God alone can “probe minds and hearts”.

The error in such a hasty judgment comes from the fact of not acknowledging that certain souls, living a calvary at certain periods in their spiritual journey, feel the need to confide, not in the first person they meet, but rather in souls that will be able to understand them. And at the time He chooses, God is the one who decides to set along their path the appropriate soul to provide them with charitable support, accompanied by affection even.

That is what Simone did for her very dear cousin by providing her with financial, moral and spiritual support, especially at a time when this latter was sorely tried in her marriage following the separation.

Marie-Paule thanked Simone so very often. On her birthday, September 14, 1959, she wrote to her: “For the time being, I can only thank from the innermost depths of my heart this exclusive and so very generous friend Mary has given me to help me and understand me. To you then, my most affectionate gratitude.” (Lettres de Marie-Paule à sa cousine Simone, pp. 83-84) On another occasion, “Thank you so much for all those pious thoughts, Masses, Communions, without forgetting my husband. Your generous soul embraces the entire family, without exception.” (Id., pp. 139-140)

After the death of her father, at whose bedside Simone had been, she experienced a solitude which weighed heavily upon her. So, she invited Marie-Paule and her children to come and live with her in her house. Given her insistence, Marie-Paule finally acquiesced to her request at the end of June 1961. The two cousins would mutually tell each other how happy they were to live together.

The void caused by Simone’s absence because she had gone somewhere for holidays prompted Marie-Paule to

write to her: *"It is with so much joy that we welcome you in our house". How we missed you! The last days, especially, seemed endless. We did so many things while you were away so that we could enjoy even more the minutes you will spend with us."* (Id., p. 142)

On the spiritual level, both of them had an ideal that was marvelously similar. In this regard, the same Marian devotion was remarkable. *"Let us hope the Blessed Virgin will make use of us for her Cause,"* Marie-Paule said. *"Let us always be little sisters in her Heart."* (Id.) At that time, the two cousins did not know what God's plans were for them, but they nevertheless knew that He was guiding them along a Marian path.

With such an enriching relationship, was it not obvious that God not only approved such a friendship but that, besides that, He was blessing it and wanted it to continue?

Many other exchanges prove that this friendship between these two cousins was not based on a purely human affection. They talked together of their common desires *"to consecrate themselves entirely to Mother Mary"* and also of *Life of Love*. (Cf. *Life of Love II*, p. 231.)

Here is what Marie-Paule wished for Simone: *"I want for you a life which will always be overflowing and generous, loving, purified, so that you may be able to understand even better Mary's desires for you... Soon, you will be involved in action with me.... On many occasions, I was able to see the*

sentiments animating you. That is why my affection goes to you without any worry, in complete tranquillity and in an entirely Marian atmosphere." (Id. *Lettres...* p. 86)

After they had worked together in the Marian apostolate, Marie-Paule would have liked to have seen Simone become attached to the Work of the Army of Mary. And although Simone turned to another path in the service of the Blessed Virgin, the Marian bond between the cousins always remained the same. (cf. *Id.*, p. 315)

In a note written in November 2000, Marie-Paule indicated that her wonderful friendship with Simone was maintained over the years and that they remained spiritually united. Nonetheless, we ought to keep in mind that Simone covered *"the base of the Work with the adornments of Christian charity. Simone passed through the Work of the Co-Redemption as Simon of Cyrene passed in the Work of the Redemption, leaving in it the fragrance of a life won over to the love of the Father and of Mary, our Mother."* (Id., p. 319)

In closing, let us ask Jesus and the Lady to guide us in our relationships; may they help us recognize genuine friendships, the ones that will motivate us to carry on in our ascent to God, to deepen our knowledge of the spirit of the Co-Redemptrix and to build the Kingdom towards which we are working.

Father André Viens