



**Mother Agnes of Jesus, O.C.D.**

**A Biography**

By: Fr. Herbert Schmidt

Ron Hannan

On September 7, 1861, Marie Pauline Martin entered into the world at her parent's house on rue du Pont-Neuf in Alencon, France. At the birth of the child, Azelie, the mother, would pray: "Lord grant the grace that this child may be consecrated to you, and that nothing may tarnish the purity of its soul. If ever it would be lost, I prefer that you should take it without delay."<sup>1</sup>



Pauline – Age 4

Little Pauline resembled her mother both in personality and in looks. She became the second-born child of nine children of Louis and Azelie Martin. Louis and Azelie honored each of their female children with the first name of Marie in honor of Our Lady and honored each male child with the additional name of Joseph in honor of St. Joseph. The children's second name was given after their godparents. Pauline's godfather was her uncle, Isidore Guerin, and her godmother was Pauline Romet, a close family friend in Alencon. The blessed day arrived on September 8, 1861, when Pauline was carried in her mother's arms to the Cathedral of Saint Pierre-de-Montsort and baptized by Father Lebouc.

Pauline studied her catechism feverishly, preparing herself for her First Holy Communion. She wanted to make every effort meaningful when it was time to consecrate herself to God.

<sup>1</sup>The Mother of the Little Flower by Celine Martin

On July 2, 1874, dressed in her beautiful white gown and veil, Pauline walked down the aisle to receive her First Holy Communion. Her family surrounded her at the Visitation Chapel in Le Mans as she consecrated herself to God.

Pauline's mother also focused her energy on Pauline maintaining her virginity. When Pauline was young, her mother would place her on her knees and tell her: "Only virgins would follow the spotless Lamb, Jesus, and that they would be crowned with white roses while singing a song that others could not sing."<sup>2</sup> Pauline reaffirmed to her mother that she would refrain from marriage and always remain a virgin for Jesus.



Pauline – Student at the Visitation School

On August 1, 1877, Pauline completed her studies at the Visitation Boarding School in Le Mans, France. After spending five years at Les Buissonnets, it was time for Pauline to answer the call to the religious life. Her eyes were focused on the Visitation convent in Le Mans. She frequently went on visits to her former boarding school and spoke with the Mother Superior about entering the convent. But God had other plans for her to serve Him. On February 16, 1882, while praying beside a statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel at St. Jacques Church, Pauline received a revelation that she is to become a Carmelite Nun.

Acting on this revelation, Pauline made frequent visits to the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux to speak to the prioress about entering into their Order. But at the time that she was seeking to enter, there was not any room at the monastery.

<sup>2</sup> The Story of a Family by: Fr. Stéphane-Joseph Piat, OFM

So, she looked into entering the Carmelite monastery in Caen. And as soon as she was going to make her final decision to join them, a postulant at the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux died suddenly which left an opening for Pauline to enter.

On October 2, 1882, she entered the Carmelites as a postulant. Louis, her uncle Isidore and Marie, her sister, escorted her to the chapel for Mass. After Mass was over, Pauline said goodbye to her family and then was greeted at the cloister door by Mother Genevieve. She changed her clothes and donned a long blue dress covered with a black cape and a dark bonnet. The initiation in the traditions of the Carmelite Order had commenced for Pauline. She said: “My vocation is not where I live or who I live with or how many different prayers I pray. It’s simply a call from the Lord, an invitation to draw me closer to Him in a life of total consecration.”<sup>3</sup>

On April 6, 1883, Pauline became a novice and was given the religious name of Sister Agnes of Jesus. During this time she learned the practice of devotion to the Holy Face under the direction of Mother Genevieve of Saint Teresa. The teachings of Saint John of the Cross were an essential part in her devotion. Sister Agnes of Jesus made her profession of vows as a Carmelite on May 8, 1884.



Pauline – Teenager

<sup>3</sup>Saint Thérèse of Lisieux...with confidence and love by: Susan Helen Wallace, FSP

She maintained her focus solely on Jesus. John 12: 23-25: “Jesus answered them saying: The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loved his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal.”<sup>4</sup> He was the true and only source of her love for enduring many obstacles while she was in exile here on earth.

Prior to Mother Genevieve’s death, who was one of the founding sisters of the Carmel of Lisieux, saw great leadership qualities in Sister Agnes. She prophesied to her Carmelite sisters on her deathbed that Sister Agnes’s public life would soon begin as a future prioress of the Carmel. On December 5, 1891, Mother Genevieve gave her soul back to God. Sister Agnes was given the task of writing a brief account of Mother’s life.

The Carmelites used their skills to earn money to help support the monastery. In following with this tradition, Sister Agnes used her skills as a painter to paint miniatures to make some money. She also painted religious quotes from the Bible on the convent walls. In the prioress’s cell, she painted the quote from the Book of Wisdom 10:17, “And she rendered to the just the wages of their labors, and conducted them in a wonderful way, and she was to them for a covert by day and for the light of stars by night.”<sup>5</sup>

On February 20, 1893, as Mother Genevieve had predicted, Mother Agnes of Jesus was elected as the new prioress. At the beginning of her term as prioress, her sister, Sister Therese prophesied to her that her reign would not go without receiving many “crowns” for Jesus. She comforted her by saying: “The vessels will be too small to contain the precious perfumes you will want to put into them; but Jesus, too, has only very small instruments on which to play His melody of love, yet He is skilled to use all those that we give Him.”<sup>6</sup> The prophecy was not far from being a reality for Mother Agnes of Jesus.

4 Holy Bible (Douay-Rheims) 1899 Edition

5 Holy Bible (Douay-Rheims) 1899 Edition

6 Collected Letters Of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux by Abbé Combes



Mother Agnes of Jesus

In December of 1893, Mother Agnes was faced with an illness. Her godfather sent her some medicine to help relieve any discomfort she was facing from her illness. She used her suffering as an opportunity to save more souls. She soon recovered from her illness and resumed her duties as prioress. She related to Sister Therese: “The daily pains we endure only strengthens our love for Him, keeping Him ever so close to our hearts. Invite our Lord into your heart and allow Him to bear your burdens as you are a witness to our Lord’s love.”<sup>7</sup>

On July 21, 1897, Mother Agnes went to the infirmary to see how her sister [Therese] was doing and she would always do little things to comfort her. Each day, Therese looked forward to seeing Mother Agnes and commented to her what it really meant to her that she was there. When she appeared before her each day her spirit was filled with great joy. Therese knew she did not have to spend a lot of her time giving to Mother Agnes for she was the one that always gave so much to her.

The spiritual union between Mother Agnes and Sister Therese was very strong. They had that special bond between the both of them. Without having to say a word to each other, everything was revealed in their souls. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, when Mother Agnes arrived in the infirmary to check up on Therese, she remarked to her about their strong spiritual bond. She said: “Little mother is my telephone; I have only to cock my ear when she comes, and I know everything.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Collected Letters Of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux- by Abbé Combes

<sup>8</sup> Collected Letters Of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux –by Abbé Combes

After the death of Sister Therese, Mother Agnes sought out to get her sister’s autobiography – “The Story of a Soul”—published. She looked to her uncle Isidore to arrange the details of the publication of the autobiography with the publishers directly. In October of 1898 she was finally able to honor her sister’s memory by sending to the other Carmelite monasteries the first published edition of “The Story of a Soul.” A good number of prioresses and mother superiors who followed the life of Therese sought out Mother Agnes and looked upon her for her guidance on issues that they themselves were facing.

On May 31, 1923, Mother Agnes was still prioress and received an unexpected honor from Pope Pius XI that she remains prioress for life. When she heard the announcement in the Carmelite Chapel from Cardinal Vico, who was visiting the Carmelite monastery, she was immediately shocked by the announcement because she did not ever expect to receive such a high honor. Her first instinct was to refuse this honor because as she saw it she was not worthy of it but Cardinal Vico convinced her otherwise as she stated with great humility: “Be it done as the Holy Father wishes. I am a Carmelite and I will obey.”<sup>9</sup>

When Father Dolan (Founder of the Little Flower Society) spoke to other people that were associated with the Carmel, he asked them whether they too felt that Mother Agnes was very holy. Father was introduced to Sister Agatha who was a frequent visitor to the monastery. She came there to assist the Carmelite infirmarian in the rehabilitation efforts of some of the sisters. When Father Dolan asked her if she too felt that Mother Agnes was very holy, she replied: “Mother Agnes is the holiest because she formed the character of the Little Flower [Therese] and therefore must be holy.”<sup>10</sup>

Father Dolan went to visit Leonie [Sister Francis Therese] Martin at the Visitation monastery; he also introduced the same question to her about Mother Agnes’s holiness. He asked: “Do you think Mother Agnes of Jesus is saintly?”<sup>11</sup> Without any hesitation Sister Francis Therese reinforced to him this perception and went even further to say that she was a saint. “I do not believe there is a superior so esteemed.”<sup>12</sup> Decades later on December 3, 1943, Father Dolan would state in one of his books after the death of Marie [Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart], oldest of the Martin daughters, “Saint Therese owes much of her sanctity, to her holy parents as well as to her holy sisters Marie and Pauline. I would not be surprised if the Church in the future would declare both of them saints.”<sup>13</sup>

9 Collected Little Flower Works – by Rev. Albert H. Dolan

10 Collected Little Flower Works- by Rev. Albert H. Dolan

11 Collected Little Flower Works- by Rev. Albert H. Dolan

12 Collected Little Flower Works-by Rev. Albert H. Dolan

13 Marie, Sister of St. Thérèse.-by Rev. Albert H. Dolan

Many of Mother Agnes's sisters were very loyal to her especially in her leadership role as prioress. With the overwhelming interest in the Carmel, the job of prioress was extremely demanding. Her sisters witnessed firsthand the day-to-day difficulties Mother Agnes faced both inside and outside the monastery. She had a dual task of fulfilling the needs of her Carmelite sisters as well as fulfilling the needs of the numerous visitors that came to the monastery. In order to accomplish such an enormous task as being prioress, she always sought out God for guidance in every task and practiced both humility and simplicity to fulfill each task. Once, in a letter to her sister Leonie, she had remarked: "I do not know why my sisters love me so much. Since I have been prioress, I have never had to say the same thing twice."<sup>14</sup>

On January 15, 1927, as an added honor to bestow upon her newly sainted sister Therese, Mother Agnes of Jesus compiled and published the booklet titled: "Novissima Verba" [Last Words]. These were a compilation of her last conversations that she had with Sister Therese. Their conversations were recorded in Mother Agnes's yellow notebook from May to September 1897.

In 1949, Mother Agnes contracted a lung infection. She always echoed the words to her sisters and those that came to visit her: "Love and Confidence", now she was living her own words. In July of 1951, a priest gave her, her last confession as well as the Last Rites. She endured harsh suffering especially when it came to her breathing. It was very difficult for her to breathe because of the fluid that had built up in her lungs.

On July 28, 1951, just minutes leading up to her death, she made every attempt to pray aloud the prayer, which she often recited herself: "Jesus, meek, humble at heart make my heart unto thine." After her last agony, witnessed by her Carmelite sisters, Pauline's [Mother Agnes of Jesus] soul ascended to Heaven.

On August 1, 1951, Bishop Picaud offered the funeral Mass. After the Mass her body was taken to the vault and placed beside her sister Marie who was already interned there.

Throughout all of the Martin sisters lives, many of the visitors who came to see Pauline, Marie, Leonie and Celine, at their respective monasteries, were left with the impression that all of them were very holy nuns.



Back Row: Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (Marie Martin), Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face (Celine Martin)

Middle Row: Mother Agnes of Jesus (Pauline Martin), Saint Therese of the Child Jesus (Therese Martin)

Front Row: Sister Marie of the Eucharist (Marie Guerin)



**Litany of Mother Agnes of Jesus, O.C.D.**

**(Private Use Only)**

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us.

Christ graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, Queen of Carmel, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, Protector of Carmel, pray for us.

Mother Agnes of Jesus, pray for us.

Mother Agnes of Jesus, lover of the Name of Jesus,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, adorer of the Eucharist,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, faithful to the Cross,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, model of purity of heart,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, patient in suffering,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, guide of little souls,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, woman of great Faith,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, woman of joyful Hope,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, woman of perfect Charity,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, spouse of the Heart of Jesus,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, faithful daughter of the Church,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, zealous for souls,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, obedient to God's Will,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, example of Christian Poverty,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, chaste virgin of Jesus,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, lily of purity,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, rose of all virtue,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, Prioress of the Carmel at Lisieux,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, friend of the Angels,

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, Have mercy on us.

Let us pray,

Mother Agnes of Jesus, you who stand before the presence of the Almighty, intercede for us, God's children who invoke your kindness and your faith in the Name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns in the glory of our Father in Heaven, world without end. Amen.

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Photos: Carmelite Monastery in Lisieux, France and Office Central de Lisieux