

July 28, 2023



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

Image by Christine Sponchia from Pixabay

A PILGRIM'S DISPATCH: AMAZING GRACE

By Julie Mussché

Maxim 63

"Do not consider unfortunate events as obstacles but as aids and cherish them, whatever they may be, as effects of the gentle and loving Providence of God your Father."

FR. JEAN-PIERRE MEADILLE, S.J.

Reflection

For 140 years following the initial foundation, the Sisters of St. Joseph grew in number and diversity of ministry. Caring for the poor, sick, and orphaned, helping people, particularly women, learn a trade -- whatever the need, the community adapted and responded as agents of God's love in the world.

The convulsion of events occurring with the French Revolution upended the

foundation of the Catholic Church in France and the life of religious congregations. Property was seized and repurposed, congregations were disbanded, and a government-sanctioned clergy was put in place. Non-conforming clergy and religious were imprisoned or martyred, and those that survived reluctantly resigned their ministries and went home to their families.

A betting person might have thought that would have been it for the Sisters of St. Joseph. Yet, the Spirit moves in mysterious ways, and in 1807, a harmonic convergence of relationships and needs inspired Cardinal Fesch, the Archbishop of Lyon, to invite Mother St. John Fontbonne to refound the Congregation. The last portion of our pilgrimage took place in Lyon, where our traveling community got to more deeply know and reflect on the extraordinary life and ministry of Mother St. John Fontbonne. We visited her home in Bas-en-Basset, as well as the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon. We also spent some time reflecting at her gravesite.

Lyon is a confluence city where two major waterways intersect, the Rhone and the Saone. It is an ancient site where commerce, learning and technology have evolved and grown because of accessibility and the consequential mix and exchange of cultures and ideas. We visited the Roman ruins of Lugdunum, where a large settlement advanced and where early Christians were martyred. Lyon also was an end point on the silk road, and there are vestiges of the silk industry in the silk shops that line one part of the city. Altogether, Lyon has been and is a pretty happening place.

What a likely place to reform and expand beyond one's wildest imagination the Little Design. Mother St. John Fontbonne was a formidable force -- and with her foresight and flexibility, responding to the needs of the time and the urgings of the Holy Spirit, is it any wonder that the Sisters of St. Joseph ended up in Orange, California? Amazing Grace!



The clay cast of the face of Mother St. John Fontbonne, from a statue by Sr. Mary Southard, CSJ
Photo by Julie Mussché

For Pondering

- Sometimes things happen that defy logical explanation. Has there been a time when you were just amazed by movements of Grace?
- How and in what ways have you been inspired by these moments?

For Prayer

We pray that the spirit, wisdom and courage of Mother St. John may inspire us for the sake of the mission and ministry to which we give ourselves each day. Let the Spirit guide our days on earth in the ways of holiness and justice, so that we may serve You in union with all people of good will.

May we be sure in faith, strong in hope, perfect in love. May we follow in her footsteps of courage, gentleness and compassion in our own day.... By our lives of healing, reconciling presence, may we draw all people to You, our God, and to unity among all people.

Amen.

**FROM THE PRAYER AT THE GRAVESITE,
CSJ HERITAGE PILGRIMAGE, EXPERIENCING OUR ROOTS**

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