

THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL

Sister Catherine Labouré, Daughter of Charity.

It was a humble daughter of Saint Vincent of Paul who was chosen by the Immaculate Virgin to reveal to the whole catholic world the wonderful devotion of the medal, called since by common consent the Miraculous Medal on account of the numerous miracles obtained by the instrumentality of this simple token.

Sister Catherine, formerly Zoe Labouré, whose life though unknown to the world was precious before God, was born on the 2nd of May 1806 at Fain-les-Moutiers, a hamlet of the Côte-d'Or, in the parish of Moutiers-Saint-jean.

Her parents were good Christians and industrious peasants who lived honourably in cultivating their own land, and enjoying the ease which activity for work and simplicity of rustic life give to country people. God blessed their marriage in granting them a numerous family: seven sons and three daughters.

Zoe was hardly eight years old, when her mother died. Already capable of feeling the weight of this sacrifice, it seemed to her that the Blessed Virgin wished to be her only Mother.

When about twelve years of age she made her first communion in the church of Moutiers-Saint Jean with a pure and fervent heart. From that time, her only desire was to give herself without reserve to that Dear Lord who had taken up His abode for the first time in her heart.

Her eldest sister having left home to enter the Sisters of Charity, Zoe was obliged to take in hand the management of the housekeeping. She cooked for the family with the help of a servant who assisted her in the rough work. In harvest time, she carried the food to the reapers and never refused any painful task.

One of her favourite occupations was the care and direction of the pigeon-house, which contained always between seven or eight hundred pigeons. She cared for them so well that every one of them knew her. At times, when she appeared they came flying about her in the form of a crown. It was, as her sister said, the most charming sight to behold: innocence attracting gentle doves, the symbol of purity.

To a spotless heart, Zoe joined the mortifications of a penitential life, and in spite of the fatigues of her daily work, she had contracted from her earliest childhood the habit of fasting on Fridays and Saturdays. Pious and recollected in the parish church where she attended mass daily at an early hour, she could be seen kneeling there on the cold pavement, even in winter.

However her laborious country life did not make her forget her vocation. Having received several proposals of marriage, her invariable answer was that she had plighted her troth long ago to her Dear Saviour, she desired Him only for her spouse

The choice she had made seems to have been decided by a dream she had, in which she perceived clearly the action of God and a preparation to her future vocation.

She dreamed she was in the village church, and in the chapel dedicated to the holy souls in Purgatory. She saw a very old priest, of venerable and remarkable aspect, vesting, and then saying mass. She assisted with devotion and deeply impressed by the presence of this unknown priest. At the end of the mass, the priest called her; but she felt too frightened and drew backwards, keeping her eyes the whole time fixed on him.

Still dreaming, she left the church and entered into one of the houses of the village to visit a sick person. There, the aged priest stood before her again, and said these words: "My daughter, it is well to take care of the sick; you shrink from me now, but one day you will be happy to come to me. God has great designs in your regard. Do not forget it." Still amazed and fearful the young girl withdrew. It seemed to her as she left the house and walked away, that her feet did not touch the ground, and, at the moment she entered her father's house, she awoke and found that all had been but a dream.

She was then eighteen years old and hardly knew how to read or write. She felt that this would be an obstacle to her admission into community, and she asked her father to let her stay some time with her sister-in-law who was a schoolmistress at Chatillon-sur-Seine, in order to take lessons from her. He was so much afraid of losing her that it was only with great reluctance he consented to her departure.

Her mind was deeply impressed with the vision that she had had, she spoke of it to the parish priest of Chatillon,

who said that in his opinion the aged priest she saw in her dream was Saint Vincent, who was calling her to be a Daughter of Charity.

Her sister-in-law took her one day to the Sisters at Chatillon, and on entering the parlour, Zoe was struck by the sight of a portrait which was an exact likeness of the priest who had said to her in the dream: "My daughter, you shrink from me now, but one day you will be happy to come to me. God has great designs in your regard. Do not forget it." She asked immediately whose portrait it was, and on hearing it was Saint Vincent's, the mystery was cleared up: she understood at once, that she was to have him for her father.

This occurrence naturally did not diminish her desires. Her stay at Chatillon was short, but it was not till the beginning of the year 1830 that she succeeded in triumphing over the resistance of her father, and entered the Sisters of Charity at Chatillon as a postulant.

Zoe Labouré was very happy to see herself at the end of a hard trial which had lasted nearly two years. On the 21st of April 1830, she reached the long desired haven of the seminary or novitiate of the Daughters of Charity.

Vision of the Heart of Saint Vincent of Paul.

Sister Labouré was overjoyed at finding herself in the spiritual home she had so longed for, and fervent were her prayers during her stay at the Mother house and great her gratitude for being entirely engaged in the service of God. Three days before the celebrated ceremony of the translation of Saint Vincent of Paul's relics from the Archbishop's residence to the Lazarist's chapel, she was favoured with a prophetic vision. The same Lord who had called Vincent from tending his father's flock to the honour of co-operating in the designs of his infinite charity, was going also to confide to a poor simple girl the secrets of His mercy.

We shall let her tell in her own simple language her impressions of this touching ceremony: "I arrived on the Wednesday before the translation of Saint Vincent of Paul's relics. I felt so happy and delighted in assisting at this great celebration that I seemed to be no longer on earth. I asked Saint Vincent to obtain for me all the graces I wanted, and prayed for his two families, and for France which seemed to me in great need of prayers. Lastly, I begged Saint Vincent to teach me what I ought to ask for, and how to do so with a strong faith."

She was coming back from Saint-Lazare, her soul full of these thoughts, and went into the chapel of the Mother-house, and there was favoured with a vision, which she relates in the following terms:

"I had the consolation of seeing Saint Vincent's heart above the little shrine where the relics were exposed.

"It appeared to me three consecutive days, each time in a different manner:

"In the first vision, the heart was of a whitish flesh colour, I understood that this meant peace, tranquillity and concord. The second time, it was of a fiery hue, the symbol of the charity which was to revive and extend all over the world.

"Lastly, I saw it of a dark red colour, which rendered my heart sad; I began to fear and felt as if that sadness had something to do with a change of Government."

(Indeed, it was very strange, that Sister Labouré should have at that time political sympathies.)

She heard an interior voice which said: "The heart of Saint Vincent is profoundly grieved at the thought of the great calamities which are about to overwhelm France."

On the last day of the octave, once again, she saw the same heart, and it was then of a light red colour. The interior voice said again: "The heart of Saint Vincent is rather comforted, because he has obtained from God through the intercession of Mary, that his two families should not perish in the midst of these calamities, and that God would make use of them to revive faith in France."

In order to quiet her mind, she spoke of these visions to her confessor, M. Aladel, a very holy priest, a true son of Saint Vincent of Paul and a man of sound judgment, great experience and prudence.

He induced her to give up these thoughts. Sister Labouré obeyed, and nothing in her exterior ever attracted the least notice from her companions.

During the whole time of her seminary, this humble Sister enjoyed the sensible presence of Our Lord in the Sacrament of His Love: "Only, said she, when a doubt crossed my mind, did I cease to behold Him, because I wished to scrutinize what I saw, from the fear of being deceived.

M. Aladel began to believe that Catherine was gifted with a prophetic spirit, and on seeing the accomplishment of several facts she had announced to him, he felt inclined to give credit to other communications still more marvellous that we are going to relate.

The first apparition of the Blessed Virgin. Sister Catherine already favoured with heavenly manifestations wished ardently, in her artless simplicity, to see the Blessed Virgin. To obtain this favour, she prayed fervently to her good Angel, to Saint Vincent and to the Blessed Virgin herself.

On the 18th of July 1830, the eve of Saint Vincent of Paul's feast, the Directress of the Seminary gave an instruction on devotion to our Blessed Lady and to the Saints, which still further increased the young Sister's desire. In this state of mind she retired to rest that night, recommending herself to Saint Vincent, with a firm confidence that her prayers would be granted. The same night at half-past eleven, she heard someone calling her three times by her name. Being thoroughly wakened, she drew her bed curtain on the side from which the voice seemed to proceed: What did she see? A beautiful fair-haired child, about five years old, dressed in white, shedding forth a heavenly light which illuminated everything. In a sweet tone of voice, he said: "Come to the Chapel, the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you." —But Sister Labouré who was sleeping in a large dormitory, thought to herself:

"If I get up, I shall be heard and discovered. "Do not be afraid," said the child, answering her thought, "It is half-past eleven, every body is asleep, and I shall accompany you."

At these words, unable to refuse the invitation of the amiable guide that had been sent to her, Sister Labouré rose, dressed herself hastily and followed the child, who walked the whole time on her left diffusing beams of brightness wherever he passed; Her surprise was great in finding that on the passages all the lamps were lighted and when they arrived at the door of the Chapel, it opened at once when the child touched it.

The altar was also illuminated, putting her in mind, she said, of Midnight Mass.

The child conducted her to the altar, where she knelt down, whilst her heavenly guide entered into the sanctuary, standing on the left side. The time seemed to her very long. At last, at midnight, the child said: "The Blessed Virgin is coming; here she is." At the same moment, Sister Labouré heard distinctly a slight noise at the right side of the Altar, like the rustling of a silk dress. A few minutes later a beautiful lady came in and seated herself at the left side of the Sanctuary, in the place usually occupied by the Director of the Community. The seat, attitude, and costume, that is to say a yellowish dress with a blue cloak, recalled to her mind those in the picture of Saint Ann hanging just above that seat. But it was not the same face. Sister Labouré was there gazing on the figure struggling inwardly between hope and doubt.

Suddenly, the little child spoke but assuming the voice of a man, he asked her whether the Queen of Heaven was not free to appear to a poor creature under whatever form she chose.

Immediately all hesitation ceased and Sister Labouré following the feelings of her heart, flew to the feet of the Blessed Virgin as a child to its mother, she knelt down and clasping her hands placed them on her knees.

We shall let her relate in her simple words what then took place: "I felt at that instant the sweetest emotion of my life; words cannot express it. The Blessed Virgin explained to me how I ought to act in time of trials, and showing me with her left hand the Altar, she told me to go there and open my heart, adding that I would receive there all the consolations I needed. She then added: *"My Child, I wish to charge you with a mission. You will have much to suffer in the performance of it, but the thought that it will be for the glory of God will enable you to overcome all difficulties. You will be contradicted, but, fear nothing, grace will be given to you; tell every thing that takes place within you with simplicity and confidence. You will see certain things, you will be inspired in your prayers; give an account of every thing to him who has the care of your soul."*

"I then asked the Blessed Virgin to explain the meaning of the things that had been shown to me."

She answered: *"My child, the times are very evil, misfortunes are going to overwhelm France; royalty will be overthrown; the whole world will be disturbed by all sorts of calamities."* (The Blessed Virgin looked very sad while saying this) *"But come,"* she added, *"to the foot of this altar. There graces will be showered on you, and on all those who shall ask for them, rich or poor."*

"A time will come when the danger will be great; it will seem as if all were lost; then I will be with you, have confidence, you will feel that I am present and that God and Saint Vincent are protecting the two communities: (The

Priests of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity.) *Have confidence, do not be discouraged, I will be with you.*"

"There will be victims in other communities. (The Blessed Virgin had tears in her eyes in saying this.)

"There will be victims in the clergy of Paris. The Archbishop will die. (So saying, she wept.) My child, she continued, the cross will be despised and trodden under foot, Our Lord's side will be opened again; the streets will run with blood; the whole world will be in sorrow." (Again the Blessed Virgin's eyes filled with tears and grief was pictured on her face.) At these words, Sister Catherine said to herself: "When will these things happen?" And an interior light distinctly indicated to her that it would be in forty years from that time, thus announcing the sad event of 1870-1871.

Our Blessed Lady charged her again to transmit to her director several recommendations regarding the community of the sisters of Charity and to tell him that he would be one day in a position which would enable him to execute her commands. Then she continued: —"But great misfortunes will happen, the danger will be great, but do not be afraid, she again said, the protection of God is always there in a special manner and Saint Vincent will take care of you. (The Blessed Virgin looked sad the whole time.) I will be with you myself; my eyes are always upon you, I will grant you many graces."

The Sister added: "Our Blessed Lady said: Graces will be bestowed upon all those who ask for them ; but people must pray... a great deal.

"I cannot tell," she goes on to say, "how long I remained near the Blessed Virgin, all I know is that after speaking to her a long time, she went away vanishing like a shadow."

When Sister Catherine rose from her knees, she found the child in the place where she had left him when going up to the Blessed Virgin. He said to her: "She is gone!" And placing himself again on her left, he conducted her back to the dormitory in the same way that he had brought her, shedding around him a heavenly light.

"I thought, continued the Sister, that this child was my Guardian Angel, because I had often asked him to obtain me the favour of seeing Our Blessed Lady..."

In returning to bed, I heard the clock strike two and I could not sleep again."

Second apparition of the Blessed Virgin.

What has just been related, was only a part of Sister Catherine's mission; or rather a preparation for the more important communication that was going to be given her, as a pledge of Our Lady's tenderness for all men.

Towards the end of November in this same year 1830, Sister Catherine gave to her director M. Aladel an account of another supernatural manifestation which she had: This time, Our Blessed Virgin did not appear as an afflicted mother grieving at the thought of the sorrows weighing upon her children, weeping over the victims selected among her best friends. She shone as the rainbow after the storm bright as the star of the ocean in the midst of the tempest guiding home the wandering sailor; Powerful as the Virgin Queen bringing forth the promises of blessings, salvation and peace.

Here is the narration written by Sister Catherine's own hand: "On the 27th of November 1830, which was a Saturday, and the eve of the first Sunday of Advent, at half-past five in the evening whilst making my meditation in the chapel, I heard on the right side of the sanctuary, a noise like the rustling of a silk dress. All at once, I perceived Our Blessed Lady standing near the picture of Saint Joseph; she was of a middle size and her face indescribably beautiful. She was dressed in a gold coloured gown, very plain high necked, with flat sleeves. Her head was covered with a white veil which floated over her shoulders down to her feet. Her hair was parted, and confined in a sort of fillet trimmed with narrow lace. Her face was not concealed. Her feet rested on a globe, or rather one half of a globe, for this 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 while she offered the globe to Our Lord.

"Suddenly her fingers were covered with rings (1) and beautiful precious stones. Rays of dazzling light darted out (1) *On each finger the Blessed Virgin wore three rings of different sizes; the largest was near her hand; a lesser one in the middle, and then a smaller one; each ring was covered with precious stones: the largest ones shot forth beams of dazzling light whilst the smaller ones were not so bright.*

of them, and the whole of her figure was enveloped in such radiance that her feet and dress were no longer visible.

"The jewels varied in size as did also the rays of light they threw out." Sister Catherine declared herself unable to say what she felt and learned during that short space of time.

"As I was busy contemplating her, the Blessed Virgin fixed her eyes upon me, and I heard an interior voice which said: *"This globe which you see represents the world especially France, and each person in particular."*

"It is beyond my power to give an idea of the beauty and magnificence of the rays. The Blessed Virgin added: *"Behold the symbol of the graces which I will bestow upon all those who ask for them;"* this made me understand how generous she is towards those who pray to her and how many graces she grants to those who ask her for them with confidence!... At this moment, I cannot say if I were alive or not, all I know is I was happy!

"After a while, a sort of oval frame surrounded the Blessed Virgin on which were written in gold letters these words:

"O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

"Then a voice said to me: *"Get a medal struck after this model; those who wear it when it is blessed will receive great graces, especially if they wear it round their neck; Graces will be abundant for those who have confidence."*

"At the same instant the oval frame seemed to turn round. 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."

No mention is made in Sister Catherine's notes of the twelve stars which surrounded the monogram of Mary and the two Hearts. However they are always figured on the back of the Medal. It is certain that this detail was given by the Sister at the time of the apparitions.

Other notes, written likewise by Sister Catherine complete this narration, adding that some of the precious stones emitted no light and as she was wondering at it, an interior voice. said that these rayless jewels were a figure of the graces that were lost by neglect in asking for them.

Third apparition of the Blessed Virgin.

M. Aladel received with indifference, even with severity the communications of his penitent; he even forbade her to believe in them.

She obeyed him as far as she could but notwithstanding all the efforts she made, nothing could efface from her memory all that she had seen and great was her pleasure to think of it at Our Lady's feet. She felt sure that she would see her again.

Her hope was realized in the course of December: at the afternoon meditation, she had another vision exactly similar, except for one remarkable circumstance, to that of the 27th of November, Our Blessed Lady, instead of remaining near the picture of Saint Joseph, passed before it and stood at the back of the Tabernacle, a little above it, in the place which her statue now occupies.

According to Sister Labouré, the Blessed Virgin appeared to be about forty years old. The apparition was encircled as before, above the level of the hands, by the invocation traced in gold letters:

"O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

She saw again at the back of this oval the monogram of the Blessed Virgin surmounted by the Cross and beneath it the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary.

Sister Labouré received again the order to get a medal struck according to the model. Here she ends the account of the vision by these words:

"To say what I learnt at the moment when the Blessed Virgin offered the globe to Our Lord, would be impossible, as it would also be to describe what I felt whilst gazing upon her! "I heard a voice at the bottom of my heart saying: "These rays are the symbol of the graces that Our Blessed Lady obtains for those who ask for them." And then, contrary, to her usual practice, Catherine, who was little given to indulge in exclamations, gave vent, to a burst of joyful anticipation at the idea of the homage which would be rendered to the Blessed Virgin:

"Oh! how beautiful it will be to hear Mary proclaimed Queen of the Universe, and particularly of France! "The children will cry out: "She is the Queen of each one of us."

When Sister Labouré related this new apparition of the Medal to M. Aladel, he asked her if she had seen anything, written on the back of the oval such as she had seen around the figure of the Immaculate Virgin.

She answered in the negative. "Well! said he, ask Our Blessed Lady what must be written on the other side."

The young Sister obeyed, and after praying for a long time; one day during meditation, she heard a voice saying: "The M and the two Hearts speak plainly enough."

No mention is made of the serpent, but as it has been included in the pictures representing the apparition, there is every reason to believe that she gave directions to that effect by word of mouth, and all doubt on the point is set at rest by what she said to her Superioress in the last year of her life.

.A space of forty-five years had already elapsed since the apparitions, M. Aladel was dead; Sister Catherine had no longer the same repugnance to speak of what had been her lifelong secret. She felt, on the contrary, impelled to reveal to one of her Superiors all that the Blessed Virgin had entrusted her with in order that he might make use of these heavenly communications to reanimate the devotion to the Immaculate Conception. When she had done so her soul seemed unburdened and she was ready to die in peace.

To realize her dearest wishes, the Superioress to whom she had revealed her secret ordered that a statue of the Immaculate Conception holding the globe should be made.

When asked if the serpent was to be represented under the feet of the Blessed Virgin, she answered that in the apparition there was a serpent of a greenish colour, with yellow spots.

She also recommended that the globe placed in Her hands should be surmounted by a small cross; that her features were not to bear a youthful expression but be impressed with a sad look which disappeared during the vision, when her face became enkindled with the flame of divine love at the moment of her prayer.

The attempt succeeded in a satisfactory manner but the shade of the dress, the heavenly brightness of the countenance and the light of the rays, all seemed to be far from reaching the ideal of the beauty described in the apparition. Also when the good Sister was called to give her opinion, her answer revealed that no human art could retrace the celestial model she had described.

It is strange to say that M. Aladel had vainly made the same attempt thirty-five years before, the model chosen was of a smaller size, and represented the vision of the Immaculate Virgin holding the globe, etc, just as Sister Catherine had described it.

The notes containing the directions given by M. Aladel were kept and found to be exactly the same as those of the Sister excepting what concerned the blue cloak. But M. Aladel was greatly dissatisfied with this attempt which gave but a confused idea of the apparition and of all its details. Finally, he resolved to adopt the model already known.

It was difficult indeed to realize the wondrous beauty, the sweet expression that shone in the majestic attitude of the Virgin, represented with her eyes beaming with love, her blessed hands loaded with treasures of mercy strewing them as a fond mother on all her children.

Marvellous propagation of the Medal called the Miraculous Medal

ON ACCOUNT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GRACES AND CURES OBTAINED BY ITS MEANS

Catherine Labouré was eagerly pressed to get the medal struck conformably to what Our Blessed Lady had asked, in honour of her Immaculate Conception but she found great difficulties on account of her wise Director, who wished to take every possible precaution against deception and who only yielded to the pressing solicitations of his penitent after having taken the advice of competent persons and received the approval of Mgr de Quélen, archbishop of Paris.

On the 30th Of June 1832, the first medals were struck. The engraving bore the image of Mary Immaculate crushing the head of the serpent under her feet. Rays of light issued from her outstretched hands and fell on the terrestrial globe on which she stood. This design was surrounded by these words: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

On the other side of the medal, was the monogram of Mary surmounted by a cross and underneath it two Hearts, the one encompassed with a crown of thorns and the other transpierced by a sword.

In the meantime all these events soon showed the heavenly origin of Sister Catherine's mission. As soon as the new medal was struck it was distributed to numberless persons who were eager to wear it as a safeguard against evil and as

a proof of their love towards the Holy Virgin.

The Miraculous Medal quickly spread all over France and by the encouragement of the Bishops, it soon made its way through the whole world, and has since been looked upon as a means destined by Providence to increase devotion to the Blessed Virgin to obtain bodily relief and also as a powerful remedy against all the evils of the soul.

Thus is the glory of Mary proclaimed in the fourth lesson of the office of the feast instituted by the Holy See in honour of the Manifestation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary under the title of the Miraculous Medal.

Of all the facts recorded in the fifth lesson of the same office, that relating to the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne is worthy of notice.

It happened on the 13th of February 1842 and has been sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority.

Alphonse Ratisbonne was born at Strasbourg and belonged to a Jewish family. Having undertaken a voyage in the east, he stopped on his way to visit Rome, and there became acquainted with M. T. de Bussiere a convert most ardent in his devotion to the Church.

The latter pitied his unfortunate friend and resolved to lose no opportunities of impressing upon him the necessity of becoming a Catholic. At last seeing that all his arguments were received with a scornful smile by M. Ratisbonne, he resolved to argue no further but felt suddenly, inspired to offer him a miraculous Medal, which he begged him to wear round his neck, and to this M. Ratisbonne consented rather reluctantly. In the meantime, prayers were said for him, and they did not remain long unanswered.

One day Alphonse entered by chance into Saint Andrew's church erected in the quarter formerly called *Delle Fratte*. It was about midday. Suddenly he felt a great emotion. It seemed to him as if the whole building disappeared and the light was concentrated in the chapel dedicated to Saint-Michael. Seized with fear, he raised his eyes when all at once in the midst of all this radiance Our Blessed Lady appeared tall, majestic, full of sweetness, exactly as she is represented on the Medal. The celestial vision changed the disposition of his heart; falling on his knees, he burst into tears and was instantaneously converted from Judaism to Catholicism. After a few days' instruction, he was received into the Church and became by the waters of baptism, a child of God, and an heir of heaven.

Development of the devotion to the Immaculate Conception.

The principal object of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Catherine seems to have been the increase of devotion amongst the faithful to the Immaculate Conception. The medal was the instrument which served this purpose. Its influence was so rapid and so striking that the Promoter charged by Mgr de Quélen to direct the Canonical Inquiry in the diocese of Paris, did not hesitate to ascribe to it the movement which had awakened in all hearts the devotion to the Immaculate Virgin and which in every part of the world was becoming more marked.

Towards the end of 1836, M. Dufriche-Desgenettes, parish priest of Notre Dame des Victoires, at Paris established in his church the celebrated Arch-Confraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Whilst he was attached to the church of Saint Francis Xavier, the Sisters of the Mother-house in the rue du Bac, were his parishioners. He had been, of course, amongst the first to be informed of the apparition in their chapel. In his joy and thankfulness for that marvellous grace he was most eager in distributing the Miraculous Medal.

He had earnestly desired that the Chapel honoured by Mary's presence should become a place of pious pilgrimages, but unable to obtain this privilege, he was chosen by Providence to meet the want by erecting the Confraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. When he saw the Sisters of charity kneeling at the foot of the Altar of the Sacred Heart of Mary, at Notre Dame de Victoires, he used to say to them: "My good Sisters, I love to see you in my dear Church; but your chapel ought to be the real place of pilgrimage, it is there the Blessed Virgin showed herself."

In the first Manifestation the Blessed Virgin announced the misfortunes threatening France. Sixteen years later the Mother of Mercy appeared again to two peasant children on the mountain of La Salette and renewed in a solemn manner the same warning she had given to the humble Sister of Charity. This event gave new extension to the devotion towards Our Blessed Lady and reminded the faithful of the necessity of earnest prayers and penitential works to appease the wrath of God.

In 1830, Sister Catherine said to her confessor: "It is the Blessed Virgin's wish that you should found a congregation; you will be its Superior. It is to be a confraternity of Children of Mary; the Blessed Virgin will give

them many graces and to you also, Indulgences will be granted to it. The month of Mary will be celebrated with great splendour. Mary will bestow abundant blessings."

In 1847 the prediction was realized: M. Etienne who was then the Superior-General of the Lazarists and consequently of the Sisters of Charity, made a journey to Rome, and there he obtained from the Sovereign Pontiff, for himself and his successors the privilege of establishing in the schools directed by the Sisters of Charity a pious confraternity under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, to which were attached all the indulgences granted to a Congregation of the Blessed Virgin established at Rome by the Society of Jesus for their students. The children of Mary of this congregation adopted the Miraculous Medal as their special badge, and wear it attached to a blue ribbon. Owing to the blessings given to this Association by Pius IX, it rapidly spread all over the world.

Then came the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, for which the Miraculous Medal had been a preparation, as the apparition of the Immaculate Virgin in the grotto of Lourdes was afterwards its confirmation.

But whilst the Miraculous Medal was propagated and wrought wonders of all kinds, Sister Catherine lived quietly fulfilling the duties of her vocation at the Hospice d'Enghien and, by a prodigy of humility, none of her companions ever knew until her death the secret she had kept so faithfully.

Death of Sister Catherine Labour.

Sister Labouré took the holy habit in the course of January 1831, and was placed under the name of Sister Catherine, at the hospital of Enghien, in the faubourg Saint-Antoine at Paris.

At first she was employed in the kitchen and the laundry, then for forty years she had the care of the old men, inmates of the House, and to this was added that of the poultry-yard. These humble occupations suited her taste and she never felt happier than when among her old patients and her chickens; each in their measure were the objects of her solicitude. Nothing in her attracted particular notice, she was very pious but without pretence; the only remark her Superioress made, was how devoutly she recited the Rosary.

Thus she lived in the hospital of Enghien for forty-six years.

Ever since the beginning of the year 1876 Sister Catherine often spoke of her death. On each of the festivals, she said to her companions: "This is the last time I shall be with you on this day." And if they did not seem to believe it, she would add: "Depend upon it certainly. I shall not see the year 1877."

During the last months she was obliged to keep her bed and give up all her active occupations.

A few days before her death, she said to one of her companions: "I shall go to Reuilly." It is the name of the house separated from the Hospice d'Enghien by a spacious garden. "Why to Reuilly? her companion answered; you would not have the courage to leave your Enghien, which you love so dearly and have never left! —"I tell you that I will go to Reuilly!—But when? —Ah! that is the question!" said Sister Catherine in a mysterious and confident tone which puzzled her companion. Soon after she said again: "There will be no need of a hearse when I am buried. — Oh! indeed, replied the Sister. —No hearse will be required, the sick Sister reasserted. —But how will they be able to do without it?— They will put me in the chapel at Reuilly." These words quickly struck her companion.

Everything was realized as she had foretold. On the 31st of December, she had several fainting fits. Her companions fearing the end proposed that she should receive the last sacraments. It was with a wonderful peace and happiness she received them, and then she asked those around her to recite the litany of the Immaculate Conception. She often repeated this invocation: "Terror of evil spirits, pray for us." She often exclaimed with an accent of deep tenderness: "My dear Community! My dear Mother-House!" One of her companions said to her with a tone of deep sadness: "Sister Catherine, are you going to leave me without saying a word of the Blessed Virgin?" Then the dying Sister bent towards her and spoke in a low voice for some time, all at once adding: "I ought not to speak, it is M. Chevalier who has the mission to do so."

After the death of M. Aladel, M. Chevalier, the first assistant to the Congregation of the Mission and Director General of the Sisters of Charity had become the depositary of all Sister Catherine's secrets.

At four o'clock in the afternoon another fainting fit brought all the Community together round Sister Catherine's bed. They remained there in prayer until seven o'clock, when she seemed to sink into a deep slumber, without the least

struggle or agony.

She soon afterwards breathed her last. Her soul had taken its flight to heaven to enjoy the presence of Jesus and of His Immaculate Mother.

Feast of the Manifestation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary under the title of the Miraculous Medal.

At the request of M. Antoine Fiat, Superior General of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Vincent of Paul, and of the Sisters of Charity, the Sovereign Pontiff has just granted a signal favour.

"It was fitting" says the Church in the office of the Immaculate Virgin Mary under the title of the Miraculous Medal, "that the maternal love which Mary manifested with so much power and liberality by the means of the Holy Medal should not be forgotten, and that at the same time the devotion to the Immaculate Conception amongst christian people ought to be furthered and increased. In order to attain these ends, the Apostolic See wished that, as had already been granted in the case of the Rosary and of the Scapular of Mount Carmel, a special feast should be celebrated each year in commemoration of the apparition of the most Blessed Mother of God, and of her Holy Medal.

Wherefore, after a most careful examination of all the facts by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and in accordance with the favourable decision thereof, Leo XIII, Supreme Pontiff, has authorised for the Congregation of the Priests of Saint Vincent of Paul always faithful to the traditions of its holy founder in the profession of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a special Office and a Mass of the Manifestation of the Blessed Virgin Immaculate under the title of the Miraculous Medal. A similar favour will be granted to the Bishops and Religious Families who will ask for it.

In accordance with the Decree of July 23rd 1894, this solemn feast, with Office and proper Mass, "will be celebrated yearly by the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, under the rite of second class, and under the rite of double major by the Ordinaries and religious Communities who shall have asked it." By another decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in date of September 7th 1894 any priest is allowed to say this same proper Mass in any chapel attached to the houses of the Sisters of Charity.

The traditions of the two families of Saint Vincent, mentioned in the office of this feast are deeply impressed with filial love towards the Immaculate Virgin. When in the year 1836, Mgr de Quélen opened the Inquiry into the origin of the Miraculous Medal, the promoter wondered why the Sisters of Charity had been selected by God for so great a favour.

He considered that the cause of this preference might be discovered in two practices observed by the Sisters of Charity from the very beginning of their Society.

The first was that of making an act of consecration to the Blessed Virgin on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; and the second that of adding the following profession of faith on that point after each decade of the Rosary: "Most Holy Virgin, I believe and confess your holy and Immaculate Conception, pure and without stain. O most pure Virgin, by your virginal purity, by your Immaculate Conception and your glorious title of Mother of God, obtain for me from your dear Son, humility, charity, a great purity of heart, of body, and of mind, a holy perseverance to my dear vocation, the gift of Prayer, a good life and a holy death.

Indulgences.

A plenary Indulgence applicable to the Souls in Purgatory is granted by His Holiness Leo XIII to all the faithful, who being sincerely contrite and having approached the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, visit any church or oratory attached to the houses of the Priests of the Mission or of the Sisters of Charity, in all parts of the world, on the feast of the Manifestation of the Immaculate Virgin, under the title of the Miraculous Medal, that is to say on the 27th of November of each year, from the first vespers to sunset of the Feast, provided, they pray according to the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

(Brief of the 24th of August 1894.)

A partial Indulgence of a hundred days is granted once a day to all those who recite devoutly the invocation: *O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.*

(Leo XIII, March 15th)

PRAYER

(Collect of the Mass)

O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast vouchsafed to glorify by numberless miracles the Blessed Virgin Mary, immaculate from the first moment of her Conception, grant that all who devoutly implore her protection on earth, may eternally enjoy Thy presence in heaven. Who, with the Father and Holy Ghost livest and reignest, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Imprimatur:

✱ RENE-FRANCOIS, Ep. Ambian.
