

Our Lady returns

On Saturday, November 27th, 1830, the vigil of the First Sunday of Advent, at 5.30 pm, Sr. Catherine retired to the Chapel with the other sisters for evening meditation. She heard the faint rustle of a silk dress. Catherine did not have to move.



Raising her eyes to the right of the main altar, she saw the beautiful Lady once more, surrounded by light, standing on a half globe of the world. Her feet were crushing a serpent, and rays of light were streaming from her fingers - all in an oval frame inscribed with the words, "*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee*"

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The whole vision "turned" showing the back of the oval inscribed with the letter "M" entwined with a Cross, and the hearts of Jesus and Mary, the former surrounded with thorns, the latter pierced with a sword. 12 stars circled this oval frame.

The Virgin spoke, this time giving a direct order: "*Have a medal struck as I have shown you. All who wear it will receive great graces*" In short, those who wear the medal, properly blessed, and repeat the prayer, *O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee*, will be greatly blessed.

Catherine asked how she was to have the medal struck. Our Lady replied that she was to go to her confessor, Father Jean Marie Aladel. "*He is my servant.*" Father Aladel at first did not believe Catherine. However, after two years, he finally went to the archbishop of Paris, who ordered two thousand medals to be struck on June 20, 1832. A terrible epidemic of cholera had broken out in Paris, claiming many lives. Medals were distributed to the sick in hospitals and they recovered. "This medal is miraculous" the people exclaimed. It was God, of course. Originally it was known as the medal of the Immaculate Conception, but so many cures and miracles were attributed to it that it soon became known as the Miraculous Medal.

Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

At the time Our Lady appeared to Catherine in 1830, the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, although widely believed, was not a dogma of the Church requiring belief. Pope Pius IX is thought to have been influenced by the apparitions to Catherine in the Rue du Bac when he decided to consult with the Church on the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. He received overwhelming support and on 8th December 1854 declared Our Lady to have been free of sin (immaculate) from the moment of her conception.

Four years later, in 1858, Our Lady appeared to Bernadette at Lourdes and, when asked who she was, she replied, "*I am the Immaculate Conception.*" So the apparitions in the rue du Bac in 1830 and the Miraculous Medal prepared for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception to be proclaimed in 1854, and the apparition at Lourdes in 1858 confirmed it.

A Life of Service



In 1831, the year after her apparitions, Catherine was appointed to another convent. No one knew which Daughter of Charity had received these apparitions of Our Lady. For the rest of her life, in Reuilly, a deprived suburb south east of Paris, Catherine contemplated Christ in a life of humble service of her brothers and sisters, as she encountered them in the loneliness of the old, the exhausting toil of the working classes, their unhealthy living conditions, their psychological distress and their alcoholism.

In 1876 she felt her life was drawing to a close and she told the mother superior of the Daughters of Charity that she was the sister. When she died the sisters released the news that the sister who had seen Our Lady had died.



When her body was exhumed in 1933, as part of the canonisation process, it was found to be as fresh as the day it was buried. Though she had lived seventy years and was in the grave for fifty-seven years, her eyes remained very blue and beautiful; and in death her arms and legs were as supple as if she were asleep. The body of Catherine was removed to a side altar at the

convent at 140 Rue du Bac, where it may now be seen behind glass at the spot where she received the request from Our Lady for the medal.

In 1947 Pope Pius XII declared her to be ***Saint Catherine Labouré*** and called her ***the saint of silence*** .

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