



# Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of July 22, 2013,  
Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

*Dear Friends,*

**D**URING his trip to France in 1986, Blessed John Paul II made a pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, where he gave a message to the Society of JESUS in which he wrote, "From the heart of Christ, the heart of man learns to know the true and unique meaning of one's life and destiny, to understand the value of an authentically Christian life, to guard against certain perversions of the human heart, to join the filial love of God with love of neighbor. Thus—and this is the true reparation asked for by the Savior's Heart—can we build the civilization of love, so greatly desired, the reign of the Heart of Christ, on the ruins produced by hatred and violence" (October 5, 1986). These words enable us to better grasp the importance of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart—the result of an inspiration given to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart Bernaud, a nun of the Visitation monastery in Bourg-en-Bresse, France, on March 13, 1863—as a way of keeping the Heart of Christ company, of honoring and consoling it.



Blessed Marie of the Sacred Heart Bernaud

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Anne-Marie Constance Bernaud was born on October 25, 1825 into a family of shopkeepers in Besançon. There would be eight children in this deeply Christian family. Baptized on All Saints' Day, she would later say that she "needed the help of the entire celestial court." As a child, Constance was consecrated numerous times to the Sacred Heart of JESUS by an aunt who had a loving devotion to the Sacred Heart, a devotion still rare at the time. At about the age of four, an eye condition that she would suffer from for several years kept her from the games of her brothers and sisters, and led her to develop a true interior life. Entirely lost in her thoughts and prayers, she loved to be alone and sing hymns. But Constance was nevertheless mischievous and playful, and would remain so all her life. Gifted with great sensitivity, the little girl did not hesitate to offer her snacks to the poor she met, and shed abundant tears when she heard of suffering. At the age of five, upon learning of the death of one of her aunts, a Sister of Charity in Besançon, she exclaimed, "I will be a nun, too!"

## *Let's kneel!*

**A**t the time of her preparation for First Communion, Constance already showed a serious knowledge of the truths of the faith. She and her brother Edouard prepared themselves very conscientiously to receive the sacrament of Penance. They wanted above all to omit nothing from the faults they had to confess, or their number. On April 20, 1836, in the Church of Our Lady, they both received the Body of Christ with fervor. That very evening, Constance said to Edouard: "Let's kneel and ask God for the grace to never make a bad communion!"

Constance was an outstanding student in her boarding school in Besançon. As an adolescent, she completed her studies at the convent of the Sisters of the Child JESUS in Langres, where she was confirmed on May 19, 1839. Unbeknownst to anyone, the girl was deepening her prayer, and praying continuously. Every morning, she made the Stations of the Cross and, during the day, said many Hail MARY's on her rosary. A short book, the "Month of the Sacred Heart", introduced her to devotion to the Heart of JESUS. "No one will ever know all the good this little book has done me," she would later say. "I would start the month's exercises over again as soon as I finished them." Her greatest joy was to offer little sacrifices to JESUS without anyone knowing. After Communion every Sunday, she consecrated the following three days to thanksgiving, and the next three days to preparing to receive JESUS again in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, after her return to Besançon in September 1840, she went to worldly parties that she enlivened with her pretty voice and her gaiety, enjoying the pleasure of appearing at the gatherings and being noticed. Yet, the desire for consecrated life remained vaguely in her mind. So, when the call of the Lord once again began to make itself felt, she confessed her straying and revealed her desire to enter religious life to a priest. Because of her age, the priest hesitated, and put off granting her permission while she was so young.

On October 14, 1841, shortly before her sixteenth birthday, Constance was married off by her parents to

Mr. Thieulin, a twenty-eight-year-old merchant. Out of respect for them, she accepted the union they had arranged. But her husband, jealous of his young wife's outgoing personality, did not make her happy. She took refuge in silence and prayer. Through perseverance and her good example, she obtained his conversion and his regular practice of religion. But on July 26, 1846, he died, leaving Constance a childless widow before she had even reached her twenty-first birthday. One of her brothers who lived in Paris invited her to stay with him. Once again she allowed herself to be intoxicated by worldly success in society, but remained faithful to religious practice. In February 1848 began the bloody days of revolution that led to the fall of the July Monarchy and the establishment of the Second Republic. Finding herself in the street at the moment that a gun battle broke out, she barely escaped the deadly confrontation. Disconcerted, she returned to Besançon.

### Visitandine

Aware of Constance's aspirations to religious life, her cousin Madame Morel invited her to Belley and put her in contact with Mother Marie-Aimée Morel, the superior of the Visitation monastery in Bourg-en-Bresse, who invited her to participate in the retreat to prepare for the Feast of the Sacred Heart (June 15, 1849). Constance agreed, as though the Lord's call had finally become manifest. But at the end of the retreat, she remained hesitant—wouldn't she do better to enter the Sisters of the Child JESUS, whom she had known since her teenage years? She confided her doubt to Bishop Devie, a friend of the holy Curé of Ars and the bishop of Belley, who advised her to enter the Visitation. As soon as she entered the convent on July 28, 1849, Constance fell prey to painful interior struggles, which she withstood by taking refuge in trust in God. The following November 25<sup>th</sup>, she took the religious habit and the name of Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. The first Friday of April 1851, she made her religious profession. She would write, "I felt strongly that my Spouse wanted on that day for me to become a victim of love (meaning entirely abandoned to His love) to make reparation to His divine Heart."

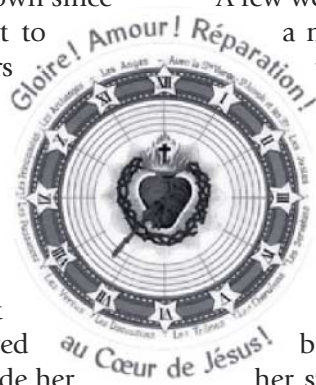
In spite of her delicate health, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart led the simple life of a Visitandine for a dozen years, fulfilling the duties entrusted to her with her natural gaiety. Her lively intelligence and musical gifts resulted in her appointment to teach at the boarding school attached to the convent. Her students, struck by her supernatural spirit, nicknamed her "Sister of Pure Love." But these duties were too heavy for her, and were replaced by the job of secretary, in particular responding to the correspondence the convent received. "Oh, how good it must be to die when one has constantly and tenderly loved and served the Spouse Who must judge us all," she noted. "Seeking in all things to please my heav-

enly Spouse, desiring nothing but His divine glance, His love alone—this, I feel, is what JESUS strongly demands of me throughout my religious life, for He will be a very jealous Spouse. O my God, are you not enough for me? ... JESUS alone when I am with my sisters, JESUS alone in my exercises, JESUS alone in my tasks, in my recreations, in the children, and to strive not only to please My Spouse but also to take pains in all things to gladden His divine Heart, to Which He has destined me to be a faithful lover."

### A mysterious dial

At this time, preparations were being made for the beatification of Venerable Margaret Mary Alacoque, who had received the grace of numerous apparitions of the Sacred Heart at the convent in Paray-le-Monial two centuries earlier. This event touched the fervent soul of Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, who wished to be able to respond with all the strength of her faith to the Lord's complaints to Margaret Mary: "Behold this Heart, which has loved men so much, that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify to them its love; and in return I receive from most of them nothing but ingratitude and scorn..." On June 7, 1862, the community in Bourg-en-Bresse was solemnly consecrated to the Sacred Heart. At the end of the year, most of the nuns in this community signed an act of abandonment to the Heart of JESUS. On the feast of Epiphany 1863, the Sacred Heart was chosen as "King of the Year."

A few weeks later, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart had a mental vision of a dial showing the hours of the day and night. After drawing a reproduction, she wrote the words "glory, love, reparation" around it. She also felt she should add the phrase "Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart." She then put the image of the Sacred Heart in the center of the dial. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, the third Friday of Lent, the Feast of the Five Wounds of Our Lord, she brought this first dial of the Guard of Honor to her superior, who blessed it and gladly agreed to have the names of all the sisters in the community inscribed on it.



Those who wish to join this work of reparation can do so by dedicating an hour each day to the "guard of honor." Their name will be inscribed on the dial in the place corresponding to the hour they have chosen. During this hour, without changing their activity, they will mentally unite themselves to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, offering to JESUS whatever they are doing—at school, at work, reading, preparing a meal, doing errands, traveling, studying, doing a favor, praying... They will strive to think a little more about JESUS and to make at least an act of love, and preferably a small sacrifice. But no particular action is prescribed—only goodwill is required. Thus "members" across the world will succeed each other in "standing guard" at the foot of the Cross, in the company of the Blessed Virgin, Saint Mary

Magdalene, and Saint John. JESUS will not be forgotten at any hour during the day.

During Holy Mass on the morning of Palm Sunday 1863, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart was touched by these words of the offertory antiphon: *My heart hath expected reproach and misery. And I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none: and for one that would comfort me, and I found none* (Ps. 68:20). The Guard of Honor precisely has as its principal end consoling the Heart of JESUS. The evening of Holy Wednesday, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart coughed up blood. She, who so loved to sing, was then forbidden to sing in the choir for several months. She offered this sacrifice “for the success of the Guard of Honor,” and took advantage of the holy days to refine the structure of the nascent effort. On Good Friday, she composed the short prayer, “The Offering of the Hour of Guard”, which would be adopted by thousands of souls to consecrate themselves to the Heart of JESUS during their chosen hour: “Lord JESUS, present in the tabernacle, I offer You this hour with all my actions, my joys, and my sorrows, to glorify Your Heart with this testimony of love and reparation. May this offering benefit my brothers and sisters and make of me an instrument in Your plan of love. With You, for You, and in You, *for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth* (Jn. 17:19). Sacred Heart of JESUS, may Your Kingdom come!”

### *The pierced side*

The following June 13<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart wrote, “I felt, more than ever, what the Heart of JESUS is: an abyss of love, misunderstood, rejected, pushed back to its source. How much this very gentle Heart has suffered and suffers daily from our tremendous ingratitude! I will implore Him to grant me this grace of making Him known and loved a little.” Devotion to the Sacred Heart, Pope Pius XII would later declare, “provides us with a most powerful means of repaying the divine Lord by our own [love]” (*Haurietis Aquas*, no. 6). On Sunday June 15<sup>th</sup>, the words “*cujus latus perforatum*” (“from whose pierced side”) from the Eucharistic hymn *Ave Verum Corpus* (“Hail, true Body”) were deeply engraved in the soul of Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. It was then that the Guard of Honor seemed to her to be the means provided by Providence to create a special devotion to the wound that the Heart of JESUS had received on the Cross. It would nevertheless be necessary to wait fifteen years before she could add to the dial the lance that pierced JESUS’ Heart—the bishop of Belley was not in favor of it.

In the encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, published May 5, 1956, Pope Pius XII wrote, “Nothing therefore prevents our adoring the Sacred Heart of JESUS CHRIST as having a part in and being the natural and expressive symbol of the abiding love with which the divine Redeemer is still on fire for mankind. Though it is no longer subject to the varying emotions of this mortal life, yet it lives and

beats ... the Heart of Christ is overflowing with love both human and divine and rich with the treasure of all graces which our Redeemer acquired by His life, sufferings and death. It is therefore the enduring source of that charity which His Spirit pours forth on all the members of His Mystical Body. ... The faithful must seek ... devotion to the Sacred Heart of JESUS if they desire to penetrate its inner nature and by piously meditating on it, receive the nourishment for the fostering and development of their religious fervor. If this devotion is constantly practiced with this knowledge and understanding, the souls of the faithful cannot but attain to the sweet knowledge of the love of Christ” (nos. 85, 100).

### *Unforeseen success*

Soon, other monasteries were invited to join this spiritual movement, and the devotion spread by word of mouth to the faithful attracted to this spiritual program. At the monastery of Paray-le-Monial, there was great surprise when they received the dial of the Guard of Honor, because a dial exactly like it already had been developed there. One year later, on March 9, 1864, the Guard of Honor was approved by Pope Pius IX and erected as a Confraternity, then raised to an Archconfraternity under Leo XIII on November 26, 1878. The Guard of Honor’s very rapid expansion across the world did not happen without difficulties and sufferings, which had repercussions on the foundress’s fragile health. Victim of this providential yet unforeseen success, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart increased her activities with Church authorities without ever leaving her humble cell, and took on an impressive correspondence. Her time was divided between the infirmary, where several times she found herself at death’s door, and her cell, during better periods. During these periods she would work doubly hard, for she saw in them the will of God. Her humility and willing self-effacement were accompanied by an extreme tenderness that made her warmly welcoming to all who suffered. In the Lord’s hands, she showed a total docility to the service of others, and felt particularly responsible for each “member,” as though each were her own child. In her persevering prayer, a deep conviction that she loved to share grew in her: the Merciful Heart of JESUS would grant her request that no “guard” would be lost to Heaven—that is, all those inscribed in the Guard of Honor would also be inscribed in the *Book of Life* (cf. Apoc. 21:27). On March 19, 1865, she wrote about the ministers of God: “I understood that the Sacred Heart passionately loves priests, and I will retain this memory forever.”

Convinced that others would be more successful in ensuring the Guard of Honor’s permanence, she tried unsuccessfully to entrust it to various communities. It then became clear that the initiative had to remain in the Visitation Order. Like all initiatives inspired by God, the history of the Archconfraternity of the Guard of Honor is marked with the foundress’s tears, sacrifices, humility, and total docility. Nevertheless, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart did not encounter only obstacles in the founda-



tion—she also found much support, notably that of Marie Deluil-Martiny, the foundress of the “Daughters of the Heart of JESUS,” who would be beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 29, 1989. “The Guard is taking off like a lit fuse!” observed Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. Along with Saint Francis de Sales, the founder of the Visitation Order, she could say: “I would like the Sacred Heart to have, instead of the crown of thorns, a crown formed from the hearts of all mankind!”

### “First Guard of Honor”

Pope Pius IX himself would ask to be enrolled in the Guard of Honor on March 25, 1872, and, on July 21, 1875, during an audience granted to a large delegation from the Archconfraternity, would remind them that one of his sweetest glories was his title, “First Guard of Honor to the Sacred Heart of JESUS.” Soon more than thirty bishops from France and abroad were enrolled. Through her writings, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart wanted to transmit to each member the love of the Heart of JESUS that consumed her soul. With strength and common sense, she imparted to them a veritable catechesis of the Heart of JESUS so “that not one might be lost for Heaven.” Laboring in the secrecy of the enclosure, hidden from the world, she left it to God to care for the initiative as He liked. Her correspondence did not end until her death on August 3, 1903.

Pope Pius XII wrote, “[T]he Heart of JESUS ... [places] before our gaze all the love with which He has embraced and even now embraces us. Consequently, the honor to be paid to the Sacred Heart is such as to raise it to the rank—so far as external practice is concerned—of the highest expression of Christian piety. ... We cannot reach the Heart of God save through the Heart of Christ, as He Himself says: ... *No one cometh to the Father save by me*” (Jn. 14:6) (*Haurietis Aquas*, no. 106). Nevertheless, the Pope warned, “And, not unreasonably as sometimes happens, accusations of excessive self-love and self-interest

are made against those who either misunderstand this excellent form of piety or practice it in the wrong way. Hence, let all be completely convinced that in showing devotion to the most Sacred Heart of JESUS the external acts of piety have not the first or most important place; nor is its essence to be found primarily in the benefits to be obtained. For if Christ has solemnly promised them in private revelations it was for the purpose of encouraging men to perform with greater fervor the chief duties of the Catholic religion, namely, love and expiation” (*ibid.*, 63).

Continuing this teaching on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, Pope Benedict XVI declared: “The Redeemer’s pierced side is the source to which the Encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* refers us: we must draw from this source to attain true knowledge of JESUS CHRIST and a deeper experience of His love... Indeed, it is only possible to be Christian by fixing our gaze on the Cross of our Redeemer, *on Him Whom they have pierced* (Jn. 19:3) ... for countless souls the wound in Christ’s side and the marks left by the nails have been the chief sign and symbol of that love that ever more incisively shaped their life from within” (Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI on Occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, May 15, 2006).

Among the millions of people who have participated in the work, we find besides Blessed Pius IX, Leo XIII, Saint Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI, Saint John Bosco, Saint Edward Poppe, Saint Madeleine-Sophie Barat, Saint Daniel Comboni, Father Ratisbonne, Blessed Marcel Callo... In 2007, the Guard of Honor received new impetus when it was established in Paray-le-Monial on January 24<sup>th</sup>, the feast of Saint Francis de Sales. The Visitation Convent of Saint Mary in this town now houses its international headquarters. On October 4, 2011, Benedict XVI “wholeheartedly granted his apostolic Blessing to each of the members and their families.” In March 2013, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this initiative was celebrated.

“O Sweet JESUS, draw me ever deeper into Your heart, so that Your love might engulf me, and I might be drowned in its sweetness!” Let us make this ardent prayer of Saint Francis de Sales our own, so that we might make reparation for the Savior’s infinitely loving heart, too often forgotten, scorned, or wounded by our sins.

Dom Antoine Marie  
o.s.b.

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