

OFFICE OF THE POSTULATOR GENERAL OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES



BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE
of the Venerable Servants of God

LOUIS MARTIN
(August 22, 1823 - July 29, 1894)

and

ZÉLIE MARTIN
(December 23, 1831 - August 28, 1877)

Lay persons, spouses, and parents
"without equal, worthy of Heaven,
a holy soil impregnated with a virginal perfume"
(St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus)

for the solemn Beatification presided over by His Eminence

JOSE CARDINAL SARAIVA MARTINS
Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints

Representative of the Holy Father

BENEDICT XVI

Basilica of Lisieux, October 19, 2008
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World Day of Missions

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF THE VENERABLE SERVANTS OF GOD LOUIS-JOSEPH-ALOYS-STANISLAS MARTIN

Louis-Joseph-Aloys-Stanislas Martin was born in Bordeaux the 22nd of August 1823. He was the third of five children of Pierre-François Martin, a captain in the army, and of Marie-Anne-Fanny Boureau, both great Christians with a lively faith. Louis was baptised on August 28, 1823.

He was seven years old when, in 1830, Captain Martin's family moved to Alençon, where Louis continued and perfected his human and Christian training/education with the Brothers of Christian Schools.

At the end of his studies, he didn't turn toward a military career like his father, but chose the profession of watchmaker. A man of faith and of prayer, for a time Louis wished to enter the priesthood.

In 1845, he went to the Swiss Alps to enter the Congregation Hospitalière du Grand-Saint-Bernard, where his first task was to learn Latin. He tried to learn it but in the end gave up. Having finished his watchmaking studies in Rennes and Strasbourg, he returned to Alençon, where he dedicated himself to his work as a watchmaker-jeweler with diligence and honesty.

Louis was the perfect kind of father figure depicted in Scripture; just, upright, loving God and serving Him without deviating.

AZÉLIE-MARIE GUÉRIN

Azélie-Marie Guérin was born at Gandelain, near Saint-Denis-sur-Sarthon, the 23rd of December 1831. She was baptised the next day, on Christmas Eve. She was the second of three children of Isidore Guérin, soldier, and of Louise-Jeanne Macé. This family, which knew the persecutions of the Jacobins, kept a deep Catholic faith during the years of the Revolution.

When her father retired in 1844, the family moved to Alençon. Zélie studied under the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. She received training that made her a very skilful lacemaker. She made the famous *point d'Alençon*, and she was in charge of sales for her own lacemaking business.

Like her sister Marie-Louise, now a religious at the Visitation convent in Le Mans, Zélie wanted to consecrate herself to the Lord. After a discussion with the Superior of the Daughters of Charity at the Alençon hospital, she understood that it was not the will of God.

Zélie was an excellent woman; lively, a hard worker, committed to loving God with all her heart.

MEETING, ENGAGEMENT, AND MARRIAGE

A providential meeting united these two young people thirsty for the absolute. One day, as Zélie crossed the Saint-Léonard Bridge, she passed a young man with a noble face, a reserved air, and a demeanor filled with an impressive dignity. At that very moment, an interior voice whispers in secret, "This is he whom I have prepared for you."

The identity of the passer-by was soon revealed. She came to know Louis Martin. The two young people quickly came to appreciate and love each other. Their spiritual harmony established itself so quickly that a religious engagement sealed their mutual commitment without delay. They did not see their marriage as a normal arrangement between two middle-class families of Alençon, but as a total opening to the will of God. From the beginning, the betrothed couple place their love under the protection of God, who, in their union, would always be "the first served." Their marriage was celebrated at midnight on July 13th, 1858 in the parish of Notre-Dame d'Alençon.

THE MARTIN HOUSEHOLD

Louis and his spouse decide at the beginning of their marriage to maintain perfect chastity. This decision is not a withdrawal into a mutual egoism. Shortly thereafter, they welcome into their home a five-year-old boy whose widowed father was crushed by the burden of raising eleven children.

However, Divine Wisdom, which leads all with "strength and gentleness," has other views for this couple, and at the end of ten months, on the advice of a priest friend, they change their minds. They now desire to have many children in order to raise them and offer them to the Lord.

Their lifestyle is that of the middle class of the period, but was strongly based on the evangelical principles that were inculcated in them by their respective families. In their home, there is no worship of work, or of riches or success.

The daily life of the couple, lived in a perfect harmony of mind and heart, put in the forefront a loving observance of the instruction of the Church: daily Mass, confession, frequent Communion, and the constant practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This fidelity to God opens the Martin spouses to the exercise of a charity without limits towards others: discreet alms to needy families, assistance to the sick and dying, intervention together to hospitalize a poor beggar. All these services are rendered in the greatest simplicity and discretion.

They actively take part in the Catholic movement of their time, living, as lay persons, the Christian spirituality in professional activity and in giving an example of reciprocal love in their marriage and their family.

They go beyond the limits of their house and parish. They have an exemplary and generous missionary spirit, enrolling their children in the Work of Childhood Missions,

making large annual donations to the Propagation of the Faith, and participating in the construction of a chapel and a seminary in Canada.

The life of this couple is not worldly; it doesn't, however, lack relationships. Leisure activities are those of the period: walks, feasts, diversions such as fishing, billiards, and travel. Monsieur Martin likes not only silence and contemplation but also company. He diligently attends the Circle Vital Romet, which radiates a social Christianity close to the ideas of Frédéric Ozanam. Louis shows himself to be very faithful in friendship and also towards persons who don't share his faith.

The union of Louis and Zélie is blessed by the birth of nine children. The work of both spouses obtains for them a certain wealth, but their family life is not without trials. In this time of high infant mortality, they lose four children at an early age, at a time when they want to have a son to become a priest. But neither the bereavement nor the trials weaken their confidence in the goodness of God's plans, and they abandon themselves with love to his will.

The education of the children is at the same joyful, tender, and demanding. Very early, Zélie teaches them the morning offering of their hearts to the good God, the simple acceptance of daily difficulties "to please Jesus." An indelible mark that is the basis of the little way taught by the most celebrated of their children: Thérèse. One cannot conceive of the growth in holiness of Thérèse and the religious vocations of her sisters independent of the spiritual life of M. and Mme. Martin, at the heart of their vocation to family life.

THE DEATH OF MADAME MARTIN

Towards the end of 1876, an old growth in her breast returns. Discovered too late, the cancer is inoperable. Despite the disappointment over a pilgrimage to Lourdes that brings no improvement for her health nor relief from the intolerable suffering she endured, Zélie maintains confidence in God through all her trials and encourages her family, and above all her husband: "I want you to not torment yourself too much [over my death]; I want you to resign yourself to the will of God." At half past midnight on Tuesday, August 28th, 1877, she dies in Alençon. Louis is left with five children: Marie, Pauline, Léonie, Céline, and Thérèse, who is four and a half years old.

THE MOVE TO LISIEUX

Louis consults with his elder daughters: "I ask your advice, my children, as it's only for you that I make this sacrifice, I wouldn't wish to impose one on you," and, without thinking of himself, he decided to move to Lisieux to live close to the family of his brother-in-law, Isidore Guérin, and thus to ensure a better future for his children.

Life at the Buissonnets, the new house in Lisieux, is more austere and withdrawn than at Alençon. But the most admirable work of this father, an exemplary educator, is the offering to God of all his daughters and then of himself. In his unshakable submission to

the will of God, like Abraham, he places no obstacle to these vocations and considers the offering of his children to the Lord as a very special grace granted to his family. Shortly after the entry of Thérèse into the Carmel of Lisieux, during a visit to the parlor of the monastery, Louis tells his daughters that at the Church of Notre-Dame of Alençon (May 1888), as he was reconsidering his life, he had said: 'My God, I am too happy. It's not possible to go to Heaven like that. I want to suffer something for you.' "And," said he, "I offered myself." Louis doesn't dare pronounce the word "victim," but his daughters understand this. This confidence really strikes Thérèse, who, several years later, offered herself as a victim to the Merciful Love of God (June 9, 1895).

THE DEATH OF MONSIEUR MARTIN

The last years of the life of the patriarch, as he is affectionately called by those close to him, are marked by several health problems. He knows the humiliation of illness: a cerebral arteriosclerosis with a long hospitalization at the Bon Sauveur in Caen in 1889, where he filled those around him with admiration and respect. One day Louis said to the doctor, "I have always been accustomed to commanding, and I see myself reduced to obeying: it's hard. But I know why the good God has given me this trial: I had never had any humiliation in my life, I needed one."¹ Returning to Lisieux in May 1892, from then on paralyzed and almost unable to speak, he dies peacefully at 8:15 a.m. on Sunday, July 29, 1894, at the château of his brother-in-law Isidore Guérin, near Evreux.

THE REPUTATION FOR HOLINESS OF LOUIS AND ZÉLIE MARTIN

Louis and Zélie's reputation for holiness is already strong during their lifetime and immediately after their death, but that did not go beyond the family circle or the close friends who knew them well. The publication of *Story of a Soul*, the autobiography of Thérèse, contributes to making that reputation known everywhere in the world.

Their processes of beatification are called for by bishops, priests and the ordinary faithful of the entire world from 1925 on. But the opening of their processes have to wait many years. Finally, Mgr. Andre Jacquemin, Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, announces the opening of the process concerning the virtues of Louis Martin on March 22, 1957. Shortly after, on October 10th, 1957, Mgr. Pasquet, Bishop of Sées, the diocese where Zélie died, opens a similar procedure. The two Causes are adopted by the Office of the Postulator General of the Discalced Carmelites.

Sister Geneviève of the Holy-Face (Céline), last living daughter of the Martins, has the joy of testifying at the Process of her parents. She declares: "My father was a 'personality'; my mother was a 'personality'; each one had a unique disposition. Neither one nor the other was non-descript. Different temperaments, but perfectly well-matched, each one completing, in perfect harmony, the deficiencies of the other, always corrected by virtue. When my sister, Mother Agnès of Jesus, and I were speaking together of our pious parents, we agreed that each was every bit the equal of the other in meriting the

¹ Summarium Documentorum XVIII: p. 785.

honors of the altar."²

The two Processes concerning the virtues were sent to Rome in 1959 and 1960 to be discussed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. On March 17, 1971, by decree of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Causes of Louis and Zélie Martin were sent to the Historical Office for lack of witnesses *de visu*. In the meantime, Pope Paul VI, for the first time in the history of the Church, decides that the two Causes went hand in hand, as it is a question of two spouses. On March 26, 1994, the Servant of God, John Paul II, declares the individual heroic virtues of the Martin spouses.

At the request of the Office of the Postulator General of the Discalced Carmelites, the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the diocese of Milan examines, from April 16th to June 10th, 2003, the miraculous healing of newborn Pietro Schilirò, born May 25th, 2002 in Monza and suffering from a serious condition following the inhalation of meconium, which led to serious pulmonary complications. The unexpected healing came about on June 29, 2002, after a novena of prayers to the Venerable Servants of God Louis and Zélie. The acts of the process *Super Miro* are given to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome on July 7, 2003.

On January 17, 2008, the Medical Commission of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declares inexplicable by science and general knowledge the healing of Pietro Schilirò, and, on the following March 17th, the Commission of Theologians recognizes that the healing of Pietro Schilirò is attributable to divine intervention.

Last July 3rd, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, approved the miracle of Pietro's healing, accomplished by God through the intercession of the Venerable Servants of God, Louis and Zélie, "incomparable" parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, and he set today, October 19th, as the date of their Beatification.

Read in Lisieux by
Father Antonio of the Mother of God, O.C.D., Vice Postulator

Basilica of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, October 19, 2008

translated by Susan Ehlert for *thereseoflisieux.org*

² Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face, *Portrait moral de mon père* (Moral portrait of my father), Summarium Documentorum, p.1187.