



Virginie Danion's journey

“ Know who you are ”

Virginie, born on October 14, 1819, came from a patriarchal household of four girls. Her parents lived their faith in the austere context of the time. Traces of Jansenism weighed on them. Virginie was marked by the fear of sin and the fear of hell. This context explains the struggles of conscience she experienced and her desire to have spiritual guides that allowed her to find her balance by trusting in God.



Early on, at the age of 8, she became seriously ill. Convinced that because of her childhood mistakes she deserved hell, anguished, she alternates between fear of demons and trust in God. At the age of 10, she made her first communion, the first meeting with Jesus in communion, with piety and humility.



At the age of 14, she had a decisive experience: she received an exceptional grace in the church of Ménéac where she was visiting her godmother: *“Eyes fixed on the Host, I felt my heart ablaze with an unknown fire. If only the Lord could be worshipped always and thanked for giving himself to us in his sacrament¹”*. However, black thoughts come back to haunt her. To make a distraction, her worried parents brought her to Rennes to complete her education begun with the Ursulines in Ploërmel. She returned home when her older sister entered the Ursulines. She dismissed suitors and sighed... *we are delivered (...) this heart that has ever burned only for you is made more intense and more ardent²”*.

¹ Brochure: Virginie Danion - Fondatrice de l'Action de Grâce de Maunon. 1884-1984 - p. 4

² Ibid. p. 5

In agreement with her spiritual companion, she made the vow of virginity at the age of 27. Her parents wanted to keep her close to them, especially after the marriage of their third daughter. Torn in her inner desires, she goes to consult the Bishop of Vannes who, through his Vicar General, invites her to leave: *'Go like Abraham without knowing where...'*



Led by her brother-in-law, she went up to Paris, entered Carmel in November 1849 and, a month later, she entered the Sisters Réparatrices du Saint Sacrement: *“happy although this spirit of reparation was contrary to my inner disposition ... I was only inclined to thank Jesus for the gift of himself and the graces that rained down on the earth.”*³ This intuition was already invading her. However, she took the habit on September 8, 1850 and became Sister Anne.



She was sent as superior to Lyon and it was there that she made a decisive encounter: Father Pierre-Julien Eymard⁴-who like her, was searching.

Raised in a family tinged with severity and fear, little by little, he understood that the Eucharist is the pinnacle of everything, that worship, praise, thanksgiving must be our essential duty. He later said that Virginie (Sister Anne) had preceded him on this path of passionate love of the Blessed Sacrament. But not everyone agreed with Sister Anne; she is suspected of diverting young women from their vocation of Reparation to lead them to Thanksgiving instead. So, the breakup is final. In vain she tried other approaches with other congregations, none of which succeeded. She returned to Mauron on July 4, 1851.

Through these various experiences, Virginie had matured in her formation to religious life and in the experience of directing souls, of leading a community. And above all, she had met Father Pierre-Julien Eymard, *"this heart on fire for the Eucharist"*.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁴ Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard (1811-1868), founder of *La Société du Saint Sacrement* and *des Servantes du Saint Sacrement*



In the same vein, she was taken by the Word of God: The healing of the 10 lepers, only one of whom, a Samaritan, a stranger, came to thank Christ. This dimension of Thanksgiving seemed essential to her, indispensable. After informing herself, she organized the Perpetual Adoration in Mauron. And providentially: a request of the Prioress of the Carmel of Bourges lead to the founding of the Association. Virginie Danion sees it as a sign from heaven: “*Providence takes the initiative; we believe in the Association for Thanksgiving, don't we have to start there?*”⁵

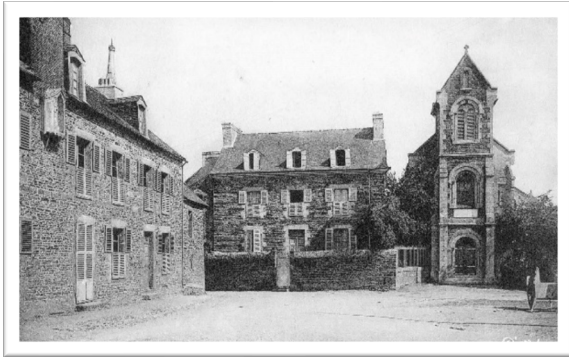
L'Association de l'Action de Grâce de Mauron was founded on March 19, 1858, on the feast of Saint Joseph to whom Virginie had a strong devotion. One can only bow to the measured audacity of Virginie Danion who dared to approach the Bishops with great diplomacy, or through a third party, to win them over to her project. Since its beginning until 2010, the Association has had 6710 members: Bishops, Priests, Religious, Laity, mainly from France, but also from the Netherlands, Ireland, Jerusalem, Italy and Spain.

Thanks to the inheritance following the death of her father, Virginie Danion had the chapel built and it was blessed on November 26, 1870. Virginie thought of ceding it to an Association, but Bishop Bécel of Vannes convinced her to keep it, not to give it up.

Virginie then had a sudden enlightenment and made a commitment: “*I vow and dedicate myself to thanksgiving and perpetual adoration, according to God's plan and in whatever way he will want.*”⁶

⁵ Brochure: *Virginie Danion – Fondatrice de l'Action de Grâce de Mauron. 1884-1984* – p. 17

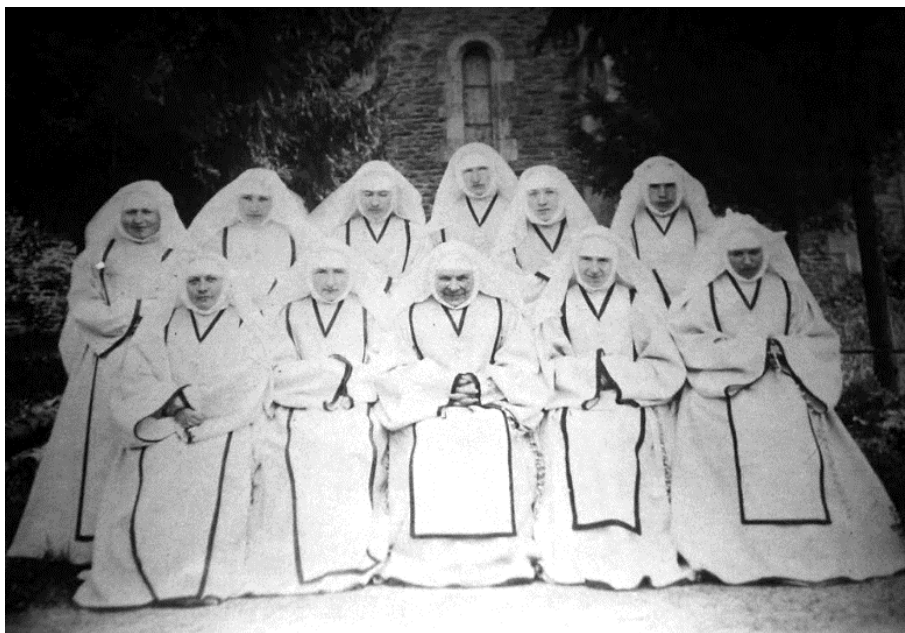
⁶ *Ibid.*, p.24



She chooses her name: Mary of the Blessed Sacrament. One of her friends had the same intuition as her. But the Bishop of Vannes recommended that Virginie wait for God's hour. In 1877, during a retreat, she finally decided to found the House of Thanksgiving. Authorization is granted by the Bishop of Vannes and the Institute chooses a location:

the Danion House in Mauron. The convent was completed in 1881; and Virginie said, *"I spent my days at the foot of the tabernacle and in loving care for my dear mother"* who died in November 1881.

Virginie and four other companions took the habit on November 21, 1883. After a year of novitiate, Bishop Bécél received the vows of Mother Mary of the Blessed Sacrament and her sisters on November 27, 1884. The small group begins its mission in the Church. The ecclesial authorities, diocesan and Rome, are very favourable. The work can become fully what it must be: cloistered and contemplative. Their lives are based on the simple and hidden life of Nazareth, engaging in various activities for their livelihood. Grace continues its work. Mother Mary of the Blessed Sacrament adores, thanks, forms her "Daughters". Cancer soon begins to drain her energy and she died on January 21, 1900. But her thoughts remain: manuscripts of her meditations, her memoirs; a whole set of life-giving documents.





Through a series of encounters, through diverse and more or less happy experiences, through her questioning, Virginie Danion progressed as a pilgrim of love. She was able to take advantage of all that she considered to be grace as a sign from heaven, as a gift of God. 'These eucharistic orantes' found the right note in the immense and harmonious blend of praise and thanksgiving. *"Adoration will be our first duty; thanksgiving will be our vocation"*. The Community and the Association de l'Action de Grâce are two flowers on the same stem to say "Thank you" and to learn to say it.

" Know who you are! "

Yes, this is the work of the Lord!





Gratitude

for the Gift of the Eucharist: a Way of Life

“Love passionately what you are ”

“The Eucharist seems like a majestic river which runs in all directions throughout the world, bathing in its invigorating waters all that gives it passage.”¹ Virginie Danion’s poetic phrase is indicative of the high regard she held for the Blessed Sacrament. Through these few words, one can perceive her contemplation for the grandeur of this gift which Jesus left to his Apostles and to all those who would believe in Him.



Virginie, who later became known as Mère Marie du Saint Sacrement, is deeply moved, especially since her spiritual experience at the age of 14, by a call to contemplation and to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. According to her, all aspects of the life of Jesus are linked to the Eucharist and calls her to adoration of this Sacrament. Thus, on Christmas



Eve, she writes: *“Yes I know, ‘the Lord will come.’ In the morning, she continues, ‘you will see His glory’ and what glory! That of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes! And still today, what other glory? That of the same Jesus hidden under the veil of bread.”²* It is understandable she gave as mission to the Congregation she founded that of "Giving thanks for the Gift of the Eucharist".

¹ *Mes veilles*, p. 16

² *Une adoratrice du Saint-Sacrement*, p. 259

It ensued that the Congregation would be named, "Communauté de l'Action de Grâce". The name invokes its specific vocation. "*For the community, giving thanks needs to be permanent, active and concretely present because the infinite blessing of the divine Eucharist, that brought us together, will also be there as a permanent and an active living gift*"³, as she expresses herself when she announces the possibility of adoration in the community chapel.



If thanksgiving for the gift of the Eucharist is strongly stressed by Mère Marie du Saint Sacrement, it also extends to all of life through praise and gratitude for all of God's blessings in creation, in one's life and in the life of the world. It is written in the congregation's Rule of Life, "We desire our whole lives to be a *Eucharistic celebration*", that is, spiritual life, fraternal communion, relationships with l'Association de l'Action de Grâce, contacts and our

work in close proximity with others. It also includes an openness to new realities, links with associations of other French contemplative communities and eucharistic prayer groups.



³ Histoire de l'Action de Grâce July 10, 1885

An important moment in the life of Mère Marie du Saint Sacrement and of her community was the establishment of devotion to Mary as Our Lady of Adoration. On July 2nd, 1865, she wrote: “*With great fervor and confidence, I entrusted our community to the Virgin Mary whom I would name on this day, Our Lady of Thanksgiving, a title she does not yet have, as far as I know, in the Church. Maybe Divine Providence was waiting for our mission of thanksgiving to give her this title. Oh Mother, your title of Our Lady of Thanksgiving is already inscribed at the foot of your statue, where your hands carry, on a sacred stone, a chalice surmounted with a Host. Perhaps it is the only representation of you as such, but I was authorized to use it.*”⁴



“*Love passionately who you are*”⁵, said a vicar general of Vannes Diocese, in 1968, to the Sisters of l’Action de Grâce. This encouragement is still relevant today despite present developments and events as we know them.



⁴ Histoire de l’Action de Grâce, October 29, 1871

⁵ Homely by Father Quesnel, celebration at Kermaria – April 17, 1968

