



*Thérèse de Lamourous*



*Blessed William Joseph Chaminade*

## ***Saints make saints ...***



**Theresa Rondeau**

Theresa Rondeau begged Venerable Marie Thérèse de Lamourous to become the Superior General of a congregation she was founding devoted to the same purposes as the Misericorde or Mercy House. Theresa Rondeau from Laval, France, had spent three months with Marie Thérèse in Bordeaux. She was so impressed with what was happening at the Bordeaux Mercy House that she wished to replicate it in Lyons. But Marie Thérèse refused. Her reasons were very simple. Every city is different. There is no one solution that fits all circumstances. Each city must develop its own form based on its own culture and needs.

Fr. Joseph Stefanelli in his beautiful life of Marie Thérèse, *Mlle de Lamourous*, however, shows what kind of influence for good Marie Thérèse really had. In one sense she is like a matriarch, since she has inspired so many nascent congregations. Fr. Stefanelli writes:

“Despite her continuing illness and her resolve not to be a ‘superior general’ to Laval, Marie Thérèse did in fact assist with the establishment of other Misericorde houses. Her reputation, not only for personal holiness but also for success in her work, had spread throughout France and beyond its borders. By the 1820s the Misericorde of Bordeaux had become a model for the work of rehabilitating prostitutes, and concerned women from many other cities looked to Bordeaux for leadership, know-how and method.” (p. 384)

My own experience with the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Boston, the congregation in which St. Faustina of Poland flourished, bears this out. In the living room of their convent in Massachusetts stands a picture of Venerable Marie Thérèse de Lamourous. Why? The foundress of the Polish group had been inspired by Theresa Rondeau, just as she had been inspired by Marie Thérèse. Yes, saints make saints.

Actually, Marie Thérèse was very gifted. She was, as we say, “street smart.” She possessed good organizing abilities. She was highly respected as a leader in the Sodality of Bordeaux. She applied much of her experience in the Sodality to the work at Mercy House. Marie Thérèse also learned from the “underground.” The “underground” were those women who were trying to get their lives back from exploitation, poverty,

and oppression. They had their own culture, language and signs. They were women of the streets, often involved with prostitution. She and Fr. Chaminade were the Administrators of Mercy House. The directresses were chosen from family or the Sodality, but the supervisors were from the women themselves at the Misericorde, the “underground.”

We are all so interdependent. We influence each other for good or for evil. What helped Marie Thérèse become such a force for good? Marie Thérèse, though she was older than Blessed Fr. Chaminade, chose him to be her spiritual director after Fr. Noel LaCroix, her spiritual guide, was forced into exile. Early in her life she had worked against scrupulosity. At the end of her life she feared death, thinking she had done nothing. Actually Marie Thérèse was a very courageous person. During the Revolution she had risked her life. Later she would offer her life to God as a victim of reparation.

But if we reflect on the direction that Blessed Fr. Chaminade offered to her, we also see his skill in guiding souls to God. Saints make saints. Marie Thérèse had asked Fr. Chaminade to draw up a guide, a plan of conduct, for herself. What are some key points that Blessed Chaminade offers to Marie Thérèse?

Blessed Fr. Chaminade recognized the efforts she was making to grow in the ways of the Spirit despite the dangers she faced in the Revolution. He keeps her mindful of the goal –complete conformity with Christ, *“in which you will no longer give in to your nature, your senses, your imagination or your own mind, but obey God Himself.”*

He leads her gently into the silences, the preparation virtues, by holding out to her the fruit of these efforts. *"You are beginning to realize it, but you will never taste it fully until you have reached the summit of that holy mountain."* The goal will be her living the consummation virtues, the virtues of Jesus and Mary. He remains fully conscious of where Marie Thérèse is at the time. Blessed Chaminade tells her he cannot give her the whole picture now, just the things she needs in the present moment. When she does what the Holy Spirit has prescribed through his ministry, he will tell her the next step. Fr. Chaminade's entire approach seems to be that *"we will follow the indications of the Holy Spirit."*

The plan of conduct Marie Thérèse is asking for starts with discerning the difference between purely human motivation as opposed to divine motivation. In other words, learning "to live by the spirit of faith." Blessed Chaminade encourages her to purify her faith, i.e., to put aside rational or imaginary motives for the practice of virtue and instead begin to see the ways of faith. He tries to purify her faith in this way and encourages her to increase acts of faith, hope and love. She should multiply these because these are the powers given at Baptism by which she can allow the Spirit to live and act in her.

Blessed Fr. Chaminade advises Marie Thérèse to put aside all her prayers and practices, which she "felt obliged" to accomplish. Instead he leads her to the prayer of faith, at least 15 minutes each morning and, if possible, likewise each evening. At the same time he leads her to control her imagination. Blessed Chaminade is trying to stabilize Marie Thérèse's life, and structure it in faith to counteract her hesitations through scrupulosity. He uses this plan, centered in faith, to start her on her journey and to carry it through to the goal.

Marie Thérèse died in 1836. She was declared Venerable by the Church, i.e., one who practiced heroic virtue during her life. We pray through her intercession for miracles so that she may be declared Blessed. What is evident in these reflections is that good people can influence others for good. Saints really do make other saints.