

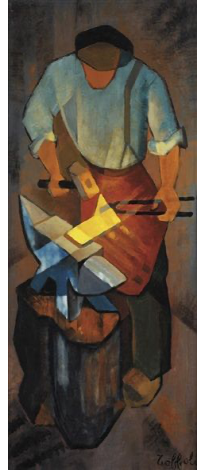


Jean Liausu 1785-1846

On November 29, 1785, Raymond Liausu, blacksmith, made his anvil resound with more joyful blows than usual: his wife Antoinette had just given birth to a son, his first child, Jean. The next day Jean was taken to church to be baptized.

We were poor in the village. Vaylats, with its 700 habitants, lived meagerly on its land. Jean came and went in his father's forge and heard the peasants' complaints about the high cost of living. During the year 1788, people suffered from hunger. The revolutionary upheavals soon shook the existing order. The parish priest had to flee because he refused to take the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

The church was closed, the bells removed...



However, the door of the Liausu house opened quite often in the evening for a proscribed priest who came to ask for hospitality ... Jean considered it as a great honor to serve these masses in secret. He later assured to have heard in the depths of his heart, under these circumstances: "You also, you will be a priest one day."

Birthplace of Father Liausu

In 1800, at the beginning of the century, calm was gradually being felt. Jean was 17 years old. His parents were illiterate, but understood the need for an education. In Vaylats, there was no school, but a school had just opened in Pylaroque, and every day, Jean joyfully walked the 11 kilometers to get there.

Jean had 6 brothers and 3 sisters and soon the poverty of the family had to terminate his schooling. A wealthy landowner asked Raymond Liausu for his oldest son to guard his herd and do seasonal work. Jean accepted, proud to be able to help his parents. Churches reopened and Jean was able to make his First Holy Communion; he was then seventeen years old.

A priest from Villefranche who had been hidden on different occasions by the Liausu family came back to thank them and offered to take their son into his home and pay his school fees.

A new step for Jean. He is enrolled in college and a generous lady takes care of the expenses.

Having completed his studies, Jean returned to his family and hoped to enter the seminary in Cahors. Here again, Divine Providence intervened. A teaching position became available at the College in Rodez. After reflection, he accepted the position which he held for three years and was thus able to help his family with the education of his brothers and sisters.



In October 1811, Jean entered the seminary in Cahors. During this rich period for his spiritual life, he was deeply touched by the person of Jesus Christ. His Superiors appoint him catechist for St Bartholomew Parish where there were many children most of whom belonged to working-class families. Numerous young and adults received no formation. Few men knew how to sign their name. Women were left in complete ignorance...

A missionary spirit was sweeping throughout France. The greatest need was to train the youth... but for a lasting parish revival, the priests saw the need for auxiliaries. Mr. Liausu immediately set to work in his parish.

On December 23, 1815, Father Liausu was ordained priest in Cahors Cathedral along with 25 other seminarians. He was 30 years old.





Father Liausu, Founder



Jean answered a first call from God: he is a priest. But a second call is more pressing within him. *"I have pity on this crowd"*. This cry of Jesus resounds in the depth of his priestly heart. Among the young girls he met in Cahors, he sent two of them to be formed in the community of the Union Sisters that he had known in Rodez.

In Cahors, other young girls were waiting for an invitation from the founder. They needed a place where they could meet. A house close to St Bartholomew Church welcomed the first three. After a few months, Father Liausu called back the two young women in formation in Rodez. The joy of meeting up again! In this communion of life, a new

destiny was founded for each one.



November 30, 1820

Father Liausu returned to Vaylats accompanied by the small nucleus of his undertaking: young girls who were called "Sisters". He had rented a house in the village where they would live and become teachers of the little girls. A young priest, Father Lefaurie, a friend of Fr. Liausu's had been appointed parish priest of Gignac and was eager to ask him for Sisters for his parish...



Saint Anne's house: first house of the Sisters



Village of Gignac



Mother Célestine

And during that time...

On August 4th 1801, Françoise Dorval was born at Saint John's Hospital, in the dry and poor Causse in the northern part of Lot department. She grew up in a Christian family in an affluent environment, in a home which had become a «providence for the poor»; and along with her mother, she learned to give and share.

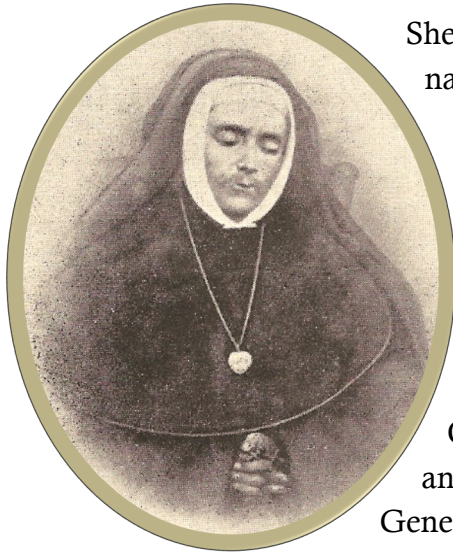
In this privileged environment, she discovered the joys of reading and writing and very early on, she became interested «in the things of God». Her uncle, Jean Baptiste Dorval, a priest who had experienced exile during the years of the French Revolution, watched over her Christian education. When she became an adolescent bursting with life, he directed her towards Father Charrazac, parish priest of the neighboring village. In the years that followed, among different events but particularly her first communion, Françoise allowed herself to be moulded by the Lord. The child's piety gave way to the ripening of faith. She became a catechist, experienced being seized by Christ in his poverty and discovered herself animated by a missionary «fire». She heard the Lord's call to follow him.



Father Charrazac directed her to the Ursulines of Brive (Corrèze) but as some of her aspirations were not satisfied, she decided to go back home.

She expressed her desire to Father Charrazac, a desire that was to animate her entire life: "I want a poverty like that of my Master, Jesus Christ; I want an obedience that will crush my pride... I want to work for the glory of God by devoting myself to the salvation of souls, to instruct the ignorant, to tell sinners about the mercies of God, to relieve miseries and to die on the job."

This is why Father Charrazac spoke to her about the Daughters of Jesus who had just recently arrived in the village of Gignac (1821). Françoise joined them at the beginning of 1822 and never left them: she was 20 years old at the time. She had found what she was looking for: the poverty of Jesus and the service of the poor.



She made her profession in the fall of 1824 and was given the name of Célestine.

Father Liausu very quickly discerned in Sister Célestine the one who could support him in the work of consolidating this young congregation. In 1834, he entrusted her with the responsibility of the house of Vaylats; she would become the soul of this house and would accomplish God's work.

On September 28th 1846, Father Liausu died at the age of 61 and Mother Célestine found herself in the position of Superior General. Woman of faith and courage,

- she would save the newly founded congregation, weakened by various ordeals;
- she would consolidate it and extend it through numerous foundations;
- she would help it take root in Jesus Christ and become a leaven of communion through its presence;
- she would undertake different constructions, the first one being the chapel which would be consecrated to the Sacred Heart on October 12th 1853.

On November 10th of the same year, following the required procedures, the Congregation was officially recognized as a teaching and nursing Congregation. In 1850, several Sisters, including Mother Célestine, lived a second novitiate experience and, after a thirty-day retreat, made their perpetual profession.

In 1855, weakened by painful rheumatism, she refused to be re-elected as Superior General. And she humbly pursued her presence in Vaylats until her peaceful death on March 6th 1865.





The spirituality and charism

The historical context of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period in France shaped Jean Liausu from his childhood. It rooted him in a people of the neglected countryside and developed in him concern for the most abandoned. At the heart of this reality, he experienced a profound meeting with Christ. His experience shines through something he wrote as a young priest, "On the greatness of Jesus Christ" "He shows himself seduced by the person of Christ Jesus. He contemplates the Word at the heart of the Trinity, then the incarnate Word who became our brother, the only Son in whom the Father sees us all as his sons"¹.



His contemplation is incarnated. He sees there the misery of his people with the eyes of Jesus and he "feels in his priest's heart the distress of the little ones deprived of the knowledge of this Good News"². And it is the cry of Jesus which echoes in his heart: "*I feel sorry for the crowd*".

The response to his experience will be a response of active compassion, a compassion which he draws from the pierced heart of the crucified One from which flows the source of Life. Then there grew in him the project of founding a religious family. He commits himself totally to it, communicating his spirit, his evangelical intuition to the first young women who will throw themselves with him into the adventure of foundation.

Marked by Ignatian spirituality, he gives his religious family a motto: "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" and a name, that of "Jesus". "You are of Jesus" reminded Mother Dorothée at the heart of the torment of 1902.

Jesus, "he 'informs' us with that form which is acting in us, which penetrates us, which is his own life... Jesus, here is what He and the Father want us to become for our brothers, all our brothers and all men are our brothers, close by or far off"³

¹ Constitutions of the congregation of the Filles de Jesus 1981. P.17

² Idem

³ À l'écoute de nos vies n° 4

He chose to fix in the countryside of Vaylats, in the midst of this poor population, the congregation which he wanted to be at the service of the poor.

Our first sisters were village girls, girls from the countryside of Vaylats, animated by faith and courage, capable of founding with simple means a religious family on these lands laid waste by the revolution. This context shaped in them attitudes of poverty, simplicity,

and availability for mission. This poverty attracted the young Francoise Dorval who would become Mother Célestine, co-foundress with Pere Liausu: “I want a poverty like that of my Master Jesus Christ... I want to work for the Glory of God by devoting myself to the salvation of souls, instruct the ignorant, tell sinners of the mercies of God, comfort all wretchedness and die to pain”



To work for the glory of God, is also to live in unity and fraternal charity in community and in congregation. Mother Célestine would safeguard and intensify this unity and this charity through trials. “The sweetest of bonds is that of an unalterable charity which must unite them among themselves, fill them with a same spirit and make them tend towards the same goal, which is to Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

If Father Liausu considers this fraternity to be so important, as did many superiors after him, it was because he knew that one never does good alone in the mission.

The mission of the Filles de Jésus of Vaylats? “We are in the world with Jesus Christ, in view of Jesus Christ, to serve Jesus Christ there”⁵; “We are only looking for the poor children of the Church, the most neglected plants of the Vine.”⁶



⁴ Constitutions of 1838

⁵ Rule of 1850

⁶ Jean Liausu - 1841



“Never let yourselves be defeated by the ingratitude of the ground that you are cultivating... the Lord will make fruitful the ground that you are cultivating with your hard-working hands”⁷ ; “It is by the cross that they belong to Jesus Christ and that his grace will accompany all their works”⁸

This inheritance from Father Liausu, from Mother Célestine and our first sisters, the Filles de Jésus de Vaylats have tried to live it through the years listening to the realities of the world. They formulated it after the second Vatican Council in an expression which has become that of their charism:

“I feel sorry for this crowd”

Mark 8,2

*With Father Liausu, overwhelmed by the distress of the countryside,
we let Jesus Christ take hold of us.*

*In simplicity, poverty and in community
Bear witness to the face of Jesus, “Word made Flesh”,
Love of God for every man.*

To the greater Glory of God



⁷ Father Liausu to the Daughters of Jesus

⁸ Jean Liausu