



Mystic and woman of action, faith in the impossible

Advent 2020 — Online Retreat with Madame Acarie

1. Barbe Acarie – Blessed Mary of the Incarnation (1566-1618)



How could the Gift that God gives us of himself on Christmas Eve not be enough for us? This is the question addressed to us by the one who was the key figure in the renewal of the Church in France at the end of the wars of religion, the foundress of the Teresian Carmel there.

Barbe Avrillot, born in 1566 into a wealthy Parisian family of nobility, became **Madame Acarie** at the age of 16 through her marriage to Pierre. She gave six children to this fervent Catholic whose involvement in the Catholic League¹ she supported. She became a Carmelite at 48 as a lay sister, under the name of **Mary of the Incarnation**. She entered into the joy of her Lord four years later at the end of a surprisingly fruitful life.

1. The «Holy League» is a military alliance created by French nobles in 1576 to fight against the Protestants to whom King Henry III has just granted freedom of worship.

2. « He is indeed a miser for whom God does not suffice. »

Madame Acarie is upset when she reads this sentence in 1587. Married for five years and already the mother of three children, she shines in Parisian salons where she is considered the most beautiful woman in Paris. A devoted hostess with a demanding spiritual life, this 21-year-old woman nevertheless has let herself be seduced by worldly life. **“He is indeed a miser for whom God does not suffice.”** It’s like thunder on a cloudless day: she decides to consecrate herself to God in prayer and service. She sheds her luxurious dresses and intensifies her social commitment to the poor and marginalized.

**« He is indeed a miser for whom God
does not suffice. »**

To want other riches while God is given to us is the ultimate greed! This seems obvious and it might be astonishing that we do not try harder to free ourselves from such a senseless vice. How can we strive for other possessions when infinite Love is offered to us? The reality is: we



are blind. At the best of times, we believe that this Gift is real, but we do not live as such. On that day, Madame Acarie experienced what God himself had given to her. She decides to receive him wholeheartedly without desiring to possess anything more.

The reason for our blindness is covetousness, which makes us conceive of all relationships as possessiveness. Now, if no human being can be an object of possession, even less so can God! To want to get hold of your fellow man is to deny him in his being, to make him an object and to forget his infinite dignity. To want to possess God is to inevitably miss the mark and to turn to all the idolized manifestations of longing, the idol being precisely whatever I can exercise control over. And then Christmas! God gives himself to our humanity, but he does so free of all covetousness — in his absolute and infinitely generous love.

Only a poor heart can receive him, following the example of Mary and Joseph. To live in this Gift requires, in effect, the renunciation of all possession, and especially that of God! In this way he can find in our hearts the manger of poverty where he can rest. Let us be students of Barbe Acarie. Our Advent meditation on her openness to the Gospel will thus prepare us to receive God's incredible gift of himself in his Son.

Her spiritual writings are contained in a few pages entitled "True Spiritual Exercises." Many more of her sentences were collected after her death, but it is the testimony of her life that will be our guide.

2. See biographies of André Duval in the 17th century and of Father Bruno de Jésus-Marie (DDB 1943); conferences on the website of www.madame-acarie.org

We will follow the Blessed from Sunday to Sunday towards the joy of Christmas :

1st Sunday : « **Keep awake !** »
- *virginity and vigilance*

2nd Sunday : « **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.** »
- *obedience and freedom*

3rd Sunday : « **I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.** »
- *action and contemplation*

4th Sunday : « **Let it be with me according to your word.** »
- *Ecclesial fruitfulness*

Christmas : **Divine humility**
- *childlike spirit*

3. Meditation to enter into the retreat

« **Rejoice then, O my soul, that you can be the hostess of such a noble and excellent host!** Wash yourself, cleanse yourself, purify yourself, and drive away from your heart with true contrition and repugnance every stain of iniquity and stain of sin, **so that you may be ready to receive this Lord who dwells in you.** You do not need anything from this guest, for he himself is the author of all things. **Tell me, therefore, O my soul,** will you not be blessed if you can once find rest with your God and truly say: **He who created me has taken rest in my tabernacle.** »

« **O my soul, tell me again, would you not consider yourself too miserly** if the presence of such a noble Lord and such a guest were not enough to please you, since you know that he is so liberal, that he will not fail to communicate his goods to you in abundance and that he will enrich you with an infinity of his gifts? » (True Spiritual Exercises)



4. Practical Points

Each Friday, you will receive an email: the downloadable text (in 2 formats: pdf and mobile) which includes a meditation on an episode in Mme. Acarie's life related to the Sunday Gospel and an Advent calendar (quotes and images) to accompany each day, Monday through Saturday.

Have a wonderful start to Advent !

fr. Olivier Rousseau ocd (Convent of Avon) and the Carmel of Pontoise
English translation by OCDS members of Canada and the U.S.

