

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 15, 2010 at 7:12am

Mar. 15, St. Louise de Marillac, Founder

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NCR Today

Today is the feast of St. Louise de Marillac, the 350th anniversary of her death.

Louise was born in 1591, the illegitimate daughter of Louis de Marillac, a well-connected widower. Her mother's name is not known. Her father acknowledged his "natural" daughter and placed her with her aunt, a Dominican nun at Poissy. When he died, his second wife removed Louise from the convent and placed her with a poor woman to learn household skills.

Louise de Marillac applied for admission to a religious order, but was not accepted. The de Marillac family arranged a marriage for her to Antoine le Gras. Louise and Antoine had one son, Michel. Antoine lost his money and his health and died in 1625.

Louise was free to concentrate on her spiritual life. She met Vincent de Paul, and together they founded the Daughters of Charity to aid the beggars of Paris, the abandoned babies, the galley slaves, the prisoners, the homeless elderly, the wounded on the battlefields, the ignorant, the mentally ill, and many other needy and desperate people.

Louise de Marillac died on March 15, 1660. She was canonized in 1934 by Pope Pius XI.

"Why did she disappear?"

In spite of all she did for the Church and for the world, "one is rather astonished at the nearly total disappearance of Louise de Marillac. Even after her canonization in 1934 (two centuries after Vincent de Paul's) and the celebration of the bi-centennial of their deaths in 1960, little mention was made of her."

Sr. Elisabeth Charpy, D.C., and Sr. Louise Sullivan, D.C., in "Spirit of Louise de Marillac", offer two reasons: the desire to "glorify Vincent" and the reticence by the Daughters to "advance the cause of canonization of a foundress who was a 'natural daughter.'"

"Why did she reappear?"

Charpy and Sullivan credit the publication in 1959 of *Louise de Marillac: A Portrait*, by Jean Calvet, with paving the way for Louise to emerge. The other "significant elements" were "the woman's movement and the reflection of Vatican Council II on the dignity of the human person (Constitution Gaudium et Spes)."

For more about St. Louise de Marillac by Sr. Louise Sullivan, D.C., please click here.

To see a YouTube video of Sr. Louise Sullivan talking about St. Louise de Marillac, click here.

The saint's relics are enshrined in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal at 140 rue du Bac, Paris. (Click on the sparkle on the side altar to the left.)

A very happy feast day to all Daughters of Charity!

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