

THE NOBLE VIRTUES OF MOTHER CLAUDINE ECHERNIER

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Claudine Echernier was born on the 29th of May 1801, in a family richer in faith than in possessions under the sun. Claudine evinces from her young age a most astonishing thirst for knowledge and a great spiritual sensibility. Coming from a large family of four brothers and sisters, she is sent to work as a Shepherdess at the age of ten. There she acquaints with a young lady and learns to read fluently within a short period of time. The comfort enjoyed by the families she served is in sharp contrast with the poverty of her own but she neither feels envy or bitterness. She gives her whole amount of her wages to her dear ones. When she was at the age of 15, her mother dies. Active and diligent this girl of fifteen makes up her mind to become a seamstress. At the age of 26 freed from her obligations as house keeper she enters the service of the parish priest of F'eterness who had been appointed to the Parish of chavanod. Later in her life when she is approached by the younger brother of the parish priest to get married she says "I vow forever my virginity to Jesus at the age of 34. I have thinking of it since I was 20". She was a down to earth person and her greatest desire was to give herself to God. This paper focuses on the following virtues of Mother Claudine Echernier

- **Humility**
- **Obedience**
- **Love of the neighbor**
- **Faith**
- **Observance of the Rules**

Humility

Our worthy Mother Foundress had such a low opinion of herself that she never pretended to be anything. But her faith and confidence in God animated her and gave her great courage and made her bear the honour of the title of Superior, which she accepted only through obedience, for she said so very many times that without the help of grace, she could not have resigned herself to this title. As soon as she could foresee that her presence was not needed for finalizing certain

things, through humility she abstained from appearing on the scene. She used to often say that having been born poor, her desire was to live and die poor and humiliated. She often repeated that according to her, a person who could not acquire a sufficient low opinion of herself in order to bear humiliations with resignation could not remain in their house.

She esteemed the virtue of humility so necessary for the salvation of the soul that she said in a convent a girl who is dominated by her pride deserves to go back into the world because there she could surely find more occasions to be humiliated and in the same way to do penance. It happened one day that a Sister hardly wise, allowed herself to say that our Mother had nothing lovable in her; this came to her ears, but she said these admirable words: "I came to know with great pleasure what someone said about me. It is true that I have nothing lovable, I rejoice at it, because the affection one has for me will be all for the good God." This good Mother appeared to be happy on all the occasions which presented themselves to humble her. She related that one day when going for confession, after having prepared herself sufficiently, at the moment of the accusation she remained speechless, without being able to find a word. "I thank the good God," she said, "for having given me this humiliation."

In a letter written by her to the Father Superior, she expressed herself thus: "I can tell you that I am happy with the humiliation which comes from my ignorance and from my incapacity. I thank the good God for it; but what pains me is to see that we do not profit enough from the trouble you take for the salvation of our souls and for our perfection, and I am not useful to you and do not help you to lead things to their end, I am rather an obstacle."

She strongly insisted on the practise of humility. She said that the good God abandons the proud souls and leaves them to fall shamefully in order to let them know their misery.

As she was convinced about her nothingness and incapacity, it was not rare to see her abasing herself below all the Sisters to the point of persuasively saying that she was still a novice, that she never had another state. As they asked her to explain herself, she added: "Yes, I was still very small when I had the misfortune of losing my mother which placed me in the novitiate of the mother of a family; then I was a novice in learning to sew: later, I became a novice in learning to cook for the parish priest; later on still I was a novice for the religious life. And now, actually, I learn to be a Superior. Thus, those who remain a long time in the novitiate need not be pitied; it is a happy time during which we learn many things."

During the two journeys that our Mother made with many of her Daughters in a horse carriage, she used her authority to give places to the Sisters as she judged fit, reserving for herself a seat

behind on a little hay. The Sisters felt mortified, but they had to obey and they were very edified by the humility of our virtuous Mother

Obedience

With regard to the virtue of obedience, it is expressed thus: “She had so much esteem for this virtue as for the other Christian virtues that she practised it with all the perfection of which she was capable. She recommended it; she preached it by her example. She had often told that she had the consolation to think that she was in the right path to work out her salvation, because she obeyed her Superiors and our holy Rules. She obeyed not only her superiors, but often also her inferiors. When she was travelling, she wanted to do only what her companion wanted provided it was according to the Rule.

Love of the neighbor

People of the world were happy with the good advice they had received from her. She helped the poor and “often,” “she would give more, if she were free. Our Mother was as generous as she was disinterested.” She repeated to us frequently: “We must work, because first of all God wants it of us and then to enable us to give alms.”

The orphans very specially attracted her compassion. She had always near her in the house of the farm, some of these poor children she had taken in when they came to beg at her door. She instructed them, taught them to work, helped them make their First Communion and did not allow them to go away unless she was sure that someone continued to look after them.

She was active in her manner of giving alms, and she distributed goods with much discernment.

If she was aware that her poor neighbours did not have firewood, she informed them that they were heating the oven in the convent so that they could profit by this occasion to bake their bread.

She gave foodstuffs to persons whom she knew were in want. She did not want the Sisters to be too exacting for their wages; she said that she was afraid that we would forget this recommendation later on.

Faith

Faith was her driving power, her consolation and her hope.

She possessed admirably the marvelous art of seeing God in all things; in creatures, in events, in everything and everywhere.

A Sister seeing her pulling out the weeds in the garden showed her surprise; our Mother replied: "I love this work very much, it reminds me about my poor heart, where there are always useless plants to uproot."

When she broke her leg she knitted, sitting on her bed. Some one told her that she should not tire herself thus; she replied that she was happy to mend the stockings of the ministers of our Lord. They were all the stockings of the Missionaries which she mended during the time of her illness.

Observance of the Rules

She listened to the Word of God with the greatest respect. She wanted to inculcate the same respect in every one. Having come to know that a Mission was going to be conducted at Lovagny, our Mother asked Father Superior Clavel the permission to follow the exercises, which he granted her. It was in winter, but the snow and the cold could not deter her from these pious walks, knitting all along. She made use of these occasions to listen to the accounts of her Daughters, whom she called, one after another to accompany her.

During the retreats, each evening she made us repeat the instructions of the day, adding to them her own reflections. Our Mother Foundress observed as exactly as she could our holy Rules in everything and always.

All the Sisters who had known her affirmed the same thing. When our Mother visited the convents, they said that they could not make her accept one dish more at table than those permitted by the Rule. If they told her that the day of her visit was a feast day for them, she replied: "It is true, for you, if it were permitted you would break the Rule only one day; but as for me, I will fail in it everyday if all the Sisters whom I visit were feasting thus."

During her journeys she did not omit any of her exercises; as in the house, she had her hours of silence, prayer, reading, etc. She said: If we dispense ourselves from the Rule during a journey, how will those who travel much observe it?

One day, finding herself in a convent where a sick sister had the permission to take wine at noon, our mother noticed that they put a bottle on the table. She asked to have it removed, saying that we must, as much as possible, and take things which are exemptions to the Rule in an unperceived manner. She was, nevertheless, very kind to the sick. She wanted each of our

Sisters to make know to her, her sufferings with simplicity and ask with humility what was necessary for her.

Our Mother was not only a simple Daughter of the Cross, but the Superior General. It is enough to conclude that if the perfection of a religious consists in the exact observance of the Rules, and if according to the testimony of competent men, our Mother Claudine Echernier was perfect and holy.