

Sharing Our Marianist Stories Ep. 21 Transcript

“Does Your Cow Give Milk?” Adèle's Letter Conversation (with Patti Gehred and Gabby Bibeau)

00:00 - Gabby Bibeau

And now Adèle is sick with tuberculosis and many days is bedridden and can't go visit the other communities. There's a lot to be discouraged about. I think it was really overwhelming. And I think the person it must have been the most overwhelming for was Adèle because she was the one who was trying to hold together this whole project. It's just astonishing to me, the grace that she had, the faith that she had.

00:42 - Patti Gehred

Welcome to *Sharing Our Marianist Stories*. I'm Patti Gehred.

00:46 - Gabby Bibeau

And I'm Sr. Gabby Bibeau.

00:49 - Patti Gehred

We're going to try something a little different today. Sr. Gabby has a letter written by Blessed Adèle, that really strikes home with her. And so, we're going to take a deep dive into this letter and find out what's interesting about it, why Sr. Gabby's interested, and what we can learn about it as members of the Marianist's Family? So Gabby, I'd like to start out by asking you a couple of questions. I did the math. It looks like Adèle is about 36 years old at this time.

01:23 - Gabby Bibeau

Yes. Yeah, she is just a little bit shy of 36, I think, because her birthday would be in a month.

01:34 - Patti Gehred

Oh, that's right.

01:35 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah. So, like, just like 11 days shy basically of her birthday, yeah.

01:41 - Patti Gehred

And so, she's writing to - I'll let you say the sister's name that she's writing to.

01:48 - Gabby Bibeau

Sister [Marie] de l'Incarnation de La Chapelle, who was the Superior of the community in Condom, another town not too far away from Agen.

02:00 - Patti Gehred

I was just going to ask, so Adèle is in Agen?

02:03 - Gabby Bibeau

Adèle is in Agen, yes, which is where their Mother House was.

02:07 - Patti Gehred

And did they write each other frequently?

02:10 - Gabby Bibeau

Yes, they did. Adèle at this point - this was a little bit less than three years before she died. So, her health was not great at this point. And so, the main way that she communicated to the Superiors of the other communities was through letter writing. So, they wrote a lot of letters to each other. Because Sr. Marie de l'Incarnation, she was the Superior, so she had a lot of questions for Adèle and Adèle would give her advice and guidance. So yes, they did.

02:50 - Patti Gehred

Is there anything else you want to say before we read the letter? Or should we jump right in?

02:57 - Gabby Bibeau

Well, let's jump right in. I have more I want to say about Father Chaminade, but let's jump right in.

03:02 - Patti Gehred

Okay. All right. Why don't you start reading then?

03:05 - Gabby Bibeau

Okay. So, this is letter #582 to Sister de l'Incarnation de La Chapelle, the Superior of Condom. This was written May 30th, 1825. And the *Acte* that Adèle put at the top of her letters - little kind of quotes - says, "Blessed Trinity, I adore you," and that's probably because this was written around the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

03:36 - Patti Gehred

Can we just take one second? So, she started all her letters with an *Acte*? And wasn't that a phrase that everyone was kind of praying on, like in community?

03:48 - Gabby Bibeau

Yes, yeah. Phrases that she came up with or were quotes from other people. And she started that way early on, before she started the Daughters of Mary. She would write that at the top of her letters as a phrase, that she would meditate on and encourage other people to meditate on.

04:12 - Patti Gehred

All right. Thank you.

04:14 - Gabby Bibeau

Here we go. "I am like you, my dear daughter. I would write to you every day if I followed the promptings of my heart. However, we must not always seek what pleases us. I do not think that a retreat would be beneficial to Mademoiselle Dardy. She needs to be in one place for a good length of time. However, if she wants to make a retreat, I shall accept her with pleasure if it is for the good of her soul. But I don't want her to be in your boarding department. I am completely opposed to that.

04:54 - Gabby Bibeau

Say so to Mother Emmanuel [aka. Marie-Rosalie Lhuillier] in case she would want her there. Otherwise, say nothing about it. I have been told that the Good Father [Father Chaminade] plans to visit us now that the royal authorization is almost an accomplished fact. Fr. [Georges] Caillet will return from Paris and Father [Chaminade] will be free to come. After that, Fr. Caillet will return to Saint-Rémy.

05:22 - Gabby Bibeau

So, you see, Father Chaminade had Fr. Caillet make a special trip so that he could come to see us. Let me hear no one calumniate our Good Father. Yesterday Sisters Luce [Marie Bouzeran] and Félicité [Marie Nicolas] took the holy habit. This brought back memories of happy days. Each in her own way is a very good religious.

05:49 - Gabby Bibeau

Come now, my dear daughter, let us not give way to depression. Patience, the work of God is a slow process, even in us. Let us bear with one another as God bears with us. Rest assured that a great deal of pride enters into our discouragement. Let us trust more in God. He will draw glory from our weakness. One day, St. Gertrude asked the Lord to deliver a Superior from a certain defect. The Lord refused, saying that this defect was good for him, for it provided him with a reason to be humble and an opportunity frequently to renew his good intention and so to give glory to God.

06:45 - Gabby Bibeau

The defects of our Superiors call for greater faith on the part of the community. They must see God rather than a human being, in the Superior. That is no small advantage. Hold firm so that no worldliness will be introduced into the boarding school. But always act with the greatest simplicity.

07:12 - Gabby Bibeau

I do not agree with Fr. [Jean-Baptiste] Castex that we should have a servant. It should be our glory to follow our Divine Master who said that he had come to serve and not to be served. Do not increase the gardener's wages, or if you do make it minimal. He is bluffing. If you are firm, he will seize his importunity.

07:39 Gabby Bibeau

Madame Belloc's [Jeanne Diché] condition has worsened. Pray for her. She is perspiring and has a bad cough. But it does not seem too serious. The rest of us are well. The Good Lord does not send all his trials at the same time.

07:58 - Gabby Bibeau

Does your cow give milk? I agree that the young ladies of Montfort simply cannot acquire the spirit of the Institute in so short a time. But God will do the work if it is really His. Let us always give good example, and when we do not, let us humbly accept the fact. It is good, Lord, for you to humble me. I embrace you and all our sisters and our Lord Jesus Christ. Sister Marie T.”

08:35 - Gabby Bibeau

And then she has a couple extra paragraphs that's sort of like a postscript: “We don't have enough pin cushions for our sewing classes. You know that it is Sr. Sacrement [Pauline Yannasch] who makes them; enough said. I am sending you a circular from the Carmelites of Agen, announcing the recent death of one of them. I want us to do the same when one of our Sisters dies. I wrote to Father [?] Fourteau several days ago for urgent information. Please send someone to see whether he has received the letter and answered it. I have not received an answer as yet.”

09:19 - Patti Gehred

What I really like about it is it's a different side of Mother Adèle than we mostly read about when we take little quotes and clips out of her letters. Because she's firm and practical and you can see that she's a leader and when you read the entire letter and not always just take out the kind of faithful or whatever quotes that we kind of pick and choose.

09:51 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah. It took a long time for letters to reach their destination at this time. So you really had to put as much into the letter as possible. So, it's all of the letters - and I think this letter is such a great example of it - in all of her letters, there is a mixture of this wonderful spiritual wisdom with very practical stuff. Like, when I first read this letter the part where she writes out of nowhere, “Does your cow give milk?”

10:26 - Patti Gehred

Yeah. I have. I have “Ha!” written after

10:31 - Gabby Bibeau

I know. It just cracked me up because I was like, “That is so random,” and it comes out of nowhere. There's no context around it. She just wanted to know, does your cow give milk? And then you know the postscript at the end about the pin cushions and advice about the gardeners. But then you also have like this wonderful anecdote about St. Gertrude. I loved that the first time I read it. I was like, “Oh my gosh, that's wonderful.” ... So, Sister de l'Incarnation - that was her

religious name. Her birth name was Charlotte, and she is an old friend of Adèle's, and she had actually a difficult path to religious life because her family did not want her to become a Sister.

11:27 - Gabby Bibeau

And she basically had to run away to join the Daughters of Mary, and eventually she became one of the Superiors of the Daughters of Mary, and in this case a Superior at Condom. And she struggled a lot with being a leader. She frequently - I mean, you can tell from Adèle's letters to her that she was sharing with Adèle her own misgivings with her own failings about all the ways she falls short in her leadership. So Adèle shares this story about St. Gertrude as a way to tell her, like, "Actually, it's good that you have defects. It's good that you're not perfect because it gives you a reason to be humble and to continually work at yourself in being more faithful to God." So, you can see in this letter the tremendous wisdom that Adèle had that she shared so freely.

12:31 - Patti Gehred

And she also explains a little bit why she talks about the gardener and saying, "Stay firm. He's kind of pulling your leg." And even about the pincushions, I think that's another way of supporting her then that to be a leader, you need to be firm in these things.

12:49 - Gabby Bibeau

Right. Yeah. The gardener is something that the Sisters here, we joke about sometimes because this gardener comes up several times... In several of her letters, the gardener comes up because it seems like he keeps asking for increases in wages. And as soon as they raise his wages, he asks again for more. So, it seems like he was really just sort of trying to pull one over on them again and again. But they kept being patient with him and... or working with him.

13:28 - Gabby Bibeau

But yeah, they didn't have a lot. The Sisters didn't have a lot at the time. They didn't have lot of finances. And you can see in a lot of the other letters them struggling to talk about taking out loans and this and that. So yeah... where the practicalities of having a congregation meets the spiritual aspect, and all the mixture of the everyday reality with the great spiritual principles that they have. It's just really fascinating.

14:10 - Patti Gehred

Yeah. When you read Adèle's letters, you really can sense her leadership style. And I'm always really impressed with that. Now, it is signed, "Sister Marie T." and you know that is Mother Adèle. That's her religious name, correct?

14:26 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, her religious name was *Marie de la Conception*. So, Mary of the Conception. But she often signed her letters in shorthand "Marie T." for *Trenquelléon*. So that was, I guess, a slightly less formal way to sign her name. And you have to remember the woman she's writing to, they've been friends for years and years since they were teenagers, basically. So, this was someone she knows well, and so she writes "Marie T." as like a slightly less formal way to sign her name.

15:09 - Patti Gehred

That makes sense. Well, at the beginning of the letter, I get the feeling they're a little - Are they a little put out with Father Chaminade that he hasn't come to visit them?

15:21 - Gabby Bibeau

I get the sense that Adèle - and this is one of the things with reading the letters. Like, I don't have, and I don't know if we have the letters that Sister de l'Incarnation wrote to her. So we kind of have to read between the lines a little bit. But I get the sense that some of the Sisters were upset that it had been so long since Father Chaminade had come to visit them. They may have been jealous of - At this time, there was the Novitiate for the Daughters of Mary for the teaching sisters [which] was in Bordeaux. So there may have been some jealousy of how, "Okay, well, some of our sisters get to see Father Chaminade all the time. And the brothers in Bordeaux get to see Father Chaminade all the time, but he hasn't come and visited us. So maybe he doesn't care about us." I get the sense that Adèle had been hearing some of that. So, Adèle's writing to let her know, "he does care about us." Yeah, but it does make me laugh the way that she says, "Let me hear no one calumniate our Good Father," and Good Father, of course, refers to Father Chaminade.

16:38 - Patti Gehred

But again, then later on the letter, she does say, "I do not agree with Father Castex that we should not have a servant," because again, I think a general view of Mother Adèle is being very obedient and humble, which she is, but she kind of puts her foot down here about having a servant.

16:59 - Gabby Bibeau

Yes, and this Father Castex, he was a priest in Condom who sort of helped probably be like a chaplain sort of for the Sisters there in Condom. And so, yeah, she doesn't just say "Oh, yeah, that's what he thinks. That's what we'll do." She had very firm principles... about poverty. And so, "No, we shouldn't have a servant that we pay. We should cook our own meals and do our own cleaning and our own laundering and that kind of thing." So I think you're right, Patti, and that she refers to Jesus himself. "I've come... not to be served, but to serve." And Jesus is our model for that.

17:55 - Patti Gehred

And Madam Belloc, who is that?

17:59 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah, Madame Belloc. She is Jeanne Diché. So Jeanne Diché was... her maiden name. Belloc is her married name. And she was Adèle's best friend from the time they made their confirmations together. And then they just hit it off, and they were best friends. And she was actually a married woman who was widowed when she was young after having multiple children. And she was a major support for the Daughters of Mary, getting them started. She helped them find a building

both times, their first convent, and then their second convent in Agen. She helped them get those convents. She helped them get established. She actually wanted to join the Daughters of Mary as a widow in the very beginning, that she was intending to join. But for family reasons she couldn't join the Daughters, and she was at Adèle's bedside when Adèle died. So they were lifelong friends, and she was a major, real friend and help support for the community.

19:21 - Patti Gehred

That's what I thought. And then her sister, Agathe, was a Marianist sister?

19:26 - Gabby Bibeau

Yeah. She was a Marianist Sister. And if you read the letter after her after this one, #583 to Sister du Sacré-Coeur Diché, that's Agathe Diché. So that's Jeanne's younger sister. And she was the first novice director for the Daughters of Mary. So, she was a very big influence, one of the original Sisters. And at this time she was the Superior at the Community in Tonneins, which was another town that they had a community.

20:05 - Patti Gehred

I like to think of Madame Belloc and Mother Adèle as such good examples of the Marianist Family. This lay woman that supported the FMI, but the FMI again supported her. You can tell they're praying for her and thinking of her as she's ill. So, I really love that relationship.

20:29 Gabby Bibeau

I do, too. Yeah, I think it's such a neat thing to reflect on. And I think that with Adèle, in general, what you can see throughout her life is how important friends are to her and how much she cherished her friendships. The first Daughters of Mary were a group of friends. That's just, I think, is so beautiful. And Jeanne, Madame Belloc, her role as a friend until the very end, and even after Adèle died, her role in the Daughters of Mary supporting them. It is such just like a micro-example of how the Marianist Family is that support of each other and in different vocations. And the other thing, too, is Jeanne Diché was instrumental in founding the Sodality in Agen. Basically, the early Lay Marianists in Agen were basically founded by Jeanne Diché, so she is an incredibly important figure in the history of the Marianists.

21:55 - Patti Gehred

Well, was there anything else in this letter that stood out to you, other than, "Does your cow give milk?"

22:05 - Gabby Bibeau

I think just the last thing that I want to say is when she writes to her about not giving way to depression and about discouragement, it's important to understand that at this time, there was a lot to be discouraged about. Because there was a lot of illness in the various communities of the Daughters of Mary. There were a lot of Sisters who had died, and one of the Sisters who died was like one of the shining lights of the Daughters of Mary. [Of the] early Superiors, just a fantastic leader, holy woman. Her name was Clémentine Yannasch, and I'm forgetting her

religious name off the top of my head right now [Sr. Thérèse de Jésus]. She died. She was in her twenties, and she was one of Adèle's good friends, too. And she died as a Superior of one of the other communities. And that was a really big blow. And they had other Sisters dying, and that was a big blow, and this was all tuberculosis.

23:20 - Gabby Bibeau

And now Adèle is sick with tuberculosis and many days is bedridden and can't go visit the other communities. There's a lot to be discouraged about. I think it was really overwhelming. And I think the person it must have been the most overwhelming for was Adèle, because she was the leader. She was the one who was trying to hold together this whole project when they kept meeting setback after setback. But she was the one who was writing encouragement for the other Sisters. I just think it's astonishing to me, the grace that she had, the faith that she had. You can tell how much the other Sisters looked up to her, even though Adèle was younger than many of them. They looked up to her and really saw her as a source of consolation in a difficult time. So, I just see that comes through so clearly in this letter as well.

24:36 - Patti Gehred

All right. Well, I hope we do more of these. I learned a lot and I think it helps all of us listening to get to know the Founders better. So, we hope to do more of these letters with Father Chaminade and Marie-Thérèse and more letters of Adèle in the future.

24:55 - Gabby Bibeau

Yes, me too. Well, thank you everyone for listening to this conversation. Before we go, I just want to let you know that if you want to read more letters by Mother Adèle, you can purchase them from our NACMS bookstore. We have two volumes of letters, and you can go to www.nacms.org and just click on our online bookstore and you can find those. So that's www.nacms.org. Thanks for listening.