



MARIE POUSSEPIN'S EXPERIENCE OF GOD AND HER TRUST IN PROVIDENCE

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As I consider the proposed theme, I think that my words will be limited to explain the profound experience that impelled and sustained our Mother Foundress to consolidate her life project and work until the end.

The expressions or indications of her profound sense of a God who is Love and who marked her existence, will be an invitation to read and re-read from different topics the spirit that she bequeathed to us and wants to be preserved in each one of us.

Every experience of the human person is an undeniable experience that during his or her life becomes a firm conviction and is expressed in each human being through traits that characterize the person. If the experience is spiritual, as is the case here, it results in a spirituality with its own characteristics. That is why as a background, I invite you to reflect on what do we understand by spirituality:

Our Spirituality "is characterized by a personal and a community relationship with God., Dominican way of living this relationship with the Spirit who dwells in us, our brothers and sisters in humanity, creation, daily events, the Word and the Sacraments.... It is the Spirit who builds us up and transforms us from within, when we remain in an attitude of continuous conversion." (Cf. The Spirituality of the Congregation p. 9-10.)

- **We speak then of an experience of God that embraces the life of Marie Poussepin and takes on her whole being and doing.**

When we look closely at the life of our Mother Foundress, we can perceive her growth in faith from childhood on and also her deepening in her baptismal experience which can be recognized at various circumstances, some favorable... and others which could be called "limited" because of what she had to face, resolve or rescue... In everything we perceive the strengthening of her faith which remains consistent and unwavering at every trial ... and which strengthens her conviction of a God who is Father and in whom we all "live, move and exist" (Acts 17, 28), and a God who does not abandon his creature and who, in an amazing way, goes out to meet his son/daughter in his/her need.

On speaking about the Providence of God, from a Biblical point of view, we can assert that it means the constant and uninterrupted presence of God as Creator in all his creation. Saint John Paul II tells us: "The Sacred Scripture in many passages praises the Divine Providence as the supreme authority of the world, who, with real consideration for all creatures and especially for human beings, gives Himself as the efficient strength for all created things."

On opening our Constitutions, the first expression we find in the chapter "The Original Vision", is: "In 1696 Marie Poussepin '**inspired by Providence**', leaves Dourdan..."

When she presents herself as "**Inspired by Providence**" (Consultation with Mr. Arrault, lawyer 1712), we see that the experience of the Providence of God has already touched her life, to the point of being able to affirm with certainty and simplicity that she is a woman inspired not by personal opinions or conveniences, nor by personal assumptions, but by a God of Love who goes ahead, who foresees and provides; a God who acts constantly in his creatures to keep them in his being and bring them to fulfillment according to his loving plan in spite of and far beyond all the adverse circumstances and situations. She keeps in mind that "God governs with his providence, all things that He has created, even the smallest things, and not just in a general way, but *each of the things in a real intimate way*. However, this does not prevent him from having a special providence for certain things." (St. Thomas).

This experience of a God who constantly provides for her, was being strengthened during the years she lived in Dourdan, by her human-Christian formation as a daughter in the Church in the family and Parish environment, also by the influence of some spiritual currents of her time, and contact with the doctrines of the Church (Magisterium)... and through her daily life in which she invites us to find God and live in His presence: "Keep the presence of God in all your actions...". General Advices. This is already the expression of a life centered on the Love of God and love of one's brothers and sisters.

- **Inspired by Providence:**

Her passage from Dourdan to Sainville was the experience of a God who looks at the situation of his children and acts accordingly. The reality of misery, hunger, ignorance and orphan hood,... in short, as Marie Poussepin herself says: "to say the least", is a theological space where she heard an invitation, where she experienced that a commitment was needed in favor of... where she perceived the loving design of the Providence of God in favor of her and the inhabitants of Sainville. This moment was an experience of an incarnate God, an encounter with the Mystery of God "who pitched his tent among us". Cf. Jn 1: 4

Here we find what we would call as "**the charismatic intuition of Marie Poussepin**", she questions herself, she feels the invitation that is the voice that rises from the desolate reality, she contemplates... "Upon receiving in her heart the dazzling revelation of that misery, even worse than what she had imagined, her eyes were opened and she was determined... to found there without delay what she would call 'THE WORK OF PROVIDENCE ALONE' (Sr. Madeleine Saint Jean).

Confronting the reality in the light of her call, she cannot but act according to what she has seen and heard. It would resound in Marie Poussepin's heart like the words of God to Moses: "I have seen the affliction of my people... and I have heard their cry... I have come down to deliver them..." (Ex. 3:7-8). The spiritual presence of the Virgin Mary was certainly her strength and light in her decision. On reading, chapter 1 from The Rule of Sainville, a flash of such transcendence seems to be revived in her expression: "They should not rely on themselves for things which are so far beyond their own power; but they can always hope in the help of the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have placed themselves..."

Inspired... Beyond human logic, she allows herself to be guided... she welcomes in faith and sets out, supported by "God alone" from whom she has received this mission; she responds with all that she is, with all that she has received, and above all, with full trust in God who, she knows, will not disappoint her. In the process on the heroic nature of her virtues, we find that "the Lord was everything for her, at every moment of her life... she always trusted in Providence" (Vote I). And referring to the heroism of her faith, Vote IV expresses: "the spirit of faith in Providence was tested in a special way in the foundation of her Institute..."

In Marie Poussepin's experience, we meet with a God who counts on his creatures and makes them his instruments to cooperate with Him in the plan of salvation; this, then, is the mystery of his choice for the purposes that he has in mind from eternity. It is God's way of acting. She recognizes this because she clearly expresses that the foundation of the Institute is "**the work of God who made use of such a weak creature**" and her awareness of what the Lord had been doing through her is such that she says in her letter to Mr. Arrault that she does everything for the future of her establishment "**even though she would like to remain in great simplicity**".

The two Testaments of our Mother Foundress bear witness to "her conviction that nothing can be accomplished without total trust in the Providence". This experience has permeated her life in such a way that we can perceive in her an intimate, familiar, profound and fundamental confidence in all her undertakings and decisions... God's Providence is a constant and definitive presence at different circumstances... in daily life... achievements and long waits, in clarity and darkness... The certainty that "God in his Providence protects and governs all things." (Vatican Council I), gave her security in her continuous searches.

We see her absolute trust in God reflected in the General Rules and the Rule of Sainville. She recommends to the Sisters: "Work more and more at acquiring the necessary abilities and, in the meanwhile, do your best and pray fervently to obtain the capacities you still lack. God will not fail to grant you all that you need, provided that you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of obtaining it. (General Rules). It is clear to Marie Poussepin that God works hand in hand with his creature whom he uses to extend and make visible his Providential care.

We see clearly the profound experience of the words of St. Paul which became in her a conviction, a certainty and a full realization: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" Phil. 4:13; and "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that of ourselves, we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God." 2 Cor 3:4-5. Hence, making this journey was a living experience; her profound attitude is expressed in trust, dedication, docility and **"abandonment into the hands of the Father..."**

Step by step, she recognizes that her work is **"the work of Providence alone"** (Petition to Monsignor de Pontchartrain). It is clear that one cannot ignore the growth of her Community, not only because of the members who are joining her, but also because of the way that all of them are taking in favor of those people who are in great need. "God's providence, which by an admirable plan of love raised the human race in its beginnings to participate in the divine nature and redeem it of sin and original ruin, restored it to its primitive dignity..." (Providentissimus Deus). God's Providence is perceived to be acting in that way. For Marie Poussepin, this action of God through her Work in Sainville, was a sign, an indicator, a signal and a response, even in difficult moments of long waiting and prolonged silence.

What would not have been a lesson for Marie Poussepin from this perspective, when vocations were multiplying... Bishops were asking for Sisters for their Dioceses...and population was gradually coming out of their difficult situations... She was reaffirming her conviction that it was the "Work of Providence alone" and that the infinite Love of God has its time.

Marie Poussepin, recognizes herself to be an instrument, a worker and the hands of the Providence... they, her sisters, those present and those who will be coming little by little... are part of this work of Providence, as she expresses it in the supplication addressed to His Majesty Louis XV: "She trusts enough in God's Providence to believe that her daughters will never lack the help necessary, provided they are faithful to her rules and assiduous in their work." She trusts fully in God, but He does not do what she and her sisters must contribute for the work of Providence to be active.

- **"The raison d'être of her community is the service of charity." (Original Vision)**

She is the servant of a Merciful God to cooperate in the reconstruction of the human fabric of this population laid down by misery: "Sister Poussepin and the Sisters of her community humbly beg, saying that **the Providence** has allowed for more than forty years...a house to be established in Sainville, from where the personnel is provided to different places in your Diocese; they take care of the spiritual and corporal needs of the people whom ignorance or illness make worthy of compassion". (She pleaded with the Bishop of Chartres).

Her representation as a **"servant"** expresses her spirituality and attitude of self-giving, following the example of Jesus who made himself the servant of all: "I have not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). The experience of God in the reality itself led her to become more and more aware of her condition as a creature and therefore, her total dependence on the One who called her for his divine purposes. She puts herself in his hands... she gives herself and perceives herself as a servant of the Merciful Love of God who acts through His Work to bring dignity to the life of this portion of the Church.

The experience of a God who Loves and Provides, who never fails and who comes to meet her in every circumstance, inflamed her heart, strengthened her capacity to take risk, fortified her confidence and predisposed her existence to make her whole life a service of Charity, an announcement of the One who "burned with love for his Father and for humanity" and a pressing call to her sisters to imitate Him and bring "everywhere the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Mysteries". Rules. XXVII.

The "Service of Charity which is the proclamation of the Word and whose source is contemplation" C. 81,

It is one of the expressions of the Charism, which gathers together the fundamental elements of her missionary vision. Her baptismal experience has led her to recognize that she is the beloved daughter of the Father and to place her Work at the service of Charity. As a servant of Charity, in the person of the most needy, Marie Poussepin "lives unwavering faith in God, the Provider and in love for Jesus Christ for whom she gives herself out of love and like Him, to the poor" (Vote VII).

Both in this identity as a servant, fruit of the experience of God, the Provider in whom she trusted herself, as well as in her filial and fraternal experience of living with heroism the theological virtues, we see her deep humility, simplicity, transparency and her true self. In her, "Charity and humility appear as the foundation and... summary of her virtues in the different perspectives of her work" (Vote IX).

Servant of what?

If He is Providence, Marie Poussepin knows that she is called to give and to make visible the Love, Mercy and Goodness of the Providence of God who always walks with His people. "They may kindle in their hearts, if possible, the love for His Divine Majesty." Rule XXVII. This "Provident Love" made its way into Marie Poussepin's heart and by taking the open space of the Works of Mercy to respond to the needs of her time, she teaches and invites us to do the same in our daily lives, always welcoming the possibility for "all that Charity can inspire" The Rule of Sainville, chapter I, through the two orientations of Education and Health Care, with preference for the poor.

Sisters, it is a heritage that we have received; we are called to make ourselves day by day as "servants" through a constant growing experience of God who is Love and God who is Providence.

Today, we become part of the "Work of Providence alone". When we look at the history of our Congregation, we have to recognize the Providential Love that has sustained its Work and has taken it according to His designs beyond the circumstances and difficulties of time and space... We have to own and live more intensely, according to the surrounding realities, this spiritual legacy which is a "rock" and which is "its Work" and which is our work also. Upon this rock, our Congregation, has its support, its reference and its strength to continue today projecting ourselves as "Instruments" that Providence has chosen for today.

In the task of Restructuration, in which the whole Congregation is involved, this spiritual heritage of "trust in Providence" shines out as our perception, light, strength and security to take proper steps according to what God in his providential plan has designed for us.

Today's circumstances, changing reality and needs of our world demand and expect from us the outstretched hand of the Providence to strengthen, enlighten and give "meaning" for their existence.

The Sainville of today also needs this spiritual legacy that we have received. Being present in 36 countries, we can see that the Work of the Humble, Pious and Charitable Marie Poussepin remains in God's hands and waits for the generous response of "trust in the Providence". In the context of the 25 years of the Beatification of Marie Poussepin, this reflection proposed by the General Government is an invitation to strengthen and bring quality to our living out of this spiritual legacy which, as a spiritual characteristic of the charismatic vision of our Mother Foundress, we should witness in our personal and community experience.

- **How can we offer an experience of the Providence of God and share it in a new way that our brothers and sisters expect and need today?**
- **In view of the reality that surrounds us, the experience of a God who Provides, would be an alternative to strengthen ourselves with a solid faith, a hope that takes us beyond the situations themselves and a passionate love for God who never abandons the work of his hands. Share your reflections and experiences.**

The Work of "Providence alone" which has lasted for more than 3 centuries, is a response today also, through our various missions. May Marie Poussepin obtain for us the grace to grow each day in identifying ourselves with the spiritual heritage that she left us and which she desired to "perpetuate".

"Thus, following the example of our Foundress who, having reserved nothing for herself, possessed nothing, we trust in Providence in the joy and freedom of those whose only wealth is the Lord" Cf. Testament of Marie Poussepin" (C. 93).