

## Saint Catherine Labouré and the “Miraculous Medal”

Saint Catherine Labouré was born on May 2, 1806, in a quaint village in Burgundy, France. She was the ninth of eleven children. At the age of nine, her mother died, and in her sorrow, Saint Catherine turned to the only other mother she knew. Standing on her tiptoes to see the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in her home, Saint Catherine tearfully said, “Now, dear Blessed Mother, you will be my mother.”

Saint Catherine received her First Communion at the age of 11 on January 25, 1818. From that day on, she rose at 4 a.m. and walked several miles to assist at Mass, and to pray for grace and strength before the start of her day’s work. Her only desire was to give herself without reserve to the Lord. Never was the thought of the Lord far from her mind. By this time Saint Catherine's elder sister, Marie Louise, had left to join the *Daughters of Charity*, a religious order of Sisters founded by Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. The little girl who had always been obedient, now at the age of 11 had to direct and supervise the homestead. She made the bread, cooked, and did the housework, carried daily meals to the workers in the fields and cared well for the animals.

Once, when she was in the village church, she saw a vision of an old priest saying Mass. After Mass, the priest turned and beckoned to her with his finger, but she drew backwards, keeping her eyes on him. The vision moved to a sickroom where she saw the same priest, who said: "My child, it is a good deed to look after the sick; you run away from me now, but one day you will be glad to come to me. God has designs for you. Do not forget it!" At that time, of course, she did not understand the significance of the vision.

As was the European custom at the time, Saint Catherine's father invited various suitors to seek her hand in marriage and always her reply was: "I shall never marry; I have promised my life to Jesus Christ." She prayed, worked, and served the family well until she was twenty-two, when she asked her father's permission to become a *Daughter of Charity*. He flatly refused, and to distract her, sent her to Paris to work in a coffee shop run by her brother Charles. There, Saint Catherine observed their suffering and her decision to enter the

nursing order of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Daughters of Charity, was reinforced.

Her aunt, Jeanne Gontard, came to Saint Catherine's aid and enrolled her in the finishing school she directed at Chatillon. Since Saint Catherine was a country girl, she was miserable at this fashionable school. One day, while visiting the hospital of the Daughters of Charity, she noted a priest's picture on the wall. She asked the nun who he might be, and was told: "Our Holy Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul." This was the same priest Saint Catherine had seen in the vision. Later, after much persuasion from her Aunt Jeanne, her father granted permission for Saint Catherine to enter the convent. At the age of 24, she joined the Daughters of Charity at the convent on the Rue du Bac in Paris.

Shortly after her entrance into the convent, God was pleased to grant Saint Catherine several extraordinary visions. On three consecutive days she beheld the heart of Saint Vincent each time under a different aspect. At other times she beheld Our Divine Lord during Mass, when He would appear as He was described in the liturgy of the day. Also, upon entering the convent, the mother superior had given each of the novices a piece of cloth from the holy founder's surplice. Because of her extreme love, Saint Catherine split her piece down the middle, swallowing half and placing the rest of it in her prayer book. She earnestly prayed to Saint Vincent that she might one day, with her own eyes, see the Mother of God.

On the eve of July 19, 1830, the traditional feast day of Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Catherine was awakened from her sleep in the convent by a beautiful child saying: "***Sister Labouré, come to the chapel; the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you.***" As Saint Catherine approached the chapel, the door swung open. When Saint Catherine went to the chapel, she found it ablaze with lights. Quietly, she knelt at the Communion rail, and suddenly heard the rustle of a silk dress. The Blessed Virgin, in a blaze of glory, sat in a chair. Saint Catherine rose, then went over and knelt before her, resting her hands on the Virgin's lap, and felt the Virgin's arms around her, as she said: "***God wishes to charge you with a mission. You will be contradicted, but do not fear; you will have the grace to do what is necessary. Tell your spiritual director all that passes within you. Times are evil in France and in the world.***"

After this a pained expression crossed the Virgin's face. ***"Come to the foot of the altar. Graces will be shed on all, great and little, especially upon those who seek them. Another community of sisters will join the Rue du Bac community. The community will become large; you will have the protection of God and Saint Vincent; I will always have my eyes upon you."*** This prediction was fulfilled when, in 1849, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's community of sisters located in Emmitsburg, MD, were received into the Paris community. Mother Seton's sisters were the foundation of the Sisters of Charity located in the United States. Later, Saint Catherine would refer to that night as "the sweetest moment of my life."

Four months passed until Our Lady returned to Rue du Bac. Here are Saint Catherine's own words describing the apparition:

***"On the 27th of November 1830 ... while making my meditation in profound silence, I seemed to hear on the right hand side of the sanctuary something like the rustling of a silk dress. Glancing in that direction, I perceived the Blessed Virgin standing near Saint Joseph's picture. Her height was medium and her countenance, indescribably beautiful. She was dressed in a robe the color of the dawn, high-necked, with plain sleeves. Her head was covered with a white veil, which floated over Her shoulders down to her feet. Her feet rested upon a globe, or rather one half of a globe, for that was all that could be seen. Her hands which were on a level with her waist, held in an easy manner another globe, a figure of the world. Her eyes were raised to Heaven, and her countenance beamed with light as she offered the globe to Our Lord. As I was busy contemplating her, the Blessed Virgin fixed her eyes upon me, and a voice said in the depths of my heart: ' This globe which you see represents the whole world, especially France, and each person in particular.'***

***"There now formed around the Blessed Virgin a frame rather oval in shape on which were written in letters of gold these words: 'O Mary Conceived Without Sin Pray for Us Who Have Recourse to Thee.' Then a voice said to me: ' Have a medal struck upon this model. All those who wear it, when it is blessed, will receive great graces especially if they wear it round the neck. Those who repeat this prayer with devotion will be in a special manner under the protection of the Mother of God. Graces will be abundantly bestowed upon those who have confidence.'***

*"At the same instant, the oval frame seemed to turn around. Then I saw on the back of it the letter 'M', surmounted by a cross, with a crossbar beneath it, and under the monogram of the name of Mary, the Holy Hearts of Jesus and of His Mother; the first surrounded by a crown of thorns and the second transpierced by a sword. I was anxious to know what words must be placed on the reverse side of the medal and after many prayers, one day in meditation I seemed to hear a voice which said to me: 'The 'M' with the Cross and the two Hearts tell enough.' "*

Saint Catherine told only her Spiritual Director, Father John Marie Aladel about her visions and her mission. At first, he did not believe her, but, after two years, in January 1832, Father Aladel approached Archbishop Hyacinth de Quelen of Paris with the story of the events that had taken place at Rue du Bac. Our Blessed Mother had chosen well her time for the apparitions as the Bishop at that period was an ardent devotee of the Immaculate Conception. He said that the Medal was in complete conformity with the Church's doctrine on the role of Our Lady and had no objections to having the medals struck at once. The Bishop even asked to be sent some of the first. The first 2,000 medals were available on June 30, 1832, and disappeared quickly.

Almost immediately, the blessings that our Lady promised showered down on those who wore her medal, and soon all of France was clamoring for what the people referred to as the "Miraculous Medal." Use of the Medal spread from country to country, and, at the time of Saint Catherine's death in 1876, more than a billion medals had been made. Today, the Medal is still drawing down from God blessings for body and soul.

Her spiritual director, Father Jean Marie Aladel, kept her identity a secret. Right before her death, Saint Catherine told her superior that she was the Sister of the Miraculous Medal. During the 46 years after the Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Catherine, she was aware of the countless miracles God was working through the Medal, yet she chose to remain anonymous. That was the way Saint Catherine preferred it. She wanted nothing more than to humbly perform her daily duties and devote herself to the care of the sick and elderly.

On December 31, 1876, Saint Catherine left this earth for heaven, and after her passing, her superior broke the silence about the Sister who had seen and touched the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Saint Catherine was canonized by Pope Pius XII on July 27, 1947. Her feast day is November 28. She was declared a saint because of the heroic virtues she lived while doing her commonplace duties. A “Saint of Ordinary People,” Saint Catherine holds the secret of sanctity for us all. Due to the great care she gave the elderly during her life, she is known as the patroness saint of seniors. Because of her great humility, she is often called the *Saint of Silence*. When her body was exhumed for beatification 57 years after her death in 1933, it was found *as fresh as the day it was buried*. Even death respected Saint Catherine whose hands rested on the knees of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her incorrupt body can still be seen today at the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity in The Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, 140 Rue du Bac in Paris. Only ten of the original medals are known to exist today.

#### References:

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miraculous\\_Medal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miraculous_Medal)
2. <https://wiki.famvin.org/>
3. <https://miraculousmedal.org/>
4. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/vincentians>
5. [https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=266](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=266)
6. <https://www.sistersofcarmel.com/about-the-miraculous-medal/>