

# *Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor to be Canonized Sunday, October 11*

At the time of her beatification in 1982, Pope John Paul II spoke eloquently of Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, emphasizing the timeliness of her spirituality and apostolic message. At a morning consistory on February 21, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI finalized the canonization date for this humble French woman who established an international religious family dedicated to the care of the needy poor. Jeanne Jugan will officially become a saint of the Roman Catholic Church on October 18, 2009.

With the population of older persons growing at an exponential rate as the Baby Boomer generation reaches retirement age, Jeanne's work and her message are even more relevant today than they were when John Paul II beatified her over a quarter century ago. As a patroness of the elderly, Jeanne Jugan is more than ever a saint for our time.

The Little Sisters of the Poor trace their roots to very humble beginnings in a small town in Brittany, France. On a cold winter's night in 1839 in the Breton village of Saint Servan, Jeanne Jugan recognized the presence of Jesus Christ in the person of an elderly, blind woman who found herself alone and in need. Jeanne carried her home and placed her in her own bed. In the days and weeks that followed, more old women arrived at her doorstep. Jeanne was also joined by a small group of young women who were willing to help with the care of her elderly guests. The Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Poor was thus



This is the only photo preserved of Jeanne Jugan. It dates from 1870-1871, and was taken by Gilbert Senn. Jeanne was nearly eighty.

born from a single, hidden act of hospitality. One hundred seventy years later, over 2,700 Little Sisters of the Poor care for more than 13,000 needy elderly persons in 202 family-like homes around the world. Thirty-two of those homes are located in North America.

Much has changed since 1839, but for the Little Sisters the essential has remained the same – to provide the needy elderly with a home where they may experience love and happiness as their earthly journey nears its completion. As the Little Sisters rejoice at the long awaited news of their foundress' canonization, they marvel at her prophetic intuition and the relevance of her message today. Far in advance of her time, Jeanne Jugan understood the needs and aspirations of the aged, especially their desire to be respected, esteemed

and loved, their longing to feel useful and their fear of loneliness and dependence. Despite extraordinary advances in society, older persons today experience the same desires and fears. Jeanne's vision is all the more timely in the face of the threats posed today by the culture of death – euthanasia, assisted suicide and the marginalization of those who are no longer useful to society. The Little Sisters feel that the elderly need a champion more today than ever. In Saint Jeanne Jugan they will have a faithful friend and intercessor.

We give thanks that Jeanne Jugan will be venerated by the Church as a saint. In addition to the celebration in Rome, we will be announcing the dates for local celebrations to mark this event with our many friends and benefactors throughout the Gulf Coast.