

fall/winter 2009

Elan

little sisters of the poor

Saint Jeanne Jugan: a hero in love and service!

JEANNE JUGAN, our beloved foundress, is canonized a saint of the Catholic Church. We could not be more thrilled—A SAINT! Our joy echoes that of the Beatitudes, for in Jeanne Jugan we witness the blessedness of the poor in spirit, the merciful and the pure of heart! ... With our Blessed Lady we sing, “The Almighty has done great things for us and holy is his name!” ... And with Jesus we praise our heavenly Father “for having revealed to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom.”

These were the spiritual attitudes so dear to our foundress. St. Jeanne Jugan was a woman who lived with élan—with the enthusiasm and joyful determination that enable the friends of God to do great things for his glory. In 1839 her humble gesture of charity to an aged, blind and infirm woman gave birth to our Congregation.

Jeanne devoted her whole life to God and the aged poor. At a time

when the elderly need a friend more than ever, she is a Saint for old age! But what about the young? Does she have anything to say to the youth of today? We think so! After all, we were so struck by her spirit and her example that we have left everything to follow in her footsteps as Little Sisters of the Poor!

Sr. Maria Lourdes, one of four newly professed Little Sisters, captures the joy of her peers: “The canonization of Jeanne Jugan gives to the world a new hero in love and service. As a young person, the canonization fills me with a greater enthusiasm and desire to follow in Jeanne Jugan’s footsteps in the total gift of self to God and the service of the aged poor. May the canonization of Jeanne Jugan reaffirm in the hearts of young women the call of God to reach out in love to the elderly!”

Soon after his election in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI told young people

that in the lives of the saints, God has opened up the Gospel as if it were a large picture book. The saints, he said, show us how to be Christian, “how to live life as it should be lived.”

What does St. Jeanne Jugan teach us about how to live? If she were here today, she would probably give us much the same advice that she gave the young Little Sisters with whom she lived and whom she loved as a mother...

“Jesus is waiting for you”—take time to find him and to listen to his voice. Jeanne often counseled the young Little Sisters, “Jesus is waiting for you in the chapel, go and find him when you feel alone and helpless ... say to him, ‘You know what is happening, my dear Jesus...’” When you feel confused or discouraged, do you turn to Jesus as your best friend? His love is always there for you—even when you keep him waiting.



Little Sisters, novices and postulants celebrate Easter at St. Ann's Novitiate.



Never forget that the poor are Our Lord! – St. Jeanne Jugan

“Pray, you have need of grace.” Pray—what could be more simple? And yet, we often find all kinds of excuses not to pray! Jeanne Jugan was born during the French Revolution, when the open practice of the faith was forbidden on pain of death. But that didn’t stop her from praying and living a sacramental life insofar as she was able. Nor did Jeanne wait until she had *achieved* sanctity before she committed herself to living a serious spiritual life. Jeanne prayed and strove to unite herself to God’s will everyday—that is how she attained holiness!

“How beautiful it is to be poor ... to depend on God for everything.” Jeanne grew up poor and she always chose to live simply. Before leaving home at the age of twenty-five, she gave all she had that was pretty or fashionable to her sisters. She was going to live and work among the poor, and she wanted to be poor with them.

The double lure of materialism and popularity can be so strong for young people today—to possess the latest gadgets, achieve the right look and be seen with just the right people. How would Jeanne Jugan respond to these temptations? Some powerful words from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans come to mind: “Do

not conform yourselves to this age ... do not be haughty but associate with the lowly” (Rom 12).

“Choosing” Gospel poverty may seem like a luxury in today’s harsh economic environment, where many young people face hard choices as they struggle to set out on their own. Growing up in a poor, single-parent family, Jeanne Jugan certainly knew financial insecurity. Her approach to the challenges and uncertainties she faced? “Depend on God for everything!”

Refuse God nothing. At an early age Jeanne knew that God wanted her for himself, that he had chosen her for a work “not yet founded.” After the marriages of her two sisters, she left home definitively to begin a new life of her own. She set off on a new path—the path on which God was leading her—without knowing exactly where he was taking her or what he was asking of her. She had no idea that twenty-two years would pass before she would discover the vocation for which God had destined her.

Jeanne Jugan didn’t bargain with God, saying “I’ll do whatever you want, Lord, if you tell me all the details and give me a sure sign ... and time to get my act together, and...” No! Jeanne followed in the dark,

without knowing. God was calling her; she had an inner certitude and that was all she needed. Like Mary, Jeanne gave an unreserved “yes”—she refused God nothing. She put out into the deep with no assurances other than the small voice of God speaking in the depths of her heart.

“The poor are Our Lord.” After twenty-two years, many of us would have settled into our comfortable lives, dismissing the idea of “a work not yet founded” as just a youthful fantasy. But not Jeanne! She lived each day as a divine encounter, and so she was ready when Jesus Christ finally revealed himself to her in the person of an elderly woman who had no one to care for her. This was the same Jesus who had said, “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me.” Jeanne knew his voice and she took him at his word.

In speaking to young people about the saints, Pope Benedict XVI once said, “Inflamed with the love of Jesus, their lives became remarkable journeys of hope.... All offered an outstretched hand of hope to those they encountered along the way, often awakening in them a life of faith. By befriending the poor, the sick and the marginalized, and through the compelling witness that comes from walking humbly in the footsteps of Jesus, these people laid open the way of faith, hope and charity to countless individuals.”

These words of Benedict XVI summarize beautifully the life and work of St. Jeanne Jugan. With what words of advice might she leave us? “Let yourself be inflamed with the love of Jesus,” Jeanne would say, “Take time to offer an outstretched hand of hope, to befriend the poor and the marginalized in your world, whoever they may be. And whatever you do, **do everything through love!**”

All for you, my Jesus!

IT IS ALWAYS A JOY to welcome new members into our religious family! On July 18, 2009 four Little Sisters made their first profession at St. Ann's Novitiate in Queens Village, New York. During the summer many other young women made profession at our novitiates around the world. To view a video presentation on the ceremony at St. Ann's, visit <http://netny.net/currents/stories/profession/>.

A large group of Little Sisters from various countries pronounced their perpetual vows at our motherhouse in France on Sunday, August 9, 2009. In preparation for this definitive commitment each Little Sister spends a full year at the motherhouse, where St. Jeanne Jugan spent the last years of her life, in quiet and prayer.

Both profession ceremonies are preceded by an eight day retreat for our young Little Sisters.



Pictured is the moment of the profession of vows in each ceremony. The Sisters in white are those making first profession, while those in black represent the ceremony of perpetual profession at our motherhouse.



Vocation Prayer to St. Jeanne Jugan

Lord Jesus, we praise and thank you for the life and vocation of St. Jeanne Jugan. From an early age she knew that you wanted her for yourself, and she allowed herself to be formed in your image, gentle and humble of heart. In the school of St. John Eudes she learned to make her life a continuation of yours in prayer and charity. At the appointed time you revealed yourself to her in the person of an elderly woman in need. Jeanne responded to your divine invitation and gave herself totally to you in the service of the aged poor. Helped by the Brothers of St. John of God, she adopted the vow of hospitality and the practice of begging on behalf of the poor.

We turn to you, Good Shepherd and Lord of the Harvest: Through the intercession of St. Jeanne Jugan, give to your Church holy priests like St. John Eudes and fervent religious like St. John of God, who will give their lives for your glory and the salvation of souls. Inspire many young women to follow in the footsteps of St. Jeanne Jugan, living the Beatitudes in humility and simplicity of heart, in the joy of hospitality to the elderly.

We make this prayer through the intercession of Mary, your mother and ours, and of St. Joseph, patron of the Universal Church. Amen.

Our friends at FOCUS

The Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) has had a wonderful spiritual friendship with the Little Sisters of the Poor. We are inspired by their example, supported by their prayers and encouraged by them when we are able to serve beside them. I am thrilled to be able to congratulate them on the blessed occasion of the Canonization of their Foundress. Jeanne Jugan led a life marked by profound surrender to and confidence in God's providence. Her Little Sisters of the Poor serve a population who have been largely forgotten by the rest of the world, insisting on the intrinsic worth of the human person, no matter how great the suffering. In a culture marked by selfishness, a society which demands productivity and performance, Jeanne's Little Sisters of the Poor continue their Foundress' work: hidden, committed, and with great reverence for the presence of God Himself in each elderly person in their care.

Several of our FOCUS missionaries have been blessed with the opportunity to spend time working along side the Little Sisters, and have come away with a profound respect for the dignity of the human person.

Says Sarah Allibone, a veteran FOCUS staff member, "The Sisters treat the dying as though they are the suffering Jesus; they view the person as a kind of sacramental, a *type* of Eucharistic Adoration, and therefore they never leave the person unattended. They are constantly in prayer for the dying person."

This life of constant prayer and hidden service characterizes Jeanne's Order, and for this reason so attracts the hearts and minds of young women in love with the Gospel. One of our former students is currently discerning with the Little Sisters of the Poor with whom she served during her college years, attracted by their charism of hidden service and hospitality [another is in formation in the novitiate in Queens Village, NY].

Jeanne Jugan remained hidden during her own lifetime, denied credit for her life's work and unrecognized in her sanctity by all but a few close companions until years after her death. Undeterred by a lack of recognition, she served faithfully in response to the call which God had issued. It is my prayer that our missionaries—and all young people—are able to emulate the profound humility and ultimate trust in God demonstrated by this holy woman and by the Order she left behind.

Curtis A. Martin,
Founder and President of FOCUS



SAVE THE DATE...

Vocation Discernment Events

At St. Ann's Novitiate, Queens Village, NY ...

Epiphany Weekend

January 2–3, 2010

Spend time in prayer, service and fellowship with our novitiate community. (Friday evening arrivals possible).

Easter Triduum

April 1–4, 2010

Participate in the novitiate's celebration of these most sacred days in the life of the Church.

Contact: vocationsbrooklyn@littlesistersofthepoor.org

In Washington, D.C. ...

Blest Are You!

February 12–14, 2010

Spend time with our postulants and explore the spirituality of St. Jeanne Jugan in a retreat setting.

Contact: vocwashington@littlesistersofthepoor.org