

A Mother's Love



“Like the beloved disciple, we accept Mary as a precious gift of God. Moved by Jesus’ love for his Mother, we dedicate ourselves to her so that the Holy Spirit, in whose action she cooperates with a mother’s love, may form us more fully to the image of her Son. By our alliance with Mary, we seek to assist her in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers [and sisters] for her first-born Son.”

Rule of Life of the Society of Mary, article 6

OPENING PRAYER *“Mary, Mother of God” by Michael Nartker, SM*

Mary, Daughter of God, from all time,
you were the beautiful thought in God’s mind.

Mary, Immaculate Child of grace,
you are God’s gift to his Son.

Mary, mother of the Son of God, the Christ,
pray for us.

Mary, Daughter of Zion,
you are the beautiful Maiden of Nazareth.

Mary, amazing Woman of Hope,
your “fiat” gave us Jesus.

Mary, Mother of Joshua, “God saves,”
pray for us.

Mary, Spouse of Joseph,
from refuge in Egypt to Calvary at the cross.

Mary, made our Mother at his feet.
Our precious Icon of Faith,

Mary, Mother of the Church, Body of Christ,
pray for us.

*The Marianist Family Prayer Book, second edition
(Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2019), 56.*

Check-In Questions

- ◆ What images come to mind when you think of Mary as mother?
- ◆ Why do these images stand out for you?



Food for Thought

Elisabeth de Vincens de Lamourous

Adapted from an oral presentation by Carol Ramey for Food for the Soul, May 12, 2011

Elisabeth de Vincens was born into a noble family that was very active in public life throughout the history of Bordeaux, France. She was born in 1735, and her mother died shortly after her birth. She was sent to live with her paternal Aunt Elisabeth (her

namesake) in Cézac, a small town 40 miles north of Bordeaux.

When she was 10, her father placed her as a boarder at the convent of the Ursulines in Bordeaux. Here,



she was educated in the humanities and the science of the saints. She was taught to read and write both Latin and French, and she learned basic math. Also, she was exposed to history, geography, zoology, botany, and perhaps the fine arts. Emphasis was put on good Christian manners as well. She had a peaceful but strong personality and quickly made herself at home among the nuns. She grew into a spiritually, emotionally, and physically well-rounded young woman who was well-prepared for marriage.

She would meet her future husband through a connection within the convent. Two of his aunts were Carmelites and were probably responsible for the initial conversations regarding the wedding of Elisabeth to Louis Marc Antoine de Lamourous.

At 19, Elisabeth became engaged to Louis, age 29, a member of the Bordeaux bar. Under a watchful nun's eye, their courtship existed completely within the convent. The engagement contact was in three sections. First, the couple agreed to take each other as husband and wife and agreed to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony within the Catholic Church. Second, financial arrangements were made; his mother donated property to Louis because he was the oldest son. And third, living arrangements were made for the couple once they were to be married: they were to live with his parents in exchange for their monthly income.

Elisabeth remained in the convent until her wedding day, December 17, 1753. They were given special permission by the archbishop to be married within the Advent season. In the first year of their marriage, they were to live in his parents' house, under the direct supervision of his mother; all his financial affairs, his income and expenses, would be under her care.

However, Louis proved to be a horrible businessman. He was forced to sell off property he had inherited and could still not often settle his

debts. This characteristic would haunt him his whole life. It is unknown whether his lack of business skill or his unwillingness to collect for his legal services was the root of this problem.

Elisabeth's oldest daughter, Marie Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous, was born on November 1, 1754.

Elisabeth would give birth to 11 children in her life, but only five would grow into adulthood. Although she was pregnant or recovering from birth for most of Marie Thérèse's life, Elisabeth made the education of her eldest daughter a priority. She taught Marie Thérèse much of what she learned in the convent and began the foundation of a deep faith. Marie Thérèse was also taught needlepoint at the age of 3, and she could embroider her own handkerchiefs and even sew clothes for dolls.

Elisabeth was always encouraging and teaching her children through formal education and practical matters. She taught Marie Thérèse to face the things she was afraid of: admit the fear, seek out its source, and face its cause. "If it is something physical, go right up to it, see it, touch it; above all, do not let fear determine behavior."¹ It was lessons in courage like these that allowed Marie Thérèse to have the faith and conversion to start her work at the Miséricorde.

The family moved to Bordeaux when Marie Thérèse was 12. They would live there until all noble families were forced out of port cities by the revolutionary government. Adjusting to city life was exactly that—an adjustment. At the guidance and example of her mother, Marie Thérèse made her first Holy Communion, and Elisabeth encouraged her to become very involved in charitable works, reaching out to the poor, the sick, and the forgotten.



Marie Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous

¹ Joseph Stefanelli, SM, *Mlle de Lamourous: A Resource on Marie Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 1998), 25.

Throughout this time in Bordeaux, Elisabeth was raising her children with a strong faith in God. At the same time, she felt the grief and sorrow of losing children. Throughout her childhood, Marie Thérèse helped her mother recover from the loss of her siblings. In addition to all this grief and loss, the family also suffered from financial troubles. Louis found himself selling his property piece by piece to settle his debts. In January of 1781, Louis' creditors wanted to come after Elisabeth's properties. To protect her and her family's interests, Elisabeth sought and received a court order separating her assets from those of her husband. She was ensuring the family would always have somewhere to live (the property in Pian).

Elisabeth developed two very close friendships with women in Bordeaux. Their friendships developed quickly, and soon they jokingly referred to themselves as "the three Marys," named after a street in the city, the *Rue des Trois Maries*, which had three statues of Mary on three adjacent houses. The women would gather for visits and friendship, their young children would play together, and they would attend church together.

As Marie Thérèse grew older, her relationship with her mother grew into a friendship. Marie Thérèse began taking on much more responsibility for the younger children and household duties. She became her mother's confidante; they would talk for hours about their hopes and concerns for the family and share in each other's faith. Elisabeth often followed Marie Thérèse's advice, but Marie Thérèse never

forgot that this was her mother whom she loved more than anything in the world. At one time, Marie Thérèse asked to wash her mother's feet. Both mother and daughter humbled themselves by performing this act of love.

Elisabeth encouraged and taught her children what it was to have a strong moral character and to seek advice from those who supported and loved them. She once told Marie Thérèse to stay as far away from romance novels as she could, reminding her that "You love God, my daughter. You love prayer. You love your responsibilities. You are very sensible. You have a good heart, and you love me very much."² If she were to read and entertain these romance stories in her head, she was at risk of losing all these good qualities she had developed.

Elisabeth was a prayerful, smart, and loving mother, wife, and friend. She was undoubtedly a main motivator and inspiration for Marie Thérèse throughout her work at the Miséricorde. We all can learn from her examples of prayer, work, dignity, courage, and friendship.

At the Miséricorde, Marie Thérèse was given the name *Bon Mère*, "the good mother." She cared and loved the women like daughters who sought refuge in her house. She was a mother who never gave birth, but Marie Thérèse loved the people in her life with compassion, tenderness, and strength. She truly emanates what it means to be a mother.

² Stefanelli, *Mlle de Lamourous*, 40.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- What parts of Elisabeth's life stand out to you? What surprises or inspires you?
- Where do you see Elisabeth's influence on Marie Thérèse in her daughter's future ministries?
- How can Elisabeth's character and personality inspire women and mothers today?



Food for Thought

Baroness Ursule de Peyronnencq

Adapted from an oral presentation by Carol Ramey for Food for the Soul, May 12, 2011

Imagine yourself, or a woman in your family, in the following situation.

You are expecting your first child. A month before the due date, the king calls together the Estates General — a meeting of representatives from all three classes in France. The king wants to raise taxes to stave off bankruptcy, brought on by the lavish lifestyle of those in the king's court and the French support of the American Revolution. (The king isn't a proponent of democracy; he just wants to embarrass and diminish England.)

Your husband, the baron, is a soldier and a member of the prestigious Royal Guard that protects the king. The baron is called back to Paris as the first events of the French Revolution start to unfold. He is not home when you give birth and go to the small local church on the same day to have your daughter, Adèle, baptized.

Your husband is committed to protecting the king and the monarchy, but when Adèle is just a little over a month old, revolutionaries storm the Bastille (a prison in Paris), and the Royal Guard refuses to fire on the mob, presumably unwilling to harm poorly organized and unarmed peasants. His unit is disbanded because Louis XVI is angered by the failure to control the mob. Your husband returns home, but his presence is short-lived.

The king is soon under house arrest by the revolutionary forces. Your husband decides to join with other aristocratic soldiers on the Franco-German border to launch a counter-revolutionary attack. The attack fails. In great danger for trying to uphold the monarchy, he goes into exile in London, England. The baron is declared an émigré, and his properties — including the house

you live in and the fields that provide income and food — are subject to confiscation.

By the time your daughter is two and a half, he is gone for the foreseeable future. Oh, and you are pregnant again with another child, a boy who is born two months after your husband leaves for what appears to be permanent exile.

Now, you have two small children and a houseful of relatives (including your mother-in-law, two sisters-in-law, and your husband's elderly uncle). Occasionally, other women — especially those turned out of the convents during the Revolution—seek shelter with you.

The status of priests is another aspect of the Revolution that deeply impacts you. The only priests in France who are serving in parishes are those who declare their allegiance to the government over the pope. You do not want to support these men, so you refuse to go to Mass or receive the sacraments at local churches. Instead, you gather the servants and family every day in a small chapel in the château for prayer and religious instruction. On Sundays, you lead the little community in worship (without the Eucharist, of course). On some occasions, an underground priest — one who has refused loyalty to the government — comes to the house for a secret liturgy.

Your own livelihood is constantly at risk. One of your sisters-in-law is trying to get legal responsibility back from the government, and the servants often protect you and your goods if marauding mobs come into the house to steal anything they can. On several occasions, local troops come to the house and station themselves outside the children's bedrooms to protect them from harm. You focus your attention and energies on teaching your children their lessons and instructing them in the faith. You are also always responding to



those around you who need care. You and your little girl often leave the château and go into peasants' homes, visiting them, bringing food, and providing basic nursing care. When the money is tight, you sell your clothing and jewelry to provide clothing and food for many in the surrounding area. The door to your kitchen is always open to anyone who needs a meal. (Can we really see ourselves doing all this? But there is more!)

This generous, smart, and kind woman could have lived a life of splendor and privilege because her ancestors include Saint Louis IX. Ursule (born in 1763) lives in Paris as a child with her mother and two sisters until her father dies when she is just seven. They move to the town of Figeac. The sisters are all well-educated by their mother.

After her marriage to the baron, Ursule lives again briefly in Paris and attends many social events among the nobility. The couple moves to Trenquelléon just before Adèle is born and lives on a large estate with many servants living in twenty-seven houses on the property. The servants and workers on the estate are always treated as family. (Adèle's parents promise dowries to the daughters of all servants, but the family's loss of income and property prevents this from happening.)

Ursule is loved and held in esteem by everyone she knows. Her husband writes that she is “‘the tenderest of mothers and a truly incomparable woman’... a priceless gem and a ‘strong woman’ in the scriptural mold.”³

Her courage and resourcefulness are again called forward when her name mistakenly appears on a list of émigrés, and she only has two days to leave the country because of another mistake by a local administrator. Her children are eight and almost six years old. They are attending a wedding in another town and do not even have time to return home to collect personal belongings. They arrange for a carriage, pack a few supplies provided by family and friends, and leave for Spain. Ursule and her children spend three years in various cities in Spain and

Portugal, where at least they can be reunited with the baron—who first meets his young son! Ursule gives birth to her third child, another daughter, while in exile in Portugal.

The family is permitted to return to Trenquelléon when Napoleon comes to power. Life for Ursule returns to some normalcy. She becomes spiritual guide to her daughter, who has a strong desire to become a religious, and Ursule also supports her by becoming a member of Adèle's Association and later the Ladies of the Retreat, a division of the Bordeaux Sodality. (It is through Ursule's casual conversation with a member of the Bordeaux Sodality, while both were visiting friends, that Adèle begins corresponding with Blessed Chaminade.) She continues her charitable work and

³ Joseph Stefanelli, SM, *Adele: A Biography of Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 1989), 20.



Baroness Ursule de Peyronnencq

makes sure that the money her husband has left to Adèle, which Adèle wanted to spend on the needs of the poor of her home region, is distributed after Adèle's death in 1828. Ursule adopts her niece, who is orphaned, and cares for her husband, the baron, when he becomes ill and disabled.

Ursule dies in 1846 at the age of 83, eighteen years after Adèle's death. Ursule leaves most of her estate to the Daughters of Mary. Her funeral is attended by family and many who have benefited from her giving nature. The newspaper runs a story recounting her many works of charity, concluding with the words used of Jesus: "Madame de Trenquelléon has passed through our land doing good."⁴

Adèle, of course, is never a biological mother, but by being named the superior of the Daughters by Father Chaminade, on the recommendation of Marie Thérèse, she is called "Mother Adèle." She truly

emulates her own mother in the care, instruction, and guidance of her "Daughters." She has learned well from Ursule the call to serve the poor, a perspective and commitment she contributes to the early foundations of the Marianist Family.



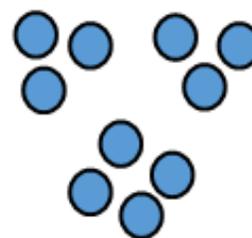
Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon

The apple, Adèle, does not fall far from the tree, Ursule.

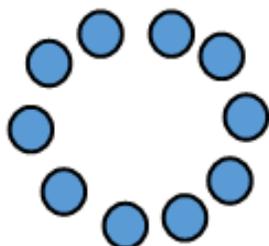
⁴ Stefanelli, *Adèle*, 21.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- ◆ What parts of Ursule's life stand out to you? What surprises or inspires you?
- ◆ Where do you see Ursule's influence on Adèle in her daughter's future ministries?
- ◆ How can Ursule's character and personality inspire women and mothers today?



LARGE GROUP GATHERING



- ◆ Who is a woman whose mothering you admire? Why?
 - ◆ What similarities do you see between Elisabeth, Ursule, and Mary?
 - ◆ Just as Adèle and Marie Thérèse were "mothers" to the people they served, how can we be "mothers" in the world around us?
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CLOSING PRAYER

“A Litany in Honor of Mary” by Joseph Lackner, SM

Holy Mary, pray for us.
Mother of God,
Mother of our redemption,
Mother of a lost child,
Mother of comfort and understanding,
Mother who shares our joys,
Mother who endures our sorrows,
Mother whose heart was pierced by a sword,
Mother most merciful,
 Woman responsible to God’s word,
 Woman willing to believe the impossible,
 Woman who rejoices in her lowliness
 Woman with an undivided heart,
 Woman of perfect freedom,
 Woman wrapped in mystery,
 Woman moved by the Spirit,
 Woman champion of the poor and lowly,
 Woman graced by a husband’s love,
 Woman widowed by a husband’s death,
 Woman at the cross,
 Woman patient and waiting,
 Woman clothed with the sun,

Queen of the fullness of times,
Queen of beauty unalloyed,
Queen of integrity,
Queen of painful meetings,
Queen of all our heart’s treasure,
Queen of our destiny,
Queen of peace,

Mary, you are mother and virgin, wife and widow, peasant and queen - blessed for all time. We need the comfort of your prayers. Remember us always to our Father through your Son, Jesus Christ, who is our Lord forever and ever. Amen.

*The Marianist Family Prayer Book, second edition
(Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2019), 50-51.*



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Related resources available at nacms.org include:

Adele by Joseph Stefanelli, SM

Mlle de Lamourous by Joseph Stefanelli, SM

The Mother of Jesus Was There by Quentin Hakenewerth, SM

Vision and Leadership Styles of Marie Thérèse de Lamourous and Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon by Alison Cawley

Marianist Community Meeting Kits are provided for the Marianist Family by the North American Center for Marianist Studies, NACMS. Additional kits, as well as other Marianist Studies resources, are available at nacms.org.

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