



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

*Sr. Anula Irvin Suguna
February 2020*

Introduction

The 25th anniversary of the beatification of Bl. Marie Poussepin is an occasion for each one of us to reflect anew on her experience and closeness to God, her perception of the world and her response at the service of God and others in the exercise of charity. It is to rediscover some insights that could motivate us to become more vigilant about the essential aspects that form our consecrated life. The exact summary of Marie Poussepin's entire life is "She saw what was right in the eyes of God and did it."¹ Her personal charism was to love God in her neighbor. Marie Poussepin experienced God in deep moments of prayer and contemplation in the silence of her heart. She experienced Him in His Word that was "spirit and life."² She encountered him in the Liturgy. She felt His presence in all her actions. She trusted in the divine providence and surrendered to His will in the simple everyday events of her life as well as in the greater events. She was firm in her faith, unwavering in her hope and generous in her charity. This study would help us to rediscover her experience of God and her trust in the Divine Providence.

1. She saw...She reflected...

¹ These words engraved on her tombstone, beautifully summarize the life of our Foundress: to see-to act. *Ratio Formationis*, p. 17.

² Sr. Reetha Mechery, "Marie Poussepin: Her Experience of God," Forum on Marie Poussepin held at Italy in Rome, 19 November 1994, p. 7.

The experience of God is always something personal, transforming and productive.³ This experience of God shaped Marie Poussepin. It is the soul from which her apostolate flowed. Marie Poussepin saw little by little, and progressively. What she saw, she did in the light of faith. She saw her parents teaching her Gospel values, family prayers and above all created in her love for the sick, poor and needy as she was involved with her mother in the activities of Confraternity of Charity. She saw all the charitable activities done by her parents who inculcated in her the same compassion for the poor and love for service. People saw holiness in her as she was chosen from the age of 7 to 15 to be the Godmother for 17 children and several times afterwards. She saw her family in difficulty. It was the events which successively revealed God's designs for her. The death of her mother, the frustrations of her father and her responsibility to give her younger brother a secure position are events that led her to determine what she has to do.⁴ She saw great misery in Sainville. She saw numerous orphan girls "without shelter and without help." She saw that sick were without assistance and it was a place "where ignorance was widespread to say the least."⁵ With a strong will, she clearly saw the deficiencies of her time and searched for solutions adapted to her possibilities. She sought to do God's will trusting in His providence and led a Christ centered life.

In the scripture there are a great number of testimonies that encourage us to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1; 11: 1-12:3). This invites us to realize that "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) impels us to advance towards the goal.⁶ This witness is our Mother Foundress Bl. Marie Poussepin who kept moving forward reflecting, pondering and meditating on what she saw. She always gazed on the Trinity, to enter into the Lord's heart, into the wounds of Jesus, for that is the abode of divine mercy.⁷ Thus her reflection produced new spiritual vigour and important transformation in the Church.

2. What was Right...She contemplated...

The Father's plan is Christ and it is Christ who loves in us for "holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full."⁸ Marie was a woman open to the present, determined to be successful in her life rather than just living for the sake of living. She adored and worshipped the Lord in the cave of her heart, the one whom she wanted to imitate in "His love for the Father and for all people." She contemplated Jesus who went around teaching, curing the sick and forgiving the sinner. She allowed the Spirit to forge in her the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world. She felt the presence of God in all her actions. The struggles and difficulties that she faced made her fully to depend on the Providence. She deemed it right to enter into the challenging field of business by trusting in the mercy of God which gave her self-confidence and inner wisdom. The fire of love and thirst for improvement can work miracles not only in one's

³ Fr. Abelardo Lobato, "Marie Poussepin: Her Experience of God," Forum on Marie Poussepin held at Italy in Rome, 19 November 1994, p. 13.

⁴ Bernard Prèteselle, *20 years after the Beatification of Marie Poussepin*, Conferences of l'abbé Prèteselle, Tours, 2014, p. 88.

⁵ *Rule of Sainville*, Préface; Bernard Prèteselle, *20 years after the Beatification of Marie Poussepin*, p. 88. *Constitutions*, "Marie Poussepin : The Original Vision," p. 11.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, no. 3.

⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Canticum Canticorum*, 61, 3-5: PL 183:1071-1073.

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Catechesis*, General Audience of 13 April 2011: *Insegnamenti* VII (2011), p. 451.

own life but also in the lives of others. She was a woman who saw goodness in others. She spent her energy for the common good of the society. She got the opportunity to know Fr. Mespolie, the Dominican Order and the Spirituality of St. Dominic; with His spirit she became the beloved of the suffering. She saw the face of God in the suffering and took care not only of their physical needs but also their spiritual and psychological needs. She cared for Marie Oliver with compassion till the end of her death offering her own bed. She practiced the self emptying love taught by her master. Prayer did not separate her from what was happening all around her. Her spirituality starts from her experience of God, in daily life, in the fraternal life, in work, rest, pain, suffering and poverty of her contemporaries.⁹

She found it right to begin a Dominican community united in the name of Jesus Christ, where the Word is welcomed, shared, studied and celebrated. God's Word leads us to share it with all those whom we encounter in this life and to proclaim the sure hope that it contains (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15-16).¹⁰ She wanted her daughters to let themselves be nourished by the Word and Bread, in order to acknowledge and live fully our relationship with Him and with our brothers and sisters. For her, prayer is the light which illuminates the darkness of our spirits, the bridge to pass over temptations, the exercise of the angels, the joy of the blessed and the channel by which all the graces flow.¹¹ Along our path of welcoming God's Word into our hearts, the Mother of the Lord accompanies us and she saw Virgin Mary as an example calling to a life of gift of self in faith and humility of heart.¹² In her attitude of simplicity and humility, without distinctions of persons neither of country nor birth, she did what is pleasing to the Lord in the exercise of charity to alleviate the misery of the people.

3. In the Eyes of God...She was united...

Marie discerned God's will, as she spent a lot of time in silence and solitude with the Lord in prayer, as she desired to see the world, with the vision of the Lord. She made a lot of plans with Him but sometimes she had to revise it to make them His plan.¹³ In the eyes of God she was holy by living her commitment with joy, by "laboring with integrity and skill in the service of her people, by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus, by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain."¹⁴ Her constant and firm decision to follow Him allowed her to offer all her pain, suffering and sacrifices at His feet. In the eyes of God, she had grown much in her spiritual life and it gave her strength to carry any amount of crosses in her life. She longed to reach out to the poor and needy with the vision of God and with the compassionate love of Christ. Marie was reminded of God's words to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings" (Ex 3:7). It was a call that made Marie to leave behind all the comforts and

⁹ *Updated Ratio Formationis*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Aperuit Illis*, no. 13.

¹¹ *Rule of Sainville*, Ch VII, art. 33.

¹² *Updated Ratio Formationis*, p. 14.

¹³ Marie Poussepin's plans sometimes were not realized. Though she took initiative to get the approval from the Dominican Order, to establish her community under the patronage of St. Dominic during her time, it was fulfilled much later. But she continued to live the spirituality of St. Dominic by actively taking part in the mission of charity in the Church.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, no. 14.

security of life, all that she earned by her sweat and blood, the wealth, the fame and all that were dear to her.¹⁵ She considered this call as of greater value. Though she had no place to stay, nothing to eat but her heart was filled with love for His people as she fully trusted in the providence. She followed the example of St. Dominic who spent his nights with the Lord and the day with the people. The fruit of her prayer life was reflected in her service rendered to all.

Marie remained united to the Lord by a continuous prayer “of the heart.”¹⁶ She found unity between contemplation and action through this frequent raising of mind and heart to Him. Her eyes were permanently opened upon the community and upon each sister in particular. This meant to have an active and watchful vigilance, an attitude of service and organization, fraternal relations, administrative functions and solicitous attention to each one of the sisters.¹⁷ This was possible because she was united to the Lord in the Eucharist, where the living Word is truly present. Every day she renewed her faith as she received this treasure of the consecrated Bread and Wine of the divine Wayfarer who joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened their eyes to the light and their hearts to new hope (cf. Lk 24:13-35).¹⁸ She communed herself with the eyes of the Lord to ‘renew her intentions always to do all things for Him.’

4. And fulfilled it...with Trust in His Providence...

Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in History, a certain aspect of the Gospel.¹⁹ Marie Poussepin was a woman with a lucid mind who, during her life and no matter which stage of it, recognized what her action had to be. She was able to assume risk without avoiding her responsibilities, without fearing failure, trying to give concrete responses to the problems of the world. She made a vital decision of leaving her family, her place of origin, her resources and all that constituted her life and, trusting only in Providence, she went on, to follow the project of God. She went to the most needy, where misery was great. The education and health ministry were a ray of hope in the life of many whose minds were in the darkness of ignorance and who were enslaved by sickness. She could inspire many young hearts who collaborated with her in her mission and she taught them to trust in God’s providence and mercy. Marie experienced God as a God of mercy and compassion, a God of love and forgiveness. Her merciful charity reached out to everyone: to the sinner, the afflicted, the ignorant, the sick and the poor.²⁰

Whoever comes in contact with fire returns enkindled, transformed into a living flame of love. Marie Poussepin is one witness of this experience of God. She knew Jesus and lived with the hunger to penetrate into His mystery.²¹ Her intimacy with the Lord re-energized her to be a reflection of His love in the mission. Reading the signs of the times and listening to the voice of

¹⁵ Sr. Mary Dominic, *Blessed Marie Poussepin: Social Apostle of Charity*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *Rule of Sainville*, Ch. 2, art. 3; *Constitutions*, “Marie Poussepin: The Original Vision,” p. 13.

¹⁷ *Marie Poussepin and Her Community*, p. 17.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, art. 59.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, no. 19.

²⁰ Sr. Reetha Mechery, “Marie Poussepin: Her Experience of God,” p. 8.

²¹ This is seen in Ch. XXVII of *Rule of Sainville*. “That they might bring wherever they are called the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His mysteries.”

God deep within her heart gave her courage and tenacity to give birth to the Congregation, with the seed of charity in her soul.

Conclusion

The starting point for every Dominican Sister of Charity of the Presentation is the experience of God. The “Sainville” of today is all around us, subdued at times, threatening at other times. Wisdom is required to discover it, audacity is required to make it our own and prudence is required to transform it. We can find adequate solutions only if we are strongly rooted in the Lord. With the help of the Spirit we can remain in faith, overcome trials with hope, and give totally to the service of charity. Blessed Marie Poussepin, a daring woman of her time, with a far sighted vision and complete trust in the Providence of God lives today in many hearts, especially in her daughters. The daughters of Marie Poussepin are invited to sustain that experience of God with a feminine touch which reveals the maternal face of God. Today she begs of us to be contemplatives who permeate the world with His presence.

Questions for reflection

- 1) In the midst of all problems and difficulties, Marie Poussepin invites us to bring a ray of hope to the world of discouragement and despair. She challenges us that true liberation comes only in and through Christ. How does my experience of God help me to contemplate deeply ‘The Word’ and let the fire of the charism of Bl. Marie Poussepin inflame my heart?
- 2) Marie Poussepin offers to us today this ‘continuous prayer of the heart’ as a simple way to be in communion with Him in the midst of hectic activities. What are the ways in which we could unite ourselves with the eyes of God in contemplating and responding to this challenging world?