

“The Match that Lit the Fire”

Baptized Marie Pauline Jaricot on July 22, 1799, Pauline was the last child born to Antoine and Jeanne Jaricot in Lyons, France. The family lived at 16 rue Tupin in Lyons, a home whose restoration was completed in 2005. In May of that same year, National Directors of the **Pontifical Mission Societies** gathered in Lyons – instead of Rome – for their annual meeting to distribute support from the Catholics of the world to the young mission churches. That particular assembly focused on the missionary heart of Pauline. Pope Benedict XVI said he hoped the gathering and its celebrations related to Pauline would “*revive missionary ardor*” among Catholics “*to announce through convinced witness and persistent prayer the Gospel and salvation which comes from the one Savior.*”

Holding up Pauline as a model – she was but 17 when she envisioned what would become the **Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith** – the Holy Father also called young people to offer themselves for missionary work, as he encouraged all the faithful to, as Pauline did, draw from the Eucharist “*the power of faith and a profound missionary conviction.*”

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Pauline’s parents had seven children, including son, Phileas, who was two years older. [*Phileas, would be very influential in her life – nurturing her love for the Missions and being instrumental in the development of the **Missionary Childhood Association***]

Pauline wrote of her parents: “*Happy are those who have received from their parents the first seeds of faith.... Be praised Lord, for giving me a just man for a father and a virtuous and charitable woman as a mother.*”



Antoine & Jeanne Jaricot – Parents of Pauline and their home on 16 rue Tupin, Lyons, France

Lyons, Pauline’s hometown, was an industrial city that became famous for its silk factories. Her family were silk merchants, a bourgeois family of that French city. While the early years of her childhood were marked by the exclusive society life of Lyons, something would happen as a teenager that would open her heart to the whole world.

At the age of 15, Pauline suffered a bad fall. Not long after that, her beloved mother died. It took Pauline many months to recover, emotionally and physically. When she did, she resumed her social life, but with less delight than before. Her heart, she wrote at this time, was “*made for the whole world. If only I could love without measure,*” she observed, “*without end.*”

A VISION FOR THE MISSIONS . . .

She began to long to help the Missions – China and the United States – a desire nurtured by her brother Phileas, who was preparing for the priesthood and who told Pauline all about the work and witness of Missionaries. Pauline saw this as her vocation – to become a Missionary of the love of God. She came to believe that “*to truly help others is to bring them to God.*”

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One day while at prayer, 18-year-old Pauline had a vision of two lamps. One had no oil; the other was overflowing and from its abundance poured oil into the empty lamp. To Pauline, the drained lamp signified the faith in her native France, still reeling from the turbulence of the French Revolution. The full lamp was the great faith of Catholics in the Missions – especially in the New World. By aiding the faith of the young new country of the United States of America, Pauline knew that seeds planted would grow and bear much fruit.

So she came up with a plan to support missionaries. She gathered workers in her family’s silk factory into “circles of 10.” Everyone in the group pledged to pray daily for the Missions and to offer each week a sou, the equivalent of a penny. Each member of the group then found 10 friends to do the same. Even in the face of opposition from parish priests in Lyons, Pauline remained steadfast. Within a year, she had 500 workers enrolled; soon there would be 2,000.

CHILDHOOD

As a child, Pauline had in fact dreamed of building such support for the Missions: *“Oh! I’d love to have a well of gold to give some to all the unfortunate, so that there would not be any more poor people at all and that no one would cry anymore.”*

Pauline’s successful efforts – where clearly not isolated or unique – were the main thrust behind the formation of the **Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith** was *“the match that lit the fire.”* But there was a struggle – like with all new initiatives – to control what was quickly becoming a source of strength and hope for the Missionary Church. At one point, Pauline was sidelined, and she struggled to ensure that what the Lord had inspired her to set in motion, would come fully to life. In 1963, 100 years after her death, Pope John XXIII signed the decree which proclaimed her virtues, declaring her “Venerable.” He wrote: *“It was she who thought of the society, who conceived it, and made it an organized reality.”*



Pauline writing down her ideas for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith

MORE HISTORY ON THE SOCIETY OF THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

On May 3, 1822, in Lyons, a group of men called “*Les Messieurs*” gathered to discuss a request for funds for the missions in Louisiana in the United States. A representative of Louisiana’s Bishop Dubourg, Father Angelo Inglesi, hoped at this meeting to have an organization set up similar to Pauline’s “*Propagation*” which was doing so well. The organization he had in mind would be formed to help missions in Louisiana, which, at that time, extended from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada.

“No!” responded Benoît Coste who was one of “*Les Messieurs*.” He made the point that no single Mission should be the sole beneficiary of funds that were gathered; any organization formed must help *all Missions everywhere*. [This was, indeed, Pauline’s own vision of universal help.] When another member of the group, Victor Girodon, spoke glowingly of the Pauline’s plan, the group voted to adopt it. Eventually Pauline consented to join her efforts to those approved by “*Les Messieurs*.” It was, as she said, “*a gain for the world.*”

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By 1922, the **Society for the Propagation of the Faith** – and three other societies established to help the Missions – became **Pontifical**, under the direct canonical jurisdiction of the Pope, who, together with the entire body of Bishops, remind the faithful of their Baptismal call to Mission, with their headquarters moved to Rome.

With the first 100 years of its existence, the **Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith** sent some \$7 million in help to the young church in the United States. *[Today, just the Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska, remains dependent on help from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, still benefiting then from the vision of Pauline Jaricot.]*

The young Church here at home started contributing to the Propagation of the Faith in 1833, with a humble gift of \$6. Today, Catholics here at home contribute about 25 percent of the support collected through the **Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith** for the 1,150 mission dioceses worldwide, mostly in Africa and Asia.

INSPIRED BY MARY

Pauline Jaricot: *‘Dear Mother, lead me along the path...’*

Pauline Jaricot’s spirituality – one that opened her heart to the world – included a deep devotion and trust in our Blessed Mother. In a prayer she wrote, dated January 1851, Pauline said:

“Tender Mother . . . allow me to place in your hands the difficult and delicate task of my spiritual life.”

Her great love for Mary can be found in her great prayer initiative, the Association of the Living Rosary, started on December 8, 1826, just four years after her vision led to the foundation of the **Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith**. Again her method was to form “circles” – groups of 15 people, each of whom pledged to pray one decade for a specific one of the traditional 15 Mysteries, every day for live. In this way, each circle of 15 would pray an entire Rosary every day, forming a “Living Rosary”!

Another project, to help working class poor, caused Pauline to fall into debt – in part due to the unscrupulous nature of those involved in the effort with her. And yet, her prayer was: *“My God forgive them and, in the degree that they have showered me with sufferings, heap blessings upon them.”*

At this time, Pauline was living in the shadow of the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière. Her daily life, observed Blessed John Paul II in a letter to the Archbishop of Lyons in 1999, was *“illuminated by the Eucharist and by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.”*

Pauline kept numerous notebooks with writings and prayers, and these, noted the late Holy Father, testify to the connection between her profound and intense spiritual life and her energy for the Mission of the Church. And in her great sufferings, which were many, she found a way to fulfill her desire to be filled with Christ’s life and to unite herself deeply with his sacrifice. As the Curé of Ars, her spiritual director for many years, said: *“I know someone who has many very heavy crosses and carries them with great love; it is Mademoiselle Jaricot.”*

One writer, Father Charles Dollen, wrote in a biography about her: *“The theology of the Cross came alive for her... More and more she identified with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, loving, suffering, atoning.”*

Pauline died on January 9, 1862; the prayer found after her death, written in her own hand, ended with these words: *“Mary, O my Mother, I am Thine!”*

In 1963, 100 years after her death, Pope John XXIII signed the decree which proclaimed the virtues of Pauline Jaricot, declaring her “venerable.” The cause for her beatification and canonization continues.