

A Saint with a Fortune: ST. EMILIE DE VIALAR

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A Saint with a Fortune

OUR story is set in a war-torn country. France, at one time the fairest daughter of Mother Church, experienced her Gethsemane during the fearful days of the Revolution. The blood of bishops, priests and nuns mingled with that of the nobility and gentry enriching the soil and making it fruitful in a wonderful way. In post-Revolution days there arose new religious orders and congregations, whose founders and foundresses have left indelible marks on the history of the universal Church. Many of these have also attained the sublime honour of having been raised to the altars and are now daily invoked throughout Christendom.

While Paris and the large cities were still writhing under the ravages of the Revolution, Gaillac, a little town in the South, was pursuing its peaceful mode of living. The River Tarn flowed undisturbed on its wonted course, while vineyards and orchards flourished on plain and hillside. However, this tranquillity was only external. The minds and hearts of the people were not at rest. In the minds of many still throbbed the cry of the Revolutionaries, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." In men's hearts a great usurpation had taken place - the "Goddess of Reason" had dethroned the God of Wisdom. (In Paris, a prostitute had been enthroned on the altar of Notre Dame cathedral, as a 'goddess of reason'. Others had taken 'Liberty' to mean the liberty to despoil the Church of all her possessions, especially the votive offerings made by former generations of French Catholics. Radical revolutionaries had taken 'Equality' to mean that everyone was a 'son of God', not just Jesus of Nazareth; whilst 'Fraternity' was interpreted as an excuse to abolish all marriage and family ties. Thus, women would be common property of 'fraternal citizens'.)

On this stage there appeared on the 12th September, 1797, a new figure to whom, later, France and the world would owe an ever increasing debt. This was the baby daughter who that day was born to James Augustine de Vialar and his charming wife Emilie de Portal. Both these families were well known and had left their mark on the history of the province. The de Vialars were opulent with baronial rights, while the de Portals were equally wealthy and renowned for their learning and the long succession of skilled physicians they had given to France. Consequently they were well known throughout the land. Dr. de Portal, the baby's grandfather, had been physician-in-chief to the King, and had also attended His Holiness, Pope Pius VI, during his sojourn in the French capital (as a virtual prisoner).

Without delay, although the registers recording date and place are not available, the little one was admitted to the life of Sanctifying Grace by the regenerating waters of Baptism and named Anne Marguerite Adelaide Emilie. Madame de Vialar cared for her growing child with the greatest diligence and vigilance so that her thoughts should, as early as possible, be directed to her God. The baby hand was soon accustomed to the actions of the Sign of the Cross, and, from the time that the tiny lips could lisp, the holy names of Jesus and Mary were the first that the child learned. This good mother was renowned for her piety and love of our Holy Mother, the Church, This ardent zeal for Christ's Mystical Body she passed on as a special legacy to her

daughter. The father, however, was less fervent and was tainted with the ideas and ideals of the so-called 'Enlightenment' and its Deist religious ideas.

When Emilie was two years old there was great rejoicing as a son had been born to the de Vialars. This child was named Augustine after his father. Two more sons, Alfred and Maximin, later blessed this union. Alfred, however, lived only twenty days.

Emilie's early education was the work of her devoted mother, but her seventh birthday brought the decision that she should go to school. At this period Christian parents had no choice as to what educational establishment they would confide their children. A school had quite recently been opened at Gaillac and it was to this that parents were compelled to send their little ones if they desired them to attend classes at all. The directress, Miss Duberville, was an ex-goddess of Reason, and, although refined and well educated, lacked all sense of religion. Hence we can well imagine with what reluctance Emilie's mother had her child enrolled at this school. However, she still remained her real teacher, instructing her in the truths of our Holy Faith and inculcating the practice of every Christian virtue. Thus Emilie grew up in an atmosphere of piety.

Before many weeks had elapsed, Miss Duberville realized that in Emilie she had an excellent pupil who would bring fame to her as a teacher. Also attending this school was a girl, about the same age as Emilie, named Hortense de Cossigny. She, too, was brilliant and had, in addition, exceptional musical ability. Emilie also learned the piano, but she did not have talent equal to Hortense who was taught by her father. The fact that Emilie was Miss Duberville's pupil made the latter concentrate on Emilie in a vain attempt to have her surpass Hortense in musical achievement. This pressure was a severe trial to Emilie, who often remarked to her friend, "I shall never be able to play like you."

Referring to this experience in her *Autobiography*, written at the request of her confessor, we find this entry, "At the age of eight or nine, God inspired me with the thought of suffering for Him the pains caused by those who governed me." Emilie attended this school for six years and endeared herself to her companions by her patience, her piety and her beautiful disposition.

The next event of importance was her Confirmation. This was an auspicious occasion as it was the first time since the Revolution that a bishop had visited Gaillac. As may well be imagined, Bishop Fournier was welcomed most enthusiastically. This date, 3rd June, 1807, was always regarded by Emilie as a great day in her life. The Holy Ghost poured into her soul His seven gifts, with those of Wisdom and Fortitude in an unusual degree. These were precisely the ones she would need most during the years that lay ahead.

The time had now come when it was decided to send Emilie to Paris to finish her education. The thought of separation grieved her mother greatly but she sacrificed her own feelings in what she considered the best interests of her cherished daughter. Paris offered the choice of several excellent schools, and had the added attraction of being the home of Baron de Portal and his daughter Madame de Lamourie (neighbours of the wealthy de Lambourie household). Thus Emilie would not be entirely among strangers.

When the necessary preparations were completed, the family set out for Paris in September, 1810. Mme. de Vialar, whose health had gradually been failing since the birth of Maximin seventeen months before, was completely exhausted by the journey and compelled to go to bed as soon as she arrived at her father's home. The famous physician immediately recognized the seriousness of his daughter's condition and employed all his skill and energy in a vain attempt to restore her to health. A time of severe trial was now at hand for, on 17th December, the good mother received the final summons to appear before her God to receive from Him the reward of her virtuous life.

To the sensitive soul of Emilie this was a very heavy cross. With a maturity beyond her years she realized her loss. Mme. de Lamourie, to whom her sister had confided the three children, was a kindly person and lavished every possible care and attention on her precious charges. However, in accordance with her mother's wishes, Emilie was taken to the Abbaye-au-Bois ['the Abbey in the Woods'] and enrolled as a boarder. Here

she was surrounded by the love and care of the good sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady.

Almost inconsolable at the death of his wife, Baron de Vialar returned to Gaillac with his two young sons and a governess named Toinon. This latter person soon assumed complete control of the household and was the cause of great suffering to Emilie when later she returned home.

Emilie spent two happy and fruitful years at the Abbey during which time she received her First Holy Communion, This was for her an occasion of special grace. In her *Autobiography* we read, "From this time God began to draw my heart to Himself. I was encouraged to correct a habit of lying that was the only fault of which I was conscious and which I had contracted for fear of being scolded by my parents. At the same period I was inspired to practise mortification. I obeyed and experienced in return a delightful union with God which filled my soul with so much sweetness that I cannot find words to express it."

Except for the death of her dearly loved mother, Emilie's life had been one of unclouded joy. Her sunny temperament endeared her to all with whom she came in contact. Her mirth and goodness seemed contagious and her sympathetic heart responded promptly to every appeal for kindness. Would this happy state continue or would it end with schooldays? The future alone held the answer to, the question.

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Happy days at the Abbey now came abruptly to an end. Baron de Vialar quite unexpectedly decided to bring his daughter home. He declared he was lonely for her company, but his treatment of her makes it difficult for us to believe this was his true motive. Amid many tears and ardent promises to return to visit her old teachers and companions, Emilie left the dear Abbey and all the happy associations of the past two years and returned home. But what a transformation! What was home without the tender, loving mother? Could it be called home? Only two years had elapsed since she had left Gaillac, but the changes wrought seemed the work of centuries.

With a heart well-nigh breaking, Emilie decided to sacrifice her feelings and to enter whole-heartedly into the difficult tasks that now lay ahead. Two young boys were longing for a mother's love which she would endeavour to supply. A father had to be won back to love and affection. What tasks for one who was only a school-girl! Responsibility soon matured Emilie and she immediately became an adornment to the home. Her father, however, did not view his daughter in this light as he was completely dominated by Toinon, whose jealousy of Emilie prompted her to concoct the most fantastic tales and to pour them into the willing ears of the master of the household.

However, friendship is a great force in one's life and Emilie at this time had two valued friends, Hortense de Cossigny and Rosine de Bermond. As Emilie was a perfect friend she knew how to value the sincerity of others. She now had to take her place in society and for a time she became engrossed in the vanities that surrounded her. Her main difficulty at this time was to find a suitable confessor and adviser to whom she could unburden her soul. This, in the days when Jansenism (the puritanical heresy) was rife, was an extremely difficult task.

During 1816 a mission was preached at Gaillac. Emilie followed the exercises as she says "without devotion and with lack of attention." However, as the mission was drawing to a close she became troubled about her Confessions and Communion and experienced an overpowering desire to make a General Confession. In this she was encouraged by one of the missionaries. Referring to her preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Penance, she said, "The Lord enlightened me so well that, without the trouble of examining my conscience, all my faults became clear to me." Again she writes, "After Confession and during Holy Mass that followed the same fear of having offended God gave me such a detestation of sin that I shed abundant tears and my heart was quite changed, filled with love towards God and with a determination to avoid all offence against Him. Furthermore, I was filled with zeal enabling me to overcome human respect, which was the obstacle I feared most."

After the Mission, her confessor, Father Miguel, allowed her to receive Holy Communion three times a week. We must remember that Emilie lived before the days of frequent and daily Communion. Nevertheless, she did not feel free to reveal the workings of grace in her soul to this priest as she felt he would attribute her declarations to pride or else condemn them as illusions. "I knew," she writes, "in such a clear and convincing manner what the Lord expected of me that I had not the least doubt." She tells us that she was first drawn to practise mortification, principally fasting, and in this she persevered for some weeks. Her next inspiration was to immolate her will to that of God. At the same time she was urged to forgo the vanities of worldly attire and to avoid in any way endeavouring to make herself appear attractive to others.

This new mode of life did not in any way mark her as singular as her mortifications were interior. She still frequented society as a companion to her father, who, in spite of his treatment of her, felt a secret pride in her queenly bearing and in her ability to make all around her feel at ease. Her piety, however, was a source of annoyance to her father who strongly protested against her evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament. He considered daily Mass sufficient devotion.

About this time Emilie received a special favour from God. She was alone in the church praying before the Blessed Sacrament when, suddenly, on the Altar she saw Our Lord stretched out before her. His Head was at the Gospel side; His Feet at the Epistle side. His Arms were in the shape of a cross and His Hair fell on to His Shoulders. A shadow hid a portion of His Body, but the Chest, Side and Feet were visible. (Emilie states that she does not know whether they were visible to the eyes of her soul or to her corporal eyes). What arrested her gaze in particular were the Five Wounds, especially the one in the right Side from which emerged several drops of blood. In thanksgiving for this singular favour, she left to her spiritual daughters the precious legacy of the daily recitation of five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys in honour of these five most precious wounds.

The choice of her vocation in life now caused her great anxiety. She thought deeply and prayed earnestly about this most vital affair, but still no definite pathway opened itself before her. However, one day while absorbed in prayer, she heard an interior voice saying to her, "In two years you will know your vocation."

At this time she felt a great attraction for the foreign missions. Each time she went to Paris to visit her grandfather she visited the Church of the Missions and back home in Gaillac she was a constant visitor to the Church of St. John of Carthage where special honour is paid to St. Francis Xavier, the Patron of the Missions. "At the age of eighteen," she writes, "I made a vow to recite daily some prayers in honour of this great saint."

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Conflicting with her desire for the foreign missions was the sense of her obligation to remain in her father's house so as to ensure the practice of religion by those who lived there. Another cause of worry at his time was the frequent offers of brilliant marriages that presented themselves. Her refusal to consider any of the learned and noble suitors who sought her hand enraged her father beyond the power of words to express.

There now came a time when all spiritual consolations were withdrawn and God seemed to have left this favoured soul to herself. She was extremely perturbed and blamed herself for this period of aridity by accusing herself of having failed to correspond fully to the inspirations of grace. Hence she decided to overcome all repugnances and unburden her mind to her confessor. She commenced by telling him of the great favours with which she had been privileged, but she did not proceed very far when she was abruptly stopped and the priest refused to believe what she was saying. Hence she was thrown back again on herself. In spite of her disappointment, she continued to do all in her power to please God and to fulfil His Will. She felt attracted to works of charity and this attraction took concrete shape in visiting the sick in their homes, in bringing them the necessary remedies and food and in working for the conversion of sinners and heretics. Surely here was a vast field of apostolic labours.

At last in 1822, Father Mercier came into her life. His arrival in Gaillac seemed providential for Emilie. She studied this new priest assiduously and, recognizing in him a truly apostolic spirit, decided to confide the

guidance of her spiritual life to him. We are not surprised to learn that in Emilie he discerned an exceptional soul upon whom God had great designs.

Emilie now felt that God was drawing her irresistibly to the religious life. But how? Where? She did not know. Her confessor felt that she was destined for an unusual apostolate, but was not very clear as to what course he should advise her to pursue. He said to her, "God has destined you, without doubt, for something important, but what it is we do not yet know." He next proceeded to test her very severely and opposed her every suggestion. This course of action was the outcome of his desire to help her and to avoid any possibility of an error of judgement in deciding her true vocation.

Emilie became more and more engrossed in her works of charity and for the next ten years continued this apostolate as well as fulfilling her duties to her father and bearing patiently the attacks of Toinon. Soon others were attracted to her charitable works and joined her in her noble enterprise. The fortune inherited from her mother was gradually finding its way to the poor and, in a house from the same legacy of this beloved mother, she gathered together the children of the poor, attended to their needs, taught them their catechism and inspired them with a love of Our Divine Lord and His Blessed Mother. The story of Bethlehem and Calvary deeply impressed this chosen group.

The society, to which by reason of her noble birth she really belonged, frowned on her good works and charitable undertakings and criticized her every action.

It could not understand her abandoning the rich attire and costly jewels to which she had been accustomed from her cradle for the more humble dress and lack of all adornment, save a little cross attached to a black cord, in which she now appeared. Yet, in spite of all this, her beauty and attractiveness were as striking as before. The world cannot understand the sublime folly of the Cross.

Baron de Vialar shared the views of his friends as regards his daughter's conduct. However, there seemed very little he could do about it. He wished to see her eclipse all rivals in the ballrooms of his friends and to contract a marriage worthy of a de Vialar. That she desired the King of Kings for her Spouse did not seem to satisfy his ambition. As he was particularly proud of his own appearance he desired to see Emilie more elaborately dressed than the other young ladies of the society in which he moved.

One day he met Emilie in the street as she was carrying a bowl of soup to one of her sick poor. Filled with indignation, he roughly seized the bowl and dashed it to pieces on the pavement at her feet. This act caused her great humiliation, but she was more concerned over the poor person's loss and her father's attitude than at anything she suffered herself. As the poor are kings in God's kingdom, Emilie felt it an honour to be able to visit them and to have them to visit her. Here again she met with opposition from her father, who would not tolerate his home being a rendezvous for the poor of the district. In a fit of rage he ordered his daughter to have a special entrance made for her "particular friends". He did not at all intend to be taken at his word, but thought that this would put an end to her caprices, as he was pleased to term her charitable undertakings.

Imagine his consternation when the sounds of the tools of masons and carpenters reached his astonished ears. Emilie, without delay, had engaged workmen to construct the new entrance, thus inflicting another defeat on the irate father.

Father Mercier now felt that he had discovered Emilie's vocation. She was a born foundress. She was to establish an order to exercise itself in the works of charity in which she was already engaged.

At dinner one day Emilie decided to tell her father of her desire for the religious life. As soon as she mentioned the subject he grasped a decanter from the table and hurled it at her head. Whether he was a poor shot, or whether Emilie moved too quickly from its course, is difficult to say, but he missed his mark. From this time things became, if possible, more difficult for Emilie.

Her friend, Rosine de Bermond, recounts that at this time Emilie had a vision of St. Joseph who said to her, "Do not be discouraged, my daughter. You will encounter many obstacles. You will be overwhelmed with bitterness. Trials will be multiplied, but your work will prosper."

Emilie now realized that in order to answer God's call she would have to leave home and all dear to her. She was worried about her father and sought to make arrangements whereby he would be so well cared for that he would not miss her unduly. The answer to her prayers came when, in 1831, Maximin married her old friend, Rosine. Henceforward she would replace Emilie in the household.

Everything seemed to be moving satisfactorily when news came of the death of Baron de Portal. Emilie loved this dear old grandfather most tenderly and was greatly grieved at his death. Wasn't he a link with her darling mother whom God had called home when Emilie was very young?

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With the passing of Baron de Portal, the medical profession lost one of its most brilliant and prominent members. During his long life he had amassed a considerable fortune, which he bequeathed to his daughter, Mme. de Lamourie, and to his three grandchildren, Emilie, Augustine and Maximin. Emilie's share was very considerable. This money came just when she needed it most. She could now establish on a solid basis the charitable works which she had so much at heart. She writes, "The assiduous care I gave to the sick when I was at home developed in me the thought of founding a working order to be able to assist them day and night."

In her own town, Gaillac, Emilie laid the foundations of her Institute. No doubt, she felt that she would find more co-labourers there than elsewhere, and her work was really well on the way. She already knew the haunts of the poor, the sick and the distressed. However widely spread her Institute might become, she felt that here it would be solidly rooted. The separation from her father made her suffer greatly and she says, "Although for twenty years my existence in my father's house was so painful that only the thought that I was fulfilling the will of God gave me strength to remain there, it was, nevertheless, with a great effort that I decided to leave my father's home on account of the great grief that I knew my going would cause him."

Mistress of her fortune, Emilie acquired a spacious house in Gaillac. Three of her friends joined her. Then at Christmas, 1832, she departed from her father's house leaving for him a letter which she hoped would make the situation clear and soften his grief. It was worded in the most tender terms and informed him that she would remain in Gaillac and thus be able to visit him and to continue to care for him whenever he had need of her. Unfortunately, Baron de Vialar wanted all or nothing. He could not bear the thought that Emilie would no longer live under his roof, or that she would no longer be an ornament to his home. He fully realized that much would be missing from the home now that she was gone.

It must be remembered that he was secretly proud of his charming daughter. The fact that her Creator had a prior claim on her did not enter his selfish calculations, and for five years he maintained a frigid aloofness. Neither the entreaties of Emilie nor of her friends could in the least soften his obdurate heart.

Now, at the age of thirty-five, Emilie was but commencing her great work. But how well equipped she was, naturally and supernaturally, for her gigantic task! A noviciate which stretched back to her most early years, the practice of asceticism which prepared her for the exigencies of the apostolate, the union of the contemplative with the active life while still at home, the exercise of works of charity for the space of two decades, and finally, the heroic endurance for nearly a quarter of a century of the ill-will of her father and the contemptible treatment of her by Toinon, these were the instruments God employed to mould the noble soul of the foundress. One endowed with so many gifts and virtues could not fail to attract souls, and in two months eight other aspirants joined the little band. Among these was Emilie Julien who was destined to become the second Superior General of the Congregation. The nucleus of the new Institute was the target of much criticism by the people of Gaillac - the foundress was too young, the habit too attractive, its members

would soon disband, etc., etc., etc. However, as everything undertaken unselfishly and earnestly for the greater glory of God and the good of souls must eventually prosper so did the work commenced by Emilie de Vialar.

The name of the new Institute had already been decided upon. It would be known as the Institute of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. At first the title is a little bewildering. It is in reality very simple and honours in an especial manner the Mystery of the Incarnation as revealed to St. Joseph by the Angel. "Fear not, Joseph, Son of David, to take unto you Mary, your spouse, for that which is conceived of her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Emilie felt that her mission was to spread the glad tidings of redemption to the remotest parts of the globe.

More than a title, however, was necessary for the new Institute. A rule of life had to be drawn up. This the foundress now set about to do. After many prayers to the Holy Spirit for guidance, and much concentration on the important work in hand, a provisional rule was presented to the members by Emilie and was joyfully received by all.

Acceptance by the members was but part of what was needed. Ecclesiastical approbation was essential. So, with a copy of the rules in her hand, and hope and trepidation struggling for supremacy in her heart, Emilie presented herself to Archbishop de Gualy, the Archbishop of Albi. On being ushered into his august presence, and the usual salutation being concluded, this kindly dignitary of Mother Church said, "Well, my child, what do you want?"

"Your Grace, I have here a copy of the rules that I have just drawn up for the Institute that I have recently founded. I trust that you will approve of them and give our work your blessing."

"Leave them with me so that I may be able to study them and later give you my verdict."

"Thank you, Your Grace."

"You may be pleased to hear that I have received gratifying reports of your work among the sick and poor. This news gave me great consolation."

"I am pleased that you are interested in our work, particularly our efforts to help the sick and distressed."

"I shall not keep you waiting long for my opinion of your rules."

"Your Grace, I thank you for your encouragement and trust all will be well."

With a light heart, Emilie left the Archbishop and hastened home to convey the glad news to her companions.

After serious deliberation, the rules were approved by this grand Archbishop, who became a powerful ally and the first Superior General of the Institute. He studied its birth, watched with interest its progress and was ever ready with valuable advice on every aspect of the life and work of the members. Indeed, Emilie now had two valuable friends, the Archbishop and Father Mercier.

Although the Institute was but a few months old many things had taken place. The works were established, the rules were approved and the Archbishop authorized Father Mercier to perform the ceremony of the taking of the habit by the first aspirants. Classes were organized but the children of the poor were to be the first to receive attention. At this time a dispensary was set up to which the poor flocked to have their ills treated or to obtain free medicine. Without any fee being asked, the sick and old were attended in their own homes, and when necessary they were watched over during the night. What mighty undertakings! However, God's love

and grace surmount the barriers raised by frail human nature, and prayer and sacrifice enabled them to carry on until their ranks were augmented. The care of the women in the local prison was now confided to the sisters.

When the needs of the poor were supplied, a school for the children of well-to-do parents was opened. This was followed by a boarding school. New recruits were forthcoming, thus permitting an extension of the works.

On 17th June, 1833, a tragedy was narrowly averted by the forethought of Sister Emilie. At this time there was in Gaillac a band of young scoundrels having a reputation for daily deeds of violence. One of this group was a carrier who, that very day, had brought a very heavy box to the convent. This box had come from Paris. The youth in question told his comrades and it was decided that the box must contain valuables which they determined to procure that night. They resolved to resort to violence if anyone attempted to thwart their plans. As the chapel was in the course of construction, the ladders left by the workmen would prove helpful. About midnight they arrived at the convent. They scaled the ladders but found to their amazement they could not enter the house. That evening, as though enlightened from on high, Emilie had locked each door and barred each window. This course of action she had never previously taken.

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On 4th July, 1830, Algeria was conquered by the French. This victory caused much excitement and many enthusiastic outbursts took place in the French capital. Colonists were encouraged to go to the newly-conquered territory, and Augustine de Vialar, the elder of the brothers of the foundress, was among the first to visit the new colony. Such was his faith in it that he purchased many extensive holdings.

Augustine was not only a true Frenchman but a valiant Christian who desired to improve the lot of the poor neglected and despised Arabs. With this end in view, he set up a travelling dispensary and wrote to France for monetary assistance to help to finance his project. The subscription list was headed by Louis Phillippe and his Queen. Now someone was needed to care for the sick and naturally Augustine's thoughts turned to his sister, and to her he made known the needs of the colony.

The arrival of the request for nuns aroused great enthusiasm at Gaillac. The foreign missions were to become a reality. Immediately Emilie approached Archbishop de Gualy in order to benefit by his fatherly advice. He gave his absolute approval of the project. This was all the foundress needed. Her acceptance of this new field of labour was surely a girlish dream crystallizing under her very eyes. Six months were allotted for the necessary preparations. She would take with her three young sisters who, in the intervening months, would have lessons in pharmacy to equip them for their new work.

On 28th July, 1835, the little band left for Algeria. What *au-revoirs* there must have been as the time of separation drew near! Those left in Gaillac must have shared with the quartet the terrors of facing the unknown and the untried. Love, however, conquers all things and the love of Christ Crucified leads souls to attempt even the impossible.

The journey took thirteen days. As the sisters travelled on the same boat as the new Governor General of Algeria they shared in his phenomenal reception and were escorted between two rows of soldiers while guns boomed a salute.

The little band was received into the home of Augustine while awaiting their departure for a distant outpost. In the meantime cholera broke out in Algiers and swept like a flame through the town. Here, now, was work at hand. The sisters fought the epidemic for three months; then it abated. Never before had such devotedness been displayed in those parts. The conditions under which the sisters laboured were indescribable, yet never a word of complaint escaped their lips. Was not their motto "Devotedness unto Death"? If so much tenderness was lavished on the poor frail bodies what concern must have been displayed for the souls of the poor

disease-stricken people?

The missionaries, through their devotedness and skill, had gained the admiration of the entire population - European and native. The Mussulmen (the Moslems) and the Jews saw for the first time Christianity resplendent in its true glory. The representative of the Holy See in Algiers wrote to Archbishop de Gualy expressing his appreciation of and edification at the conduct of the sisters. He also communicated the same impressions to Cardinal Franzoni, Prefect of Propaganda, Rome. Thus officially, for the first time, Rome and Emilie met.

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Now that the sisters seemed firmly established at Algiers, Mother Emilie deemed it fitting that she should return to the cradle of the Institute. At the end of November she placed Sister Henriette Rieunier in charge and left for France. The sisters were very sad to see her go but realized that her presence was needed at home. Immediately on her return, Mother Emilie arranged for a retreat. This was conducted by Fr. P. Bequei. After the retreat she went to Paris to present herself to the Queen and to solicit her protection, as affairs in Algeria, as in any newly-colonized territory, were very unsettled. The present time was opportune for her to make her request as all France was sounding the praises of the sisters and the work of Baron de Portal as court physician was still fresh in the minds of all. The Queen accorded Emilie a most encouraging reception and promised her support.

In March she returned to Gaillac! But what a different Gaillac! The inhabitants who had formerly tormented the sisters and considered them as fools now regarded them as heroines and saints. How fickle and fleeting is the blame or applause of the crowd!

The convent at Gaillac was now solidly established, but Africa was calling for attention, so, towards the end of April, 1836, Mother Emilie again left for Algeria. Her first work was to find a building suitable for a convent. Up to now the sisters had remained at the home of Augustine de Vialar. Before long she acquired three houses and established schools and dispensaries. By the end of 1836, twenty sisters were on the mission. The Arabs, who learned to admire the nuns during the epidemic, continued to come to them and marvelled at the maternal care with which they attended their most repulsive sores. "He must be very good Who makes you do such things," one remarked while gazing at a Sister's crucifix.

In addition to providing a home for newly-born babes abandoned by their unnatural parents, the convent became a refuge for girls in distress and, in fact, for any one in trouble. The care bestowed on these unfortunate members of Christ's flock gained for Mother Emilie and the sisters the esteem of the native population which the passing of the years would only intensify. When, late in 1836, two or three French members of the Council protested against the presence of the sisters in the State Hospital, the Arab and Israelite members disputed so hotly in favour of the sisters that the protest was dismissed and never again raised.

On hearing this Mother Emilie was galvanized into action. She decided to sacrifice the remainder of her fortune in the interests, present and future, of the Congregation. Financially she alone had borne the full burden of the enormous expenses attached to the establishments in Algiers. It was not until two years later that she received any pecuniary assistance and then only for work being done in the State Hospital. This recognition was the result of the pressure brought to bear on the authorities by Augustine.

A call now came from Bone (in nearby Tunisia) for the sisters to undertake there the work of education. Mother Emilie did not immediately respond as she was endeavouring to obtain some financial aid to enable the work in Algiers to be carried on and extended. After many stormy debates this was forthcoming and when all matters on that score were finalized, she set out with four sisters for Bone. She remained there some weeks organizing the works and, after naming Sister Emilie Julien as Superior, she returned to Algiers.

The January of 1838 found her back at Gaillac. In reality she was the recognized Mother General of the Congregation, but this fact had to be canonically established by the elections prescribed by the constitutions. In due course these elections were held and on the unanimous vote of the sisters Emilie de Vialar became the first Mother General of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. The newly appointed Mother General now made some additions to the constitutions which received the approbation of Archbishop de Gualy.

Now came the first foundation in France outside the Mother House. At Montans was a house owned by one of the sisters. This was converted into a convent where classes for young children were held.

The event for which Mother Emilie had long prayed and hoped now took place. Her father at last consented to see her. The successful intermediary was her brother, Augustine, who managed to make his father realize his extreme folly. This reconciliation brought untold joy to Emilie. She had found it a severe trial all these years to be welcomed in every home in Gaillac except her own.

In 1839, the parish priest of Saint-Affrique asked for the sisters to work in that town. He offered a furnished house containing a beautiful chapel as a residence for the nuns. Soon a staff was selected and Father Mercier accompanied the sisters to their new home. The town was agog with excitement. The convent was besieged from morning to night with well-wishers anxious to meet the nuns.

March 1839 found twelve sisters in the hospital at Algiers and twenty-four in the central house in the town. From Constantine came a plea for sisters. The population there was mainly native as very few colonists had yet settled at that spot. Ever ready to assist the needy, Mother Emilie and some sisters left for Constantine on 4th April the same year.

This was an auspicious occasion, as the newly appointed Bishop of Algiers, Bishop Dupuch, accompanied the sisters and installed them in their new home. The trip was very stormy and threatened to end disastrously but for the intervention of Her who is Star of the Sea. In thanksgiving for a safe arrival, Bishop Dupuch offered Holy Mass the next morning. Constantine was still some distance. *En route*, Bone, where the sisters were already established, and Hippo, with its memories of the great St. Augustine, were visited. At length, their destination being reached, the sisters took charge of a hospital.

Mother Emilie describing this arrival said, "The town rejoiced at our coming and the Arabs stopped us at every step to tell us how much they loved us. They brought their sick and asked us to visit them in their homes. I cured the chief of the desert tribes, known as the Serpent of the Desert. He displayed great confidence in me. One day as I was preparing to administer a remedy to him, I, according to local custom, tasted the potion to assure him that it was all right. He seemed pained and said, "What are you doing? From you I would take anything."

Later he asked for some sisters to go to Biskra, the capital of his territory, and, on one of the sisters remarking that, perhaps, the Arabs in that part would not respect the nuns, he said, with much feeling, "If one of my tribe or an Arab from any other district should show the least disrespect to the Cross you wear, I would have him beheaded on the spot."

Constantine being firmly established, Mother Emilie returned to Algiers and towards the end of the year, prompted and aided by Bishop Dupuch, commenced a new work - the charge of an orphanage. This was on the feast of St. Cyprian, the martyr bishop of Carthage. The Bishop adopted twenty-five orphans whom he placed in the care of the sisters. This number corresponded to the pieces of gold that St. Cyprian gave to his executioner in the days of the Roman persecutions.

Until now the Bishop of Algiers had been very well disposed towards the foundress. He even persuaded her to send to His Holiness, Gregory XVI, an account of the good that was being accomplished by the Institute in Algiers and France. With the protection of the Bishop, the successful opening of new foundations, the

sympathy of the populace, the stage seemed set for a splendid mission in Algeria. God, however, Who wishes to sublimate all by contact with His Cross, soon placed Mother Emilie's feet on the Via Dolorosa.

As if she had a premonition of the trials that lay ahead, Mother Emilie wrote to Archbishop de Gualy and asked his authorization to make a foundation at Tunis. His Grace was delighted at the excellent proposal and wrote most cordially to her in the following terms. "Such a design can come only from the Holy Spirit Who wishes through it to procure spiritual help for an immense population and to consolidate the houses you already have in Algeria. Not only do I permit you, but also I exhort you to realize this pious project as soon as you can, persuaded that your enterprise must have happy results. The enemy of souls will not allow, without stern resistance, a people over whom he has held sovereign sway to be snatched away from him. But you know, through experience, that God will protect you."

Now the time of severe trial was at hand. Bishop Dupuch set about to demand certain changes in the Constitutions of the Institute. Desiring to be Superior General of the houses in Algeria, he wrote to Mother Emilie as follows: "Do you consent, now and for the time that God keeps your society in Algeria, you and all the members who compose or will compose it, purely and simply to be under my episcopal jurisdiction and that of my successors, in such a way that we can dispose, as seems good to us before God, of you and your sisters of the said society? Do you bind yourself expressly to observe and to have observed the modifications and changes that, now and in the future, we believe useful to make for the houses in our diocese only, to your rules and constitutions?"

"It is evident," replies Mother Emilie, "that a society which would submit to such an arrangement would no longer be a society. The religious Congregation that would accept such conditions would be signing its own death warrant."

Events now moved rapidly. His Lordship was adamant in the demands he had made and, Mother Emilie, feeling that she had right on her side, firmly but respectfully resisted. Perhaps, without the heavy cross laid on the foundress's shoulders by this Bishop, she would never have had such an opportunity of displaying her heroic virtue and admirable courage. Furthermore these events led indirectly to the establishment of foundations at Tunis and Rome.

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The Archbishop of Albi now advised Mother Emilie to go to Rome, the heart of the Church, and there to seek the approbation of the Constitutions. His Grace wrote a letter to His Holiness introducing to him the foundress and imploring him to assist her.

For a long time Mother Emilie had been considering a visit to Rome as, desirous that her Congregation should know no national boundaries, she realized the necessity of having the approval of the supreme Head of the Universal Church. She arrived in Rome towards the end of 1840.

His Holiness received her almost immediately on her arrival. She humbly petitioned the approval of the Constitutions and clearly explained her difficulties with Bishop Dupuch. After listening very attentively His Holiness replied, "Providence must have great designs for your Institute since He permits it to undergo such severe trials."

When Mother Emilie assured Gregory XVI of her unswerving obedience he said with enthusiasm, "I believe it. I believe it." The Pope declared his keen interest in her work.

Some days after this interview, a friend of the Congregation went to visit the Pope, who said, "Is Mother Emilie satisfied with the audience I gave her?" On receiving an affirmative reply he smilingly added, "She knows how to defend her rights."

Mother Emilie's stay in the Eternal City was prolonged. She remained there eighteen months. While waiting for her affairs to be finalized, she opened a house in Rome. The sisters began by caring for the sick in their own homes, particularly the French resident in that city. Next was opened a school for the children of parents in comfortable circumstances. The monetary assistance from such establishments enabled the works among the poor to be extended.

While everything in Rome was progressing favourably, affairs in Algeria were going from bad to worse. The sisters were ordered by the Bishop to withdraw from Algiers, and when it became known that they had to leave there were protests from every quarter. Two of these were forwarded to the Holy Father. One was from the colonists bearing two hundred signatures, the other, bearing one hundred and thirty-three signatures, from the Mussulman population. These protests were a source of great consolation to Mother Emilie who alone knew the amount of good accomplished for souls and bodies in this sphere of activity.

She and her sisters, with one unfortunate exception, felt that they could never yield to the demands of the Bishop. Although their hearts were breaking at leaving their devoted people, they realized that the Congregation as a whole could not be jeopardized. It must be remembered that the expenses attached to the foundations in Algiers had come from the private fortune of Mother Emilie. She had spent, almost to her last farthing, in this new land. Now, what indemnity was she to receive? Surely all she had invested would be restored to her. Unfortunately such was not to be the case.

While these affairs were torturing the mind of the foundress, Rome gave her the joy of her life by a provisional approval of the Rules and Constitutions. This took place on 6th May, 1842. The Congregation was not quite ten years old.

Before passing from Bishop Dupuch, we must relate that years later he realized his mistake and wrote a very apologetic letter to Mother Emilie. When it arrived she read it, showed it to a few of the sisters and then tore it in shreds saying, "It is not right that a Bishop should thus humble himself before a religious."

A month after the Constitutions had been so well received by Rome, Mother Emilie suffered a heavy loss in the death of her old friend, adviser and superior, Archbishop de Gualy.

Having terminated her work in Rome, the foundress returned to France before setting out again for Algiers.

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Before the end of January, 1843, all the sisters had returned to Gaillac or had been placed elsewhere. Mother Emilie alone remained in Algiers, like a captain who is last to leave his sinking ship. Now she had to face another cross, this time a family one. Augustine lost his beautiful young wife at the early age of twenty-seven. She left two tiny children, Margaret aged two and Euphemie still a babe in arms. We can well imagine what a consolation it was to Augustine to have his sister with him at this time. What courage she must have inspired in him and what hopes of eternal rewards she must have kindled in the soul of her dying sister-in-law! The two motherless ones now became the objects of the special love and devotion of their aunt.

At this time an interesting offer was made to Mother Emilie to open a boarding school at La Marsa in Tunisia. This offer came from Monsieur Raffo, the minister of the Bey or ruler of the Tunisian State, and could hardly be refused. In order to study the situation on the spot, the foundress left for that town via Tunis. After due investigation she accepted the work and sent two sisters to open the house. Later a third joined the duo. While the house at La Marsa was being founded under such patronage, Marshal Bugeaud in a public speech declared, "The Sisters of St. Joseph have helped me most in relieving the terrible miseries that the Administration, with all the means at its disposal, has been unable to alleviate. They have cared for the sick who could not find accommodation in hospital and they have taken care of the orphans."

La Marsa being established and the work well on the way, Mother Emilie left for Tunis, passing through

Bone *en route*, and then returned to France. The boat was quarantined at Toulon and the passengers had to spend some time in isolation. When this period was completed, the foundress continued her journey to Gaillac where a very warm welcome awaited her from the sisters who always felt secure when she was in their midst.

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The Congregation and its works were now becoming well-known and calls for sisters came from far and near. Even distant Cyprus asked for the sisters. Mother Emilie, it must be realized, was a very poor traveller and had a dread of the sea. This, however, she conquered in the interest of her life's great work and bravely faced the many journeys it entailed. She liked to accompany the sisters whenever possible to any new foundation.

While she was away the financial state of the Institute had greatly deteriorated, owing to the fraud and dishonesty of those who had been trusted to guard its interests. Mother Emilie endeavoured by gentle means at first, then through the medium of the Law Court, to have her affairs adjusted, but without success. She did not even have the satisfaction of knowing what had happened to her money.

In 1845, while in Malta, the foundress met Father Bruno, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, who was on a holiday from Burma. The Sisters of St. Joseph and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have been associated since the early days of both Congregations. As we will see, in Western Australia they together helped to pioneer the work of Christian education and planted the faith firmly in the port of Fremantle, where, to-day, the Sons of Eugene de Mazenod and the Daughters of St. Emilie de Vialar still carry on their grand work in the traditions of the first missionaries to that part of Australia.

Father Bruno asked for sisters for Burma. A moment's reflection will reveal the difficulties in a pagan oriental country. However, when later Mother Emilie asked for volunteers for this arduous mission she was overcome and overjoyed by the spirit of sacrifice displayed by her sisters. All who volunteered could not be sent so she made a judicious selection of six young sisters for the distant mission.

A very astonishing and striking incident occurred as the missionaries were journeying to their new home. There was no Suez Canal at that time and the voyage was trying and hazardous. The route from Alexandria to Suez was through desert. However, the sisters felt that He Who had to flee through the same desert to escape the anger of a jealous, impious King, would protect those who had become voluntary exiles for Him.

During this part of the voyage they met an old man who, each time the coach stopped, approached them and said, "It is I, my children, fear not, I am here." This aged man had a long white beard and carried a staff. He took their small parcels and helped them back into the coach. He finally accompanied them to the boat and said, "Good-bye, my children. A pleasant trip. Fear nothing for I am here."

Then he disappeared. The sisters looked at one another in amazement as each felt that it was their father and protector St. Joseph who had come to them.

The successor of Archbishop de Gualy in the archdiocese of Albi was not in many ways favourably inclined towards Mother Emilie, and, when her financial position became so involved, due to no fault of hers, he condemned her as incapable. With her usual foresight, she predicted that eventually it would become necessary to leave Gaillac, so she looked towards Toulouse as the place for the Mother House of the Congregation. She did not yet realize that this was but a stepping-stone to Marseilles, where God had destined her to, establish the Mother House. There we find it to-day but not at the same location as in the days of the foundress.

By a strange coincidence the sisters were invited back to Gaillac in 1867 while Mother Emilie Julien was Mother General. The influential families of that town appealed for a return of the Sisters of St. Joseph to

educate their daughters. The sisters returned to inhabit the very house that they had been virtually forced to leave some years earlier.

Once again, Mother Emilie, in the interests of the Congregation, attempted to have the money of which she had been deprived restored to her. Again she failed. In the midst of all these trials her calmness was unruffled. One day a Sister, astonished at seeing her so calm and happy in her poverty, remarked the fact to her and received this reply: "If I had not become poor, I would never have established the Congregation. Blessings would not have come. All must be stamped with the seal of the Cross. Let us thank Our Lord for this grace. Let us have confidence. His Providence will never fail us. He is our Spouse. It was for Him we left all, and He has undertaken to care for us." Could anything be more beautiful than these sentiments? How differently we act and react when deprived of even a trifle!

For four years the Mother House was at Toulouse, then Mother Emilie decided that Marseilles being a port would be much more convenient now that sisters were constantly leaving for distant missions fields. The first house taken there proved too small, so a larger one was acquired at Marengo Street, and it was here that the foundress lived until her death. It was in Marseilles that she met the saintly Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to whom reference has already been made. The help that this holy man gave to Mother Emilie was invaluable.

The arrival of the sisters in Marseilles is recorded by one of them as follows. "Never did we enjoy a meal better than the one we had the first evening, seated on the ground, in a room littered with boxes and trunks. The menu was a piece of bread and boiled potatoes. Each one deemed herself happy to share the poverty of Our Lord Who said to, St. Peter, "Leave there your nets and follow Me."

Mother Emilie wrote a little later, "We are very happy at Marseilles. The Bishop is good to us. He is a grand man. The spirit of the clergy is good and the inhabitants are well-disposed towards us. We have arranged things in the house and are comfortably lodged. I have four unoccupied rooms ready to open as class rooms. The Providence of God, Who assists me so powerfully, makes me feel that He wished us to come to Marseilles and that pupils will be forthcoming."

The change of air greatly benefited the health of the foundress upon whom the strain of so much travelling and worry was visibly beginning to take its toll. Another sorrow, however, came to her. The only link with her dear mother was severed by the death of her cherished aunt, Mme. Lamourie.

It was to this aunt, it will be recalled, that the dying mother had confided her three tiny children. How she had watched over their interests, rejoiced in their successes, grieved in their sorrows and how proud she was of her devoted and saintly niece!

September, 1854, found the sisters in Oxford. This was the first opening in an English-speaking country. However, this foundation, owing to a very strong and bigoted Protestant element in the town and the attitude of the new parish priest, was short-lived, as Mother Emilie considered it wise to withdraw the sisters. This was a keen disappointment to her. It seems to be a peculiarity of the Congregation that it has always been invited to return to the very places it has had to abandon years earlier. So it was with Oxford. After a space of ninety-nine years, the sisters have returned and the foundation has rapidly advanced and is well established.

As a soothing balm to Mother Emilie's disappointed spirit over the failure of Oxford, a call for sisters came from the most unexpected source. Dr. Serra, the learned and saintly bishop of Perth in Western Australia, approached the foundress and asked for sisters to work in the port of Fremantle where there were no nuns. Mother Emilie acceded to his request and appointed four brave young sisters to this distant mission field. They were Mother Julia, Sister Emilie, Sister Lucy and Sister Zoe. In January, 1855, the sisters accompanied by Bishop Serra left from London. The journey took four months. On 24th May, Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, the sisters reached Fremantle. This anniversary is always celebrated with great solemnity by the sisters in Australia, especially as it the national feast-day of that country. The journey was full of hardships.

The colony was but in its infancy and those who know the history of the early days of the settlement are able to appreciate the privations these gallant pioneers must have endured.

The first house occupied by the Sisters was invaded by swirling waters during the winter months, so the sisters had to seek shelter elsewhere until the rains subsided: Perhaps their greatest difficulty was their ignorance of the English tongue. Their only knowledge of the language of the colony was what they had acquired during the four months at sea. However, goodwill and perseverance surmounted all difficulties and, in July of the same year, they opened their first school. In 1856, two Irish sisters arrived. These were the last to receive their obediences from the Mother Foundress.

At Marseilles everything was flourishing. Bishop de Mazenod granted the sisters the privilege of Sunday Mass in their own chapel and he appointed a chaplain to the convent. Again His Grace showed his appreciation of the sisters, when he approved in the following words of the Statutes of the Congregation. "Having taken cognizance of the Statutes of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, and having learned through experience that the said sisters, by their fidelity in fulfilling with zeal the ends of these Statutes, have, since the establishment of their community in the town of Marseilles, done the good that they propose and will do more by the development of their works and considering besides that these religious by their work in the foreign missions can render great service to the Church and to France, we have approved and do now approve the Statutes of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition."

Mother Emilie earnestly desired to have the Congregation legalized according to civil law. She had tried to procure this legalization several times before, but there always seemed to be some obstacle in the way. No doubt, feeling that she did not have much longer to live, she wished to leave her sisters in security. This time after much negotiation she secured imperial approbation. This was signed at the Palace of St. Cloud, 17th October, 1855. The foundress was now overjoyed and had inserted in the four leading newspapers, the following: "An imperial decree dated 17th October, 1855, has officially constituted the Association of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, whose Mother House is at 35 Marengo Street, Marseilles, a religious congregation recognized by law. The principal aim of this Congregation is devotion to teaching and to works of charity in foreign missions." Mother Emilie hastened to convey the good news to all the houses of the Institute. These glad tidings brought untold joy to all.

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Mother Emilie returned from Paris in 1856. Her sisters remarked that she did not look well and that she seemed very exhausted after the journey. Hence they were greatly alarmed. However, after a few days, she seemed to revive and the sisters' hopes soared high. On Thursday, 20th August, she took the evening meal as usual with the community and, at the recreation that followed, she was her accustomed bright and happy self. After night prayers she retired to her room without anyone realizing how she felt. The next day she was seized with terrific abdominal pains and at once cholera was suspected. After hours of excessive vomiting, the trouble was diagnosed as a strangulated hernia. She had developed a hernia while still at home, when, one day she dragged a bag of corn to distribute to her dear poor. Although she suffered much from this all her life, she never complained of it and very few knew of her disability. Now it had reached its climax. The worn-out body could no longer support the strain.

Mother Emilie realized that her end was near so she asked for a priest and with child-like trust and simplicity received the Last Sacraments, surrounded by her sorrowing sisters. Her two nieces, the daughters of Augustine, who had lost their mother when they were babies, were in Marseilles at the time and so were summoned to their aunt's death-bed.

Joyfully and peacefully the soul of the foundress winged its flight to its Creator. When the news of her death was circulated in the town, cries of "The Saint is dead," rang out on all sides. There were also the pessimists who predicted the end of the Congregation now that Mother Emilie was no longer there.

The funeral took place on 26th August. From the Church of Our Lady of the Mount at Marseilles the mortal remains of this great woman were taken to the cemetery of St. Charles. Four years later they were transferred to the cemetery of St. Peter. Now, except for the parts that are enclosed in reliquaries scattered over the globe, they are at the Mother House.

At the time of the foundress's death, the sisters received condolences from far and near. Although she was only fifty-eight, she had accomplished much and above all she had sanctified herself. The good work she commenced is carried on by her daughters in four continents. Since her death there has been a great expansion of the works.

A short time after her death, the sisters were worried about the future of the Congregation so some of them approached the saintly Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney, who said, "Sisters, remain in peace; the Congregation of Mother de Vialar is the cherished flock of Jesus Christ and of your patron St. Joseph. The Congregation will not fail. On the contrary, it will extend far, for, my Sisters, you are called to do much good. You are poor like St. Joseph, your patron, who worked all his life to provide for the daily bread of the Holy Family."

The world was to hear much more of Emilie de Vialar for on 18th June, 1939, she was beatified by the present Holy Father, Pius XII, who affixed the final seal to her sanctity when, on 24th June, 1951, he canonized her amidst the usual pomp and ceremony that accompanies this great event.

St. Emilie de Vialar, pray for us.

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