

CHRIST IN THEIR MIDST



Six Holy Couples

By Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

2021

Table of Contents

Love in the afternoon

(Leonard Cheshire and Sue Ryder)

The story of an unusual couple

(Piero e Lucille Corti)

The great friendship

(Jaques and Raissa Maritain)

Unending Love

(Frank and Elisabeth Longford)

The Power of Two

(Blessed Louis and Mary Beltrame-Quattrocchi)

Paradise Family

(Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin)

~~~~~

*Leonard Cheshire & Sue Ryder*

## **LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON**

*He was 42 and she was 36 when they met, fell in love and married. He was a war hero who had turned all his remarkable energies to the care of the sick and handicapped. She was a wartime member of the Secret service who had dedicated her youth to the rescue of prisoners of war in Poland. His “Cheshire Homes” and her “Sue Ryder Charity Shops” had already dotted the map of Europe and spread to many countries of the world. Their mutual love blossomed from their cooperation in serving their fellow human beings and increased their power for goodness. This is the story of an extraordinary couple of true saints.*

The life of Leonard Cheshire followed a classic pattern of Christian hagiography: birth into a well-to-do family; a dashing, turbulent and spiritually thoughtless youth; an unexpected encounter with God, followed by conversion, suffering, voluntary poverty and dedication to prayer and good works. To describe holiness convincingly is quite difficult, but for Leonard Cheshire and his wife Sue Ryder there is no other word that accounts for their exceptional dedication to the most unfortunate, inspired by their Catholic faith. Especially Leonard, a modest, reserved but totally self-assured Englishman, who deserved to be called by Nehru, the father of independent India, “the greatest man since Gandhi”.

Leonard Cheshire was born at Chester, England, on September 7 1917. His background was cultivated and secure. His father was professor of law at Oxford; his mother came from a military family. Anglicanism was in their blood but not taken very seriously. The family was close, affectionate and supportive. Young Leonard went to Oxford where he took a second-class degree in law and acquired a reputation for dare-devil exploits, disregard for

authority and a self-assurance bordering on arrogance. He joined the University Air Squadron, learned to fly and found that he enjoyed it.

In early 1939, with war clearly looming, he applied for a permanent commission in the RAF (Royal Air Force). When war broke out, between June 1940 and August 1941, he carried out more than 100 bombing missions, encountering hazards and deaths on an almost unimaginable scale. In March 1943, he became the youngest group captain in the Service and in September that year was given command of the celebrated “Dambuster” squadron which specialized in low-level bombing. Cheshire was nearing the end of his fourth tour of duty in July 1944, when he was awarded the “Victoria Cross”, the highest British war decoration.

His citation read: “In four years of fighting against the bitterest opposition, he maintained a standard of outstanding personal achievement, his successful operations being the result of careful planning, brilliant execution and supreme contempt for danger. Cheshire displayed the courage and determination of an exceptional leader.”

Following a staff job in India, he was nominated by Churchill in 1945 to be one of the two British observers at the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki. This experience affected him deeply and convinced him that no government could ever again face the risk of nuclear attack, and that nuclear deterrence therefore opened up the possibility of world peace. To the end of his life, he believed in world peace as an attainable goal and nuclear deterrence as a necessary condition of achieving it. On his return from the mission, he left the RAF and went home to his house, Le Court in Hampshire.

### **The Peacetime Hero**

The end of the war found him with no clear idea of what to do next. But the business of war, the horrors he had undergone and helped to inflict, the comradeship and discovery of his own gift for leadership had matured and deepened him. Cheshire had no religious feelings during the war. His conversion to Catholicism came later, starting in the unlikely setting of a Mayfair bar. A woman told him in the course of a conversation there that God was a real person, and, he said, 'There wasn't exactly a blinding light, but I suddenly knew she was right.' He began to pray...

In 1948, he heard that an acquaintance, Arthur Dykes, was terminally ill. Dykes asked Cheshire for a bit of land on which to park his caravan until he was on his feet again; it was apparent that nobody had told him that he was dying. Cheshire couldn't maintain the deception and told Dykes the truth. To Cheshire's astonishment, Dykes was much relieved. "Thank you, Len, for letting me know," he said, "It's not knowing that is the worst of all." Cheshire invited Arthur Dykes to stay with him in his house.

Dykes was a lapsed Catholic, and asked for a priest. Cheshire's conversations with Dykes and his encounter with the priest led to his characteristically sudden and decisive conversion to Catholicism. As Cheshire cared for Dykes he learned basic nursing and became a frequent helper at the local hospital. Then someone brought along his elderly wife who was ill and bedridden, and Cheshire nursed her also, bathing her and caring for her needs.

Meanwhile, other broken or ailing people followed Dykes into Cheshire's care, and before long he was running the first embryonic Cheshire home. He had found his vocation. He would recount this as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a man who had recently been the youngest group captain in the RAF to do. "I didn't go looking for those people. They were on my path," he explained. By the time Arthur Dykes died in 1948, there were 24 people staying at Le Court: there was no going back.

There followed the gradually accelerating spread of Cheshire Homes across the country, initiated by Cheshire himself and gaining momentum from his example and his genius for attracting and motivating willing helpers. At first, the homes were in effect hospices; but it gradually became clear that the focus should be on physical and mental disability. In 1951 Cheshire turned his attention to India and the first oversea home was started in Bombay where it still flourishes. By the time of his death in 1992, his foundation had become probably the largest disability care charity in the world, responsible today for 140 homes and services in the United Kingdom and supporting 240 more in 50 other countries, from Argentina to Indonesia.

There was nothing simple about this achievement. It is all rather extraordinary, owing to the attraction of Cheshire's personality and his exceptional commitment. It is due to his determination, his courage, his charm tempered with occasional ruthlessness, his personal relationships with

others(not least his devoted and exceptional wife, Sue Ryder) and his interior life as a Christian and a Catholic. Cheshire embraced Catholicism with the enthusiasm of the convert and with the single-mindedness which had characterized him in war.

### *The power of two*

In 1952 Leonard fell seriously sick with tuberculosis, underwent the removal of one lung and spent two years in a sanatorium. This was a time of suffering, but also of intensified prayer and theological studies. When he came out, he was attracted by monastic life and almost resolved to join the Cistercians, “partly”, as he explained afterwards, “because they are absolute in their standpoint, and partly because I liked very much their balance of life, with the harmony between mental life, prayer and very hard physical work”. In the end, he opted for life in the world. He made no secret of his faith, and his lifestyle was as frugal as his travels and social obligations allowed. He embraced the world in the spirit of the cloister. And then love appeared.

Baroness Sue Ryder, a wartime member of the Special Operations Executive, was six years younger than Leonard, having been born in 1923. After the war she had become famous for her work in Poland with concentration camp survivors. The “Sue Ryder Foundation” was established in 1953 to help the homeless in the aftermath of the Second World War but it subsequently widened its appeal to include the sick and needy in Britain and had a string of health care homes and 500 charity shops. Lady Ryder was a tireless worker for the disadvantaged, animated as she was by her deep Catholic faith. She was a hands-on charity director, often driving lorries of food and clothing to Warsaw to help the needy, especially while the country was under Communist rule.

When Cheshire first met Sue Ryder with the idea that they might work together, he had no thought of marrying, and neither did she. But a strong attraction grew up quickly. On April 5 1959, in Mumbai's Catholic Cathedral, he bound his life to hers. The marriage was a happy one, and they went to live in a Sue Ryder home in Cavendish, Suffolk. They were blessed with a son Jeremy and a daughter Elizabeth. In the 33 years of their life together, they continued their commitment to their different organizations.

In 1984, on the occasion of their Silver Jubilee, they were granted an audience by Pope John Paul II. In 1991 Leonard was given a life peerage. He lived through his final illness (*Motor Neurone Disease*) with exemplary spiritual fortitude. Queen Elizabeth II paid personal tribute to him in her Christmas message to the Commonwealth in December 1992. On the death of her husband, Sue Ryder became president of the Cheshire Foundation, which now runs over 200 facilities in over 50 countries, in addition to her role as leader of her own charity “The Sue Ryder Foundation”. Baroness Ryder died in November 2000, aged 77.

### *A paradox of love*

Leonard Cheshire led two separate careers one after the other: he was a pilot and then a charity worker. Each one of them would have made him one of the most remarkable men of our time. He was one of the few people in the world to see a nuclear device dropped in anger, yet his name is primarily associated with conflict resolution and charitable work. There cannot be many men who have received their country’s highest award for wartime bravery, but who are remembered primarily for humanitarian service.

Cheshire had a slim athletic frame with heavy eyebrows and a ready smile that showed his two front teeth, and something of the clean-cut, boyish good looks. He was soft-spoken but could command respect and an extraordinary degree of admiration. It would be misleading to say he was modest. He was not diffident, and he would talk about his accomplishments, but he talked about them as if they were something anyone might do. He would answer questions about anything: his wartime feats, his feelings about facing death in the air, his courtship with Sue Ryder, his religious faith. Yet paradoxically, he left the impression of a man different from the rest of the people in many deep ways. Casual acquaintances could appreciate his courtesy, his evident seriousness of purpose joined with a sense of humor, without being aware of the extent to which his private life was centered on prayer.

His loyalty to the Church was unshaken by the upheavals which followed the Second Vatican Council and retained its initial whole-hearted simplicity: he had no time for religious controversy. In the weeks leading up to his painful death he used to say: “All that matters to me is the Mass because it was at the Last Supper that we all became members of the Lord’s mystical





## **PIERO AND LUCILLE CORTI: THE STORY OF AN UNUSUAL COUPLE**

*He thought he was choosing a quiet corner of Africa where to fulfill the dream of his youth. His wife was with him. They were both doctors. They lived through the most turbulent period of the modern history of Uganda. Wars, revolutions and guerillas could not stop the relentless pace of their missionary service. Not even Aids.*

Gulu Airport in Northern Uganda, end of April 2003. Since the first hours of the morning, many people stood patiently waiting for the body of their brother and friend, the missionary doctor, Piero Corti, to be brought back to them for burial. When the plane appeared out of the blue sky, a deep silence got hold of the crowd. A few minutes later, the hatch slowly opened showing the coffin. A group of traditional Acholi dancers swirled in the *miel-liel* dance, the customary dance reserved for the tribal chiefs.

This is how he came back to what he considered his land of adoption, in order to be buried besides his wife Lucille. In exactly the same way, she had returned after her death in 1996. Under the shadow of the huge tree, in front of the entrance to Saint Mary's Hospital, Lacor, for which they had dedicated their entire life, in the peace of the tomb, the extraordinary adventure of this unusual couple came to an end.

### **Piero, a tenacious slow-starter**

Piero was born at Besana Brianza, near Milan, on September 16 1925, the fifth of nine brothers. Eugenio, the eldest, became an accomplished novelist: his major work, "*Il Cavallo Rosso* (The Red Horse)" has been translated in dozens of languages. Corrado, the last but one of the children, joined the Jesuits, became a priest and preceded Piero in Africa, as a missionary to Chad. Piero, however, appeared to be a slow starter in life: he was already 36 when he married Lucille. One of the reasons for being so was that as a young person he was sickly.

At seven he got pneumonia; in 1950 he tested positive for tuberculosis; and in 1982 he suffered his first heart attack, followed by

several others, the last being in 1995. He was naturally hesitant in the beginning of things, but once he made up his mind, nobody ever stopped him or managed to slow him down from the hectic pace of his commitments and initiatives. That was his character: once he took a decision, it involved his whole person, without calculation. But he was an intelligent manager of his own and others' resources.

In his personal make up, a great role was played by the faith and example of his mother Irma. Besides his mother and, later, his wife Lucille, there is another extraordinary figure of a woman who entered Piero's life and exercised a great influence: Benedetta Bianchi Porro, a school mate at the faculty of medicine, who was dreaming of becoming a missionary doctor, but was affected by polio and later by a brain tumor who reduced her to a blind, deaf and mute trunk. Notwithstanding her condition, she kept encouraging Piero in his projects of missionary life.

When Lucille arrived, he wrote to Benedetta: "Don't worry any more: I had promised I would work for two people, meaning me and you. But since Lucille is here, she works for three people! My promise will be amply kept because of her". In his youth, Piero was tormented by the desire of finding a wife who could respond to his needs and accept his missionary ideals. He once confided: "I like beautiful women. But I want to find a strong woman, a woman who can accept to stay at my side for the rest of my life, share my missionary ideal and help me to fulfill it". God sent him Lucille.

### **Lucille, a saintly agnostic**

Piero meets Lucille Teasdale, herself a doctor, in the late fifties, in Canada where he has gone to continue his studies of medicine. After an extensive tour in different countries of Africa, he decides to settle in Uganda, at Gulu and develop the dispensary at Lacor. He gets the idea of inviting Lucille and eventually writes to her. For a full year he waits for an answer but in vain. Then, she accepts and joins him. The experience of common medical work soon becomes mutual attraction and love: they decide to marry.

It was December 5, 1961 when Peter and Lucille celebrated their marriage, in the chapel of the hospital, with the only presence of the seven Italian Comboni sisters of the hospital staff and it was in front of them that

they cut the nuptial cake. The following year their daughter Dominique was born and they remained in Africa for the rest of their lives. Since the beginning, Piero did it because of his Christian faith, in silent obedience to the family tradition of profound religiosity. Lucille on the contrary was agnostic and rather cool about religion, but extremely concerned and responsible about life. Later, influenced by the simple religious warmth of her husband and his family, she came back almost insensibly to God and surrendered in complete trust to Him.

### **The power of two**

Lucille and Piero were an evidently non-conformist couple, both driven by a mixture of spirit of adventure, strict sense of duty and a religious inclination that gave very little way to pure emotionalism. Both alive with intellectual curiosity, voracious readers of books during their little free time, Piero and Lucille worked with exceptional single-mindedness for the people of Uganda and for the development of Lacor Hospital. The time of their staying in Uganda is marked by extraordinary happenings: the country first became independent from the British in 1962.

In 1971 it fell under the military dictatorship of the notorious Idi Amin Dada. It was a time of tribal cruelty and many victims. A war waged by the Tanzanians freed Uganda of the dictator, but what followed was not peace and security: the country continued its troubled journey towards an uncertain future. Piero and Lucille withstood the pressure and many times overcame the temptation to leave everything and run away. It was in 1986 that Lucille realized that she was HIV positive. That was the beginning of her ten years long struggle with Aids up to her premature death on August 1 1966 at the age of 63.

Especially this vicissitude of Lucille, with its drama and moving human aspects, has touched the imagination of the many people who knew the couple. A surgeon by profession, Lucille contracted the terrible virus of Aids at the operating theater, where she used to spend many hours for years on end. Her medical profession gave her complete lucidity about her clinical condition, but notwithstanding all this, she dedicated herself until the last breath to the faithfulness to her vocation, sustained by the support of Piero and Dominique. In about 40 years, they made of Saint Mary's Hospital, Lacor, one of the most modern health institutes in Africa and a sure point of



Jacques and Raissa Maritain

## **THE GREAT FRIENDSHIP**

*Such was the essence of the marital companionship of the French philosopher and the Russian woman mystic and it became their way to holiness. Jacques (1882-1973) met Raissa(1883-1961) when both were students at the Sorbonne university in Paris, France. They soon became inseparable. Together they overcame despair, found Christ in the bosom of the Catholic Church and mapped out their individual destiny: Jacques as a scholar and university professor; Raissa as a pilgrim of the Absolute through her Journal and poetry. Their house became the hub of a network of knowledge and grace that brought many back to God and to the Church. When her companion preceded him in death, Jacques joined the community of The Little Brothers of Jesus and died there at 90.*

When the Russian young woman Raissa Oumansov began her studies at the University of Paris she was seventeen years old and the year was 1900. It was a time of great scientific achievements and the Sorbonne was one of its centers. Marie and Pierre Curie, for example, had discovered radium there only two years before. It was natural, therefore, for Raissa to turn to the sciences for the answers she sought. To her dismay, however, she soon discovered that her professors were either strict materialists or simply did not pose for themselves questions concerning truth and meaning. Hope began to wane in her heart. Yet, she also continued to await “some great event, some perfect fulfillment.” The first step toward that fulfillment came when she met the man who would become her greatest companion during her earthly pilgrimage: Jacques Maritain.

Almost from the moment that Jacques Maritain introduced himself to Raissa, they became inseparable. They were both students at the Sorbonne, he a year older than she, and they both were searching for the meaning of their lives. Jacques Maritain came from a family that embodied the values of the French

Revolution. He discovered, however, what many others of his generation would one day recognize: the agnosticism that was their heritage was too thin a soil for the sense of justice that burned in their hearts. To withstand the winds of tyranny, justice needs deep roots and a rich soil in which to sink them. It was during his search for that rich ideal soil that Jacques encountered Raïssa. In the friendship that grew between them, they undertook the search together.

In the midst of their distress, Jacques and Raïssa reached a fateful decision that would shape the rest of their lives. While strolling through Paris, they both agreed that if it were impossible to know the truth, to distinguish good from evil, just from unjust, then life was not worth living. In such a case, it would be better to die young through suicide than to live an absurdity. They were spared from following through on this because, at the urging of their friend Charles Péguy, they attended the lectures of Henri Bergson at the Collège de France. Bergson's critique of scientism dissolved their intellectual despair and instilled in them "the sense of the absolute." Then, through the influence of Léon Bloy, they converted to the Roman Catholic faith in 1906.

God in his great mercy led them to Christ, to baptism in the Catholic Church and to the consolation of the Eucharist. In reading Bloy's great novel, *The Woman Who Was Poor*, the Maritains encountered the greatness of the Christian saints. "What struck us so forcibly on first reading Bloy's novel was the stature of this believer's soul, his burning zeal for justice, the beauty of a doctrine which for the first time rose up before our eyes" they later confessed.

Upon meeting Bloy and his family, they were even more impressed. His poverty, his faith, his heroic independence, all spoke to the young Maritains of the life-giving mystery of Christ. Entering Bloy's home seemed to them a homecoming. In particular, by leading Raïssa to Christ, Bloy gave back to her the Jewish faith of her childhood, now brought to completion in the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

### ***A domestic community of prayer***

Jacques Maritain was born in Paris on November 18, 1882, the son of Paul Maritain, who was a lawyer, and his wife Geneviève Favre and was reared in a liberal Protestant milieu. He was sent to the Lycée Henri-IV. Later, he

attended the Sorbonne, studying the natural sciences: chemistry, biology and physics. By that time he had become an unbeliever.

Raissa Oumansov was born into a pious Jewish family of modest means in Russia in 1883. During the ten years that Raissa lived in the Russian Empire, she was deeply shaped by the piety and traditions of her observant family, especially by the example of her maternal grandfather. Impressed, even at an early age, by his joy and gentle goodness, she learned as the years passed the deep source from which they sprang: “They came from his great piety, the piety of the *Hasidim*, the Jewish mystics. My grandfather’s religion was one altogether of love and confidence, of joy and charity” she wrote. Raissa’s understanding of her Hasidic heritage is best seen in her later description of the work and personality of another Russian Jew, her friend Marc Chagall, the painter loved by pope Francis.

When Raissa was barely ten, her parents decided that they should emigrate as a family to France. They settled in Paris. Paris would become for Raissa her second homeland, more beloved to her than any other place on earth. Exile from their homeland not only uprooted them from their friends and family, it also occasioned a loss of faith. But then Jacques appeared on the horizon of Raissa’s life and their destiny took a turn for the better.

Jacques and Raissa were receptive to Bloy’s message. In 1906, together with Vera, Raissa’s sister, they were baptized into the Catholic Church, with Léon and Jeanne Bloy as their godparents. On that occasion, Jacques and Raissa had their marriage blessed which they had contracted civilly in 1904. From that point on, Raissa began to discern the features of her vocation. She was being called to live in union with Christ. She was also being invited, through a life of prayer and study, to put into words — in prose and poetry — the truths she was now discovering in Christ.

The years between their baptism and the outbreak of the First World War were a time of spiritual gestation for the Maritains, and for many others in Europe. Those years saw the conversion of Jacques’ sister and Raissa’s father. A number of their friends also converted at this time, including two who had become dear to many in France through their writings and exploits: Jacques’ boyhood friend, Ernest Psichari, and his early mentor, Charles Péguy. During those years, Jacques and Raissa with her sister Vera became

Benedictine oblates, establishing together a domestic community of prayer and study.

Jacques and Raissa had decided to live as brother and sister, forsaking marital intimacy and the joys of raising a family in order to dedicate themselves more deeply to their vocation to serve the truth. It was also during those years that the Maritains discovered Thomas Aquinas and began, under the guidance of their Dominican mentors, to study his works in depth.

Although Jacques was already beginning to become known in France through his articles, it was only after the First World War that his life as a philosopher began in earnest. Having received a bequest in support of his work from a soldier killed at the front, the Maritains were able to buy a home in Meudon, a village not far from Paris, and bring their plans to fruition. They could live a life of prayer and study, and make their home a center for Catholic thought and culture, under the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Their home became a place where artists and intellectuals could find friendship and lively discussion. The guest lists to their home during those years reads like a *Who's Who* of the Catholic intellectual revival in France. It was during the Meudon years that Raissa's public life as a writer and a poet began.

### ***America and World War II***

By the early 1930s Jacques Maritain was an established figure in Catholic thought. He was already a frequent visitor to North America and, since 1932, had come annually to the Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, Canada, to give courses of lectures. Following his lectures in Toronto at the beginning of 1940, he moved to the United States, teaching at Princeton University (1941-42) and Columbia (1941-44). When the Second World War overtook France in 1940, the Maritains were in America.

Unable to return to their homeland and their friends, they dedicated their energies to helping the young generation that was undergoing the crucible of the war find the deeper meaning of the events they were suffering. Moving to New York, Jacques became deeply involved in rescue activities, seeking to bring persecuted and threatened academics, many of them Jews, to America. He was instrumental in founding the Free School of High Studies,



a kind of university in exile that was, at the same time, the center of Gaullist resistance in the United States.

To give courage to the young generations, Raissa told the story of the Catholic revival in France as she and Jacques had experienced it. The first volume, *Les Grandes Amitiés (We Have Been Friends Together)* appeared in 1941 and was followed by its sequel, *Les Aventures de la Grâce (Adventures in Grace)* in 1944. As a chronicle of the Catholic revival in France, these books are without equal. More than this, however, they offer us a theology of conversion and Christian vocation expressed in a narrative that traces the effects of God's mercy upon the lives of a generation searching for meaning.

Following the liberation of France in the summer of 1944, Jacques was named French ambassador to the Vatican, serving until 1948, but was also actively involved in drafting the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

### ***Integral Humanism***

Maritain was a strong defender of a natural law ethics. He viewed ethical norms as being rooted in human nature. We know the natural law through our direct acquaintance with it in our human experience. Of central importance is Maritain's argument that natural rights are rooted in the natural law. This was key to his involvement in the drafting of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Maritain advocated what he called "Integral Humanism."

He argued that secular forms of humanism were inevitably anti-human in that they refused to recognize the whole person. Once the spiritual dimension of human nature is rejected, we no longer have an integral, but a merely partial, humanism, one which rejects a fundamental aspect of the human person. Possibly his most famous book is *Integral Humanism* (1936) where he also develops a theory of cooperation, to show how people of different intellectual positions can nevertheless cooperate to achieve common practical aims. Maritain's political theory was extremely influential, and was a primary source behind the Christian Democratic movement.

Maritain's emphasis on the value of the human person has been described as a form of *personalism*, which he saw as a *via media* between individualism and socialism. Maritain's Christian humanism and personalism have also had

a significant influence in the social encyclicals of Pope Paul VI and in the thought of Pope John Paul II. One consequence of his natural law and natural rights theory is that Maritain favored a democratic and liberal view of the state, and argued for a political society that is both personalist, pluralist, and inspired by Christian values.

### *Raissa's legacy*

In 1960, Maritain and his wife returned to France. Following Raissa's death later that year, Maritain moved to Toulouse, where he decided to live with a religious order, the Little Brothers of Jesus. He also published Raissa's writings under the title *Raissa's Journal*. It was a real revelation. From the earliest days of her conversion, Raissa felt an intense call to contemplative prayer. It was during this period that Raissa began to write her *Journal*, which was published only after her death.

With arresting clarity she describes the Lord's action in her life and her struggles to understand and respond. Brief insights — “To love and understand one's neighbor one must forget oneself” — are interspersed with descriptions of her struggles and pearls of calm wisdom, such as the following: “Error is like the foam on the waves, it eludes our grasp and keeps reappearing. The soul must not exhaust itself fighting against the foam. Its zeal must be purified and calmed and, by union with the divine Will, it must gather strength from the depths. And Christ, with all his merits and the merits of all the saints, will do his work deep down below the surface of the waters. And everything that can be saved will be saved”.

The journal also provides the record of her awareness that the Lord was inviting her to accept a share in his suffering. She wrote: “During silent prayer, I feel inwardly solicited to abandon myself to God, and not only solicited but effectively *inclined* to do it, and do it, feeling that it is for a trial, for a suffering, for which my consent is thus demanded. I make this act of abandonment in spite of my natural cowardice”.

In his solitude, Jacques had a moment of glory when he was invited to the Second Vatican Council as observer and it is to him that pope Paul VI, his pupil and admirer, presented his "*Message to Men of Thought and of Science*" at the close of Vatican II. During this time he wrote a number of books, the best-known of which was *The Farmer of the Garonne* (a work sharply critical of post-Vatican Council excesses), published in 1967. In

1970, he petitioned to join the order, and died in Toulouse on April 28, 1973.

At the time of his death, Maritain was undoubtedly the best known Catholic philosopher in the world. The breadth of his philosophical work, his influence in the social philosophy of the Catholic Church, and his ardent defense of human rights made him one of the central figures of his times. Maritain is the author of some sixty books and hundreds of scholarly articles. His philosophical work has been translated into some twenty languages. He is buried alongside Raissa in Kolbsheim (Alsace) France. The cause for beatification of him and his wife Raissa is already on the way.

&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&

Frank and Elizabeth Longford

## **UNENDING LOVE STORY**

---

*Both members of the British aristocracy, their love story, from its romantic beginning to its end, is fascinating and exemplar: over 69 years of marriage and eight children, their lives remained distinct and yet emotionally complementary. Frank Pakenham (1905-2001) was a politician and social reformer. As Lord Longford, he was notable for his lifelong advocacy of penal reform, but especially because he visited prisoners on a regular basis for nearly seventy years, until his death. He saw politics less as a career and more as part of a moral crusade. Conscience for him came before party loyalty. At his death, Prime Minister Tony Blair said: "He was a great man of passionate integrity and humanity and a great reformer, committed to modernizing the law while also caring deeply for individuals". Lady Elizabeth (1906-2002) was "addicted to motherhood", but also an accomplished historian.*

It happened one night, at the end of a New College ball, at Oxford University, in 1928. Frank Pakenham, a young member of the British nobility, exhausted by the reveling, was dozing on a divan, oblivious of everything. In that moment a girl was passing by and she was attracted by the handsomeness of the young man. "His face was of a monumental beauty," she later wrote, "as if of some Greek god, with brown curls, dressed in modern clothes". She bestowed a kiss on the brow that was later to be instantly recognized by its conspicuous high dome.

The girl was Elizabeth Harman, herself a member of the nobility, an undergraduate at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Able, articulate and beautiful, with undergraduates and even dons tumbling over one another to fall in love with her, she was endowed with gifts of beauty and charm to which she added the virtues of industriousness and a sympathetic curiosity about other people. She was a friend of Evelyn Waugh and Lord David Hogg said that

"there was not an undergraduate who would not consider it a privilege to hold an umbrella over her."

Two years later, when they were both lecturing for the Workers Educational Association in Stoke, at the height of the 1930s depression, love blossomed. They were married at St Margaret's Westminster in 1931, family legend being that Frank turned up at Westminster Abbey by mistake, to find it empty, and was consoled by his best man Freddie Birkenhead saying: "Nobody goes to weddings these days."

In Elizabeth Harman, the future Lord Longford found the emotional warmth and love denied him as a child by a difficult, and often cruel, mother. Made painfully aware of his insignificance in her eyes next to his elder brother, he only recovered a sense of self-esteem while at Oxford. It was Elizabeth who convinced him to join the Labor party. In return, having been converted to Catholicism while at Oxford by the Jesuit Father Martin D'Arcy, Frank persuaded her to join him in the church of Rome. They found great strength in the moral certainties of Catholicism.

### *Champion of prison reform*

Francis Aungier Pakenham was born on December 5, 1905. A member of an old, landed Anglo-Irish family, he was one of the few aristocratic hereditary peers to have ever served in senior capacity within Labor governments, at the time associated with socialism and left-wing politics, when peers usually held conservative political views.

He was educated at Eton College and New College, Oxford. Despite having failed to be awarded a scholarship, he graduated with a first-class honors degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics and became a don at Christ Church. As mentioned above, at Oxford he met his wife, Elizabeth.

In 1961, Pakenham inherited from his brother the earldom of Longford in the Peerage of Ireland and from then onwards was generally known to the public as *Lord Longford*. He was famed for championing social outcasts and unpopular causes. He is especially notable for his lifelong advocacy of penal reform. Longford was way ahead of his time in questioning the direction of

prison policy, this is why much of his dream of reforms was never implemented.

That is not to say he was without substantial achievements; it was just that the goals he set himself remained outside his grasp. He dreamed of being a reforming home secretary, an ambition that prompted his old friend Evelyn Waugh to jokingly remark "and then we would all be murdered in our beds". A prison visitor since the 1930s, Longford was still going, two and three times a week, to visit the abandoned and despised in jail, until close to the end of his life.

An example: in the late 1980s, he was contacted by the solicitor for a young Dutchman, convicted of a drugs offence, sent to Albany prison on the Isle of Wight, suffering from Aids and cut off by his family. Longford was the only person who visited this dying man, a gesture repeated in countless episodes that never made headlines but which brought help and relief.

He also initiated practical measures to ease offenders' reintegration into society. He founded *the New Bridge* in 1955, the first organization dedicated to ex-prisoners' welfare. In 1970, he established, in *New Horizon*, the first drop-in centre for homeless teenagers. Until the end, he spent time at New Horizon's offices, oblivious to its users' sometimes rough teasing, anxious to understand what had alienated them from the mainstream. He also contributed a series of learned reports on penal reform and chaired the committee which, in 1963, recommended the setting-up of the parole system, still the bedrock of the current order.

---

### ***Occupational Hazard***

Lord Longford gained a reputation for eccentricity, when, in his continuous efforts to rehabilitate offenders, he campaigned for the parole and release from prison of the Moors murderer Myra Hindley. The Moors murders were carried out by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley between July 1963 and October 1965, in and around what is now Greater Manchester, England. The victims were five children aged between 10 and 17, at least four of whom were sexually assaulted.

The murders are so named because two of the victims were discovered in graves dug on Saddleworth Moor; a third grave was discovered on the moor in 1987, more than 20 years after Brady and Hindley's trial in 1966. The bodies of the last two victims were never discovered. The murders were reported in almost every English language newspaper of the world. Myra Hindley was characterized by the press as "the most evil woman in Britain".

In 1977, eleven years after Hindley was convicted for two murders and being an accessory in a third murder, Longford appeared on television and spoke openly of his belief that Hindley should now be released from prison as she had repented for her sins and was no longer a danger to the public.

In 1985, he condemned the Parole Board's decision not to consider Hindley's release for another five years as "barbaric", and his campaign for Hindley continued even after she admitted to two more murders in 1986. This development strengthened media and public allegation that Hindley's remorse was nothing more than a ploy to improve her chances of parole. In 1990, Home Secretary David Waddington ruled that "life should mean life" for Hindley. This position was never changed, notwithstanding the ongoing battle in Hindley's behalf by Lord Longford.

This stubborn defense of a very unpopular criminal can only be understood considering Lord Longford's heroic idealism which made nothing of the public opinion once he was convinced of the truth of his stance. Exasperated, Anne West, mother of one of the victims, threatened to kill Hindley if she was ever released. Hindley died in November 2002, having never been paroled.

### *A Christian at home and abroad*

In 1947, Longford had his finest hour as a minister when the prime minister Attlee made him responsible for the British zone of occupied Germany. For a year, he worked tirelessly to stop the Germans starving to death. He reopened schools and hospitals, and worked with American and French counterparts on the currency reform that would bring stability to West Germany. On the ground, Longford saw sooner than his superiors that cooperation with the Soviets was impossible, and that partition was inevitable.

---

He made headlines by telling German audiences that the British people forgave them for what had happened in the war. His remarks caused a storm of outrage in a country still suffering rationing, since not all British people shared his generosity in forgiving, but Konrad Adenauer, the father of West Germany, came to regard him as his people's one true friend in London and later credited him with being among his country's founding fathers.

As a devout Christian, determined to translate faith into action, Longford was a leading figure in the Nationwide Festival of Light of 1971, protesting against the commercial exploitation of sex and violence, and advocating the teaching of Christ as the key to recovering moral stability in the nation.

In 1972 he was appointed to head the group charged with investigating the effects of pornography on society, which published the controversial Pornography Report. He became known as a campaigner against pornography and held the view that it was degrading - to its users and to those who worked in the trade, especially women.

Lord Longford was politically instrumental in decriminalizing homosexuality in the United Kingdom, but later became a staunch opponent of homosexuality, referring to it as "nauseating", "utterly wrongful" and that gay people were "handicapped". He continued to oppose any gay rights legislation, including the equalization of the age of consent.

After 1968, Longford devoted himself to his campaigns and to publishing. He had already produced several volumes of autobiography and one book: *Peace By Ordeal*, on the background to the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty, that was regarded as a classic. His account uses primary sources from the time and is widely recognized as the definitive account of this aspect of Irish history. Longford came to greatly admire Éamon de Valera, the famous Irish patriot, and was chosen as the co-author of his official biography: *Éamon de Valera*, which was published in 1970, co-written with Thomas P. O'Neill.

But his later efforts, while tackling ambitious subjects like humility and forgiveness, were politely, though unenthusiastically, received. Queen Elizabeth however continued to hold him in high esteem. In 1972, she made him a knight of the garter. From the floor of the House of Lords, as well as



continually pushing the government on prisons' policy, he spoke in favor of Ireland, a country he regarded as his home.

### *The other half*

Elizabeth Harman was born in 1906, the oldest of five. Both her parents were doctors and from the highest echelons of the British society. She was a feminist, but of an earlier kind. She never doubted the capability nor the right of women to hold the highest offices, but she did not admire sexual liberation. She regarded promiscuity as a disappointing fall from the ideal.

In 1946 she converted to Catholicism, influenced by her husband's conversion five years earlier. Her Catholicism drew on the inspiration that had made her a socialist, i.e. her emotional closeness to the working class, and built on it. She greatly admired the French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, because her conversion was intellectual as well as spiritual. But in her heart she believed in a good Providence, revealed in all God's creation. Her love for her garden at Bernhurst was an expression of this.

She was over 50 when she wrote: *Victoria RI*, the biography of Queen Victoria, her first bestseller followed by her acclaimed two-volume life of Wellington and many others. She was keen on research, relished travelling to visit battlefields and passed on her passion for historical biography to her eldest daughter Antonia Fraser, to her eldest son Thomas and to various grandchildren whom she always advised: "Not to study history would be like living in a house with no windows."

She had a naturally optimistic attitude towards life that inspired her as the mother of eight. Only the death of her daughter Catherine in 1969 seriously shook this optimism, a blow she struggled to recover from. She had a love and fascination with family, not only her own of eight and their offspring. It inspired her interest in history.

She was passionate and had a zest for life that made her believe strongly in finding opportunity for enjoyment. When she returned to her home at the end of her life, she insisted that it was an excellent opportunity for the grandchildren to give a party, even more than one.

These characteristics found a harmonious tension with her husband. His personal odyssey from conservative Anglican to Catholic socialist mirrored hers. She embodied the belief that at times he doubted. Over 69 years of marriage their thoughts became inextricably entwined, but remained distinct and complementary: she was the Yin to his Yang.

The Longfords enjoyed an extraordinarily happy marriage. They remained active in their various political, literary and campaigning activities well into their 90s, relaxing only to enjoy their countless grandchildren and great-grandchildren at their cherished Sussex home, Bernhurst. Frank died within a month from pneumonia in August 2001: he was 95.

Elizabeth's final wish was to be taken from her London nursing home to Bernhurst, where she retreated to her feather bed, with a great tulip tree at the window, and slipped away peacefully, surrounded by her family. She died with dignity after eighteen months of gradual decline in physical capability. Her optimism and her passion, at the thought of rejoining him, was undimmed to the end.

&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&

Blessed Louis and Mary Beltrame Quattrocchi

# THE POWER OF TWO

*He was a layer and a civil servant, she a housewife, a writer and a mystic. They had four children and their family was open to life, prayer, social apostolate, solidarity with the poor and friendship. They are the first couple to be declared blessed as couple, a shining example of the holiness “next door” of which pope Francis speaks.*

Louis Beltrame Quattrocchi (1880-1951) met Mary Corsini (1884-1965) in her home in Florence and they were married on November 1905 in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. The following year, Philip was born, followed by Caesar and Stephanie. In September 1913, Mary conceived another child. In the fourth month, violent hemorrhaging began. The diagnosis fell: *placenta praevia* (bad placement of the placenta which prevents a regular delivery). At the time, that amounted to a death sentence for the mother and child.

The gynecologist, a very famous professor, declared that a termination of the pregnancy was the only hope to save the mother. Mary and Louis were appalled. Directing their gaze to the Crucifix hanging on the wall, they drew from Him the strength to respond with a categorical “no” to abortion.

Contradicted and at a loss, the professor said to Louis: “You do not realize, Counselor—with this decision, you are preparing to be a widower with three children to care for!” The answer remained unchanged: the “no” remained “no”. Terrible anguish fell on the family. The only source of light came from a boundless trust in God and in the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. The communion of husband and wife, rooted in God, became stronger than ever.

Four months passed in this way, with Mary staying in bed. Finally, on April 6, 1914, at the end of the eighth month, confronted with the mother's weak condition, the gynecologist intervened to induce labor, and Maria gave birth by natural means. Little Henrietta was born. In spite of the pessimistic prognosis, both mother and child were saved. This trial manifested the quality of the faith of these Christian spouses.

### *A Layer and A Writer*

Louis Beltrame was born in 1880, at Catania, Sicily. He added to his father's name that of his uncle Quattrocchi who, unable to have children of his own, adopted him. In 1891, he moved to Rome with his aunt and uncle. After studying law, Luigi began a career as a lawyer. He loved the great literary classics, as well as music, theater, the beauty of nature, and travel. A friendship between the Corsini and Quattrocchi families provided the opportunity for Mary and Luigi to meet and eventually marry.

Possessed of a very open mind, Mary had a thirst for knowledge that would not diminish with time. She delegated many material tasks to the staff that served the family, as was customary at that time among middle-class families. Over the years, she wrote articles and books—it was her “apostolate of the pen.” Her writings, which her husband also worked on, were addressed to mothers and families.

In politics, the Beltrames initially supported fascism as a way of promoting the moral, religious, cultural, and social ideas the party espoused. However, over time they became more suspicious of the regime, and eventually came to disapprove of it entirely, when its racial laws were introduced. They then went to great lengths to save Jews.

In 1943, Louis was chosen by the President of the Council of Ministers to become the Counsel General of the Italian State. Later, he was invited to step forward as a candidate for a seat in the Senate. With Mary's agreement, he declined this offer, because he did not share certain orientations with those who extended this invitation.

Louis was a discreet man, naturally endowed with a certain air of distinction and friendliness in his relations with others. More interested in apostolic than professional activities, he was involved in them at the parish and national levels, particularly in programs for the formation of youth and especially scouts, for whom he sacrificed hours that could have been used for rest and relaxation.

### *Maternal Priesthood*

Their family life was never dull. There was always time for sports, holidays by the sea and in the mountains. Their house was open to their numerous

friends and those who knocked at their door asking for food. During World War II their apartment in Via Depretis, near St. Mary Major, in Rome, was a shelter for refugees. Every evening they prayed the Rosary together, the family was consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, solemnly placed on the mantelpiece of their dining room.

In the middle of their busy life, the flourishing of the first three children's vocation took place whose development was followed with love and firmness for a greater generosity and faithfulness to the call of God. This is what Maria wrote to her second son who manifested the decision to follow his elder brother in the priesthood:

“My dear Caesar, yesterday, seeing you also with the cassock, next to your brother Philip, in offering you also, and in the most complete way to the Lord, I felt myself, my dear son, to be your priest. I had already thought with Philip that I had done a bit like the Blessed Virgin when she presented to the temple her only begotten Son. Therefore, for this very reason, I have the right to call myself also your priest”.

***Holiness in ordinary life***

In November 1951, Louis died of heart attack in his home in via Depretis. After 14 years as a widow, Mary joined Louis. On August 26, 1965, she died in Henrietta's arms, in their house in the mountains, at Serravalle. They were a couple who knew how to love and respect each other in the ups and downs of married and family life. They found in the love of God the strength to begin again.

They never lost heart despite the negative part of family life, the tragedies of the war, two sons as chaplains in the army, the German occupation of Rome, and lived to see the reconstruction of Italy after the war, as they moved forwards with the grace of God on the way of heroic sanctity in ordinary life.

&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&

Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin

# PARADISE FAMILY

*Louis and Zelig Martin, St. Therese of the Child Jesus' parents, are the second couple to reach proclaimed holiness together. The Martin couple faced the normal challenges and vicissitudes of daily life: earning a living, educating the children, economic and political uncertainties. They faced the mystery of suffering as four of their nine children died at an early age. Zelig herself died of inoperable breast cancer at age 46 when Therese, the youngest child, was only four years old. As a supportive family, they bore these trials with fervent faith and intense love. Louis Martin was left alone to raise the five daughters. He took three of them to the Carmel and to a life of prayer. The other two joined after his death. St. Therese once wrote to her missionary friend Maurice Belliere: "God has given me a father and a mother more worthy of heaven than of earth".*

Louis and Zelig Martin were declared "venerable" on March 26, 1994 by Pope John Paul II. They were beatified on October 19, 2008, after the miraculous healing of the Italian infant Pietro Schiliro from a fatal lung malformation was recognized. It was only the second time in history that a married couple was beatified, the first being Luigi and Maria Beltrame-Quattrocchi of Italy, in 2001.

The cause of Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin has progressed significantly since 2008. Another miracle on behalf of Carmen, a Spanish little girl, is under consideration and in 2011 the collection of their letters was published in English with the title: "A Call to a Deeper Love" (The Family Correspondence of the Parents of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, 1863-1885). Only 16 letters from Louis survive, but many of Zelig's 216 letters give vivid details about their family life, their children and Louis as husband and father.

### *Sainthood: a family project*

These letters provide us with a treasure of rich insights into the lives and spirituality of these two extraordinary individuals. We are given a series of snapshots revealing the tone and texture of the lives of these two saintly, and yet, in many ways, very ordinary people. The incidents described which give us access to the honesty and intimacy of their lives, were never meant for the general public. They greatly enrich our understanding of this charismatic couple who radiated holiness and brought to life the greatest Saint of the modern age.

They underscore the fact that sainthood is a family project of parents and children immersed in the God of love. They call us to a deeper love for God, for each other and for the poor in our midst and invite us to accept whatever the will of God may be for us in our lives, however confusing and painful that may be, and to have total trust and confidence in Him.

The anguish of losing four of their nine children, the economic reverses that threatened their businesses, Zélie's losing battle with breast cancer and the Alzheimer's disease suffered by Louis are all brought vividly to light in these letters as is the undying love of this model couple for one another. Louis and Zélie were immersed in the 19th century Catholic piety. No matter the troubles, the Martins believed in God as a provident, loving Father.

### *A stitching artist*

The second child of Isidore and Louise-Jeanne Guerin, Zélie was born on December 23, 1831 in Gandelain, in the Orne region of France, where her father was engaged as a gendarme. In a letter addressed to her brother, she herself defined her childhood and her youth as « sad as a shroud, because, if mother spoiled you, with me, you know, she was too severe ; she who was so good did not find a way with me, and so I suffered a terrible heart ache. »

This education was to mark her character, the exacting way she had of living her spirituality. After her studies in the convent of the Perpetual Adoration in Alençon, she felt a religious calling but, faced with the refusal of the Mother Superior, she took on a professional course and initiated with success the manufacture of the famous Alençon stitch. Toward the end of 1853, she created work from home for many hand-workers. Her workshop was renowned for the quality of her work. The relationship that she had with her

personnel whom she said she must love as members of her own family, shows us that she was always ready to fight injustice and to support those who were in need. The Bible guided her every move.

One day, as Zélie crossed the Saint Leonard Bridge, she passed a young man with a noble face, a reserved air, and a demeanor filled with an impressive dignity. At that very moment, an interior voice whispered to her: "This is he whom I have prepared for you." The identity of the passer-by was soon revealed as Louis Martin. The two young people quickly came to appreciate and love each other. Their spiritual harmony established itself so quickly that a religious engagement sealed their mutual commitment without delay. They did not see their marriage as a normal arrangement between two middle-class families of Alençon, but as a total opening to the will of God.

From the beginning, the betrothed couple placed their love under the protection of God, who, in their union, would always be "the first served." Their marriage was celebrated on July 13, 1858 in the parish of Notre-Dame d'Alençon. Louis and his spouse decided at the beginning of their marriage to maintain perfect chastity. However, Divine Providence who leads all with "strength and gentleness," had other views for this couple, and at the end of ten months, on the advice of a priest friend, they changed their minds. They now desired to have many children in order to raise them and offer them to the Lord.

### *A watchmaker and jeweler*

Louis Martin was born in Bordeaux, France, on August 22, 1823 also into a military family and spent his early years at various French military posts. At the end of his studies in Alençon, he didn't turn toward a military career like his father, but chose the profession of watchmaker. A man of faith and of prayer, for a time Louis wished to enter the priesthood. In 1845, he went to the Swiss Alps to enter a Carthusian monastery, where his first task was to learn Latin. He tried to learn it but in the end gave up. Having finished his watch-making studies in Rennes and Strasbourg, he returned to Alençon, where he dedicated himself to his work as a watchmaker-jeweler with diligence and honesty. Then he met and married Zélie.

Alongside this strong, tender, but undeniably domineering woman, Louis seems to have been made of much softer stuff. He was a dreamer and a romantic. He loved nature with a deep sentimental enthusiasm. From him St. Therese inherited her passion for flowers and meadows, for her native



landscape, for clouds, thunderstorms, the sea and the stars. Louis made pilgrimages to Chartres and Lourdes, went to Germany and Austria, travelled twice to Rome and even to Constantinople, and planned but did not live to carry out a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Together with this desire for adventure was an impulse towards withdrawal; at Lisieux, where he moved after his wife's death, he arranged a little den for himself high up in the attic, a true monastic cell for praying, reading and meditation. Even his daughters were allowed to enter it only if they wished spiritual converse and self-examination. As in a monastery, he divided the day into worship, garden work and relaxation.

As a jeweler and watchmaker he loved the precious things he dealt with. To his daughters he gave touching and naive pet names: Marie was his *diamond*, Pauline his *noble pearl*, Celine *the bold one*, and *the guardian angel* - Therese was his *little queen* to whom all treasures belonged.

### ***Holy Family***

What a struggle it was to stay alive in the nineteenth century! Of the nine children of the Martin family, four died in infancy or childhood. The other five were survivors of days and nights of worry for their parents. Zelig and Louis feared that every cold, every fever was going to take yet another. The childhood diseases took so many for which there was no effective remedy in those days.

To lose four children at an early age, at a time when they wanted to have a son to become a priest, was very hard. But neither the bereavement nor the trials weakened their confidence in the goodness of God's plans, and they abandoned themselves with love to His Will. The surviving children, five girls, will all become nuns, four of them in the Carmelite monastery.

The education of the children was at the same time joyful, tender, and demanding. Very early, Zelig taught them the morning offering of their hearts to the good God, the simple acceptance of daily difficulties "to please Jesus." The saintly parents left an indelible mark that is the basis of the little way taught by the most celebrated of their children: Therese. One cannot conceive of the growth in holiness of Therese and the religious vocations of her sisters independent of the spiritual life of Mr. and Mrs. Martin, at the heart of their vocation to family life.

One of the daughters, Celine, wrote: “In our home, character formation had in religious piety the main purchase point. There was a whole hearth liturgy: evening prayers in the family, month of Mary, the Sunday worship, pious reading the eve of Sunday. My mother used to take me on her knees to help me to prepare my confessions, and it was to the very confidence of her daughters that she was always directing herself”.

### *A widower's challenge*

At the wife's death, Louis Martin was left alone to raise the five daughters: He took them to school, played games with them, made them toys, mimicked the birds, sang them old French ballads, took them to church, prayed with them and, together, they generously served the poor. St. Therese, known for her spirituality of the “little way” (showing great love in all the small matters of daily life), was schooled in that spirituality right in her own home and family life.

She wrote: “When the preacher was speaking about Saint Teresa of Avila, my dad used to bend towards me and whisper: ‘Listen carefully, my little queen, he is speaking of your patron saint’”. I really listened but often I used to look at my dad more than at the preacher; his beautiful countenance was telling me so much! How many times I saw his eyes fill up with tears which he in vain tried to contain...” In one of her letters to her father, Saint Therese also wrote: “When I think of you I naturally remember our good God”.

But the most admirable work of this father was the offering to God of all his daughters and then of himself. In his unshakable submission to the will of God, like Abraham, he placed no obstacle to these vocations and considered the offering of his children to the Lord as a very special grace granted to his family.

Shortly after the entry of Therese into the Carmel, Louis told his daughters that at the Church of Notre-Dame of Alençon, as he was reconsidering his life, he had said: "My God, I am too happy. It's not possible to go to Heaven like that. I want to suffer something for you." "And," he added "I offered myself." Louis didn't dare pronounce the word "victim," but his daughters understood. This confidence really touched Therese, who, several years later, offered herself as a victim to the Merciful Love of God.

The last years of the life of Mr. Martin, "the patriarch", as he was affectionately called by those close to him, are marked by several health problems. He knew the humiliation of illness: a cerebral arteriosclerosis with a long hospitalization at the Bon Sauveur in Caen, where he filled those around him with admiration and respect. Returning to Lisieux in May 1892, he was paralyzed and almost unable to speak. He died peacefully on Sunday, July 29, 1894.

***Spiritual ascent together***

Cardinal Saraiva Martins, the legate of Pope Benedict XVI, presided at the Mass of Beatification in the basilica of St. Therese at Lisieux. In his homily, he declared: "My heart is full of gratitude to God for this exemplary witness of conjugal love, which is bound to stimulate Christian couples in practicing virtue just as it stimulated the desire for holiness in Therese.

While reading the Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father, I thought of my father and mother, and now I invite you to think of your parents that together we may thank God for having created and made us Christians through the conjugal love of our parents.

Among the vocations to which individuals are called by Providence, marriage is one of the highest and most noble. Louis and Zelig understood that they could become holy not in spite of marriage, but through, in, and by marriage, and that their becoming a couple was the beginning of a spiritual ascent together towards God".

&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&