
GRATITUDE TO THE GREY NUNS



With all of you, and especially with the parishioners of St. Leonard, I want to give thanks to God for the fifty years' presence and dedication of the Grey Nuns – the Sisters of Charity – among us. And I believe that the best way to show them our gratitude is to repeat a prayer to St. Marguerite d'Youville, foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Montréal; the prayer was given to me by my friends at the Foyer Notre-Dame in St. Leonard.

PRAYER TO ST. MARGUERITE D'YOUVILLE

«O Saint Marguerite d'Youville, woman of kindness and compassion, you are a page from the Gospel which inspires our actions. Give us your eyes to discover the most pressing needs of our time. Give us your ears to hear the cries of suffering and distress. Give us your hands to heal the wounds and diminish the pain. Give us your heart, especially, to show the divine love which knows no borders. Pray the Father to give us as He did to you, a bold faith, an insurmountable hope, and a universal charity.»

A HEART AFLAME

St. Marguerite d'Youville, known as the Mother of the Poor, lived only to the age of seventy, from 1701 to 1771, but what an stimulating life it was! The eldest of six children, a wife and mother, widowed at the age of 29, with two children. At the age of 36 she welcomed needy women into her home. She was suspected with being involved in the liquor trade with the Indians, as her husband had been, was accused of being a drunk, [Hence the name "Grey Nuns" (Soeurs Grises") given to her and her Sisters, "grises" ("grey") being the French slang for "inebriated", "drunk".] and even of being a prostitute. In 1747 she took charge of the Hôpital général des Frères Charon, in Montréal. Her religious community was approved by Bishop de Pontbriand in 1755. Her hospital took in the poverty-stricken of the area: the poor, the epileptic, even the lepers. Before the wars leading to the Conquest of 1760, her hospital ministered to the French and English sick and wounded, and abandoned children. In 1765, fire destroyed the general hospital, but it was rebuilt four years later by its courageous director. Mother d'Youville died December 23, 1771, and was canonised December 9, 1990, by Pope John Paul II. Three words sum up Mother d'Youville's spirituality: Father, Providence, and the Poor.

ZEALOUS DISCIPLES

For 250 years, Mother d'Youville's disciples have been pursuing her work with the same devotion and zeal as their foundress, even coming to our own diocese of Edmundston. For fifty years now they have been in St. Leonard, models of charity and devotedness. Through their consecrated life they witness to the Father's love for everyone, they witness to the love of Jesus our Saviour and to the love which covers the whole universe through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The love the Sisters show is rooted in their prayer life and intimate union with God. They discover in God Himself the communion they want to create among humans. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, used to say, « The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace. »

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Saint Vincent de Paul, founder of the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission, a man world-renowned for his service to the poor, has astonishing: « *God loves the poor, therefore He loves those who love the poor, because when we love someone, we also love their friends and servants. The poor are God's beloved. We should not hold back when it comes to serving the poor.* » And he wrote to the Daughters of Charity who were duty-bound to stop their prayer if the poor called. « *It is not to leave God, to leave God for God, that is, one of God's works for another one. Because, you see, charity is above all rules and all rules must be subordinate to it. Charity is a great lady, and one must do as she commands. Let us then go and work with renewed love in the service of the poor; furthermore, let us seek out the poorest of the poor and the most abandoned. Let us acknowledge before God that the poor are our lords and masters, and that we are unworthy to offer them our menial work.* »

OPTION FOR THE POOR

Even if poverty has different features from one parish to another, one country to another, and between one century and the next, there are still many poor among us. There is an alarming number of hungry children in our own country; despite the commitment made by our political in 1990 to break the circle of poverty, the number of poor children is still climbing. The same applies to women, too: last year, the World March of Women pressed us to fight against poverty and injustice. The same also can be said concerning our First Nations brothers and sisters, and immigrants. The struggle against poverty certainly is a sign of hope in our world. And I want to thank all those who show concern for the marginalised, the destitute, and the those who suffer the most, whether at the political, pastoral, family, or social levels. May the example of Saint Marguerite d'Youville and her companions be a stimulating incentive to us. What they have sowed among us, these fifty years, continues to bear fruit: the new senior citizens' home is an answer to new felt needs; the example given by the Sisters of Charity inspire us to commit ourselves in a new way to our suffering brothers and sisters. We must continue to follow the examples of loving concern and compassion which these sisters have given us. « *In serving the poor, we serve Jesus Christ. How true this is!* », Saint Vincent de Paul used to say. « *You serve Jesus Christ in the poor. And this is as true as our being here. A sister will visit de sick ten times a day, and she will find God ten times. You must treat the poor with kindness and respect, remembering that you are serving Jesus Christ.* »

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