

## **Virtues Of Our Venerated Mother Foundress Claudine Echernier**

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Mother Claudine was brought up in poverty, accustomed early in life to hardwork, tried by affliction and misfortune, she had acquired a maturity of judgement beyond her age and condition. It does not seem that dreams of the future and seducing illusions of youth ever crossed her mind. Her only preoccupation was to know the will of God and accomplish it. Mother Claudine was not educated but was made to work under some masters to earn her living. Her character was built up with unselfishness, piety and filial love. This paper focuses on the following virtues of our Mother Claudine: **Love of Jesus Christ, Imitation of Jesus Christ, Poverty, Trust in Divine Providence, Confidence in Jesus Christ, Prayer and Devotion to Mary.**

### **Love of Jesus Christ**

Our mother loved Our Lord with an ardent and generous love, which manifested itself in her words, and many times by the tears she shed before the Blessed Sacrament and before the Crucifix. During the span of 30 years she had the happiness of receiving the Holy Communion daily. This immense favour, one of the most precious that she declared who owed to obedience made her progress continually in the path of sanctity; but it was never a motive for vain glory or for eccentricity. The whole day served for thanking and preparing for these Communions.

At Chavanod, no one remembers having seen her missing Mass on working days. If her health needed to be tended to she satisfied it after having assisted at Holy Mass.

She could not understand how anyone could find the time long during the Visits to the Blessed Sacrament nor how religious could ever say, like the people of the world : the Mass was very long; the offices were long, etc.

Her recollection was so great in the holy place that she never knew what was happening around her. It happened to her many times that she passed the whole night in the church, failing to have noticed that the Sacristan had closed the doors, and sure enough she was not angry. This mistake often passed unnoticed among the Sisters, because the various occupations demanded her

presence here and there. At Chavanod, for example, the Sisters of the farm thought that she was in the Novitiate house. At Annecy, they thought she had returned to Chavanod. It was only on the following day at the time of the recreation, on being questioned about her absence, that our good Mother related with simplicity her happy adventure.

### **Imitation of Jesus Christ**

Like Him and for love of Him she loved poverty, work, suffering, privations, an obscure and hidden life. Like Him and in view of pressing Him, she edified the neighbour, instructed and cared for him according to her ability; she tried to procure the glory of God as much as possible. Her thoughts, her intentions, her words and her works, all were animated by the spirit of Our Lord.

She was like the Ciborium enclosing the holy species. She carried Jesus within herself. He was her life, according to the beautiful teaching of St. Paul.

### **Poverty**

The attraction for the perishable things of this world never allured her, nor even tempted the generous heart of our venerated Mother Foundress. As a child, young girl, in the world, in the convent, everywhere and always, our venerated Mother Claudine Echernier was detached from everything and practised the virtue of poverty in all its perfection.

Her clothes were clean and neat, but patched. She took care of the least things. Very often she said that she was humiliated when she saw some of the Daughters of the Cross not being satisfied with little. When she took the Teaching-Sisters to a parish, she recommended order and cleanliness. She never remained idle. She worked continuously, but with what purity of intention! She forbade us to overburden ourselves with work. She wanted us to be always on our guard against human interest and human respect; that is to say, she never wanted the desire of money to make us neglect our spiritual exercises; she also recommended very much that we never work in order to attract the esteem of others. She often repeated that the schools can go on without us, that the washing of linen also can be done without us, etc., etc., that we were not at all needed; but in order to save our souls it is necessary that we do what Our Lord Jesus Christ came to teach us to do during the 33 years he lived on earth. She was always afraid that the sisters did not understand enough what our religious vocation bound us to. She expatiated long

on the necessity of meditating on the poverty practiced by the Holy Family. However, she was far from insisting that her Daughters do things which were not in keeping with the dignity of their state.

One day, relates one Sister, as she was speaking to our Mother about rather important things, it happened that in spite of herself she allowed herself to be distracted by fixedly looking at her footwear; she perceived it and told the sister: “You are looking at my slippers, well! they were discarded by one Sister; she considered them too ugly for her; I took them for myself. The stockings that I have on now, I took them also from a Sister who, finding them too rough has given them to me.”

Once, when she explained a spiritual reading to the novices, she gave them this advice: you must form yourselves to be brisk at your work when you are young, and we cannot receive among us people who do not work satisfactorily, because they will be only a burden in the community and in the work.

She could not stand superfluity. Many times she showed how pained she was to see that the spirit of poverty and simplicity did not reign among the Sisters and even in the novitiate. The choice of furniture, the curtains for the windows wearied her. When she visited the convents she particularly observed if they practiced poverty.

### **Trust in Divine Providence**

Our dear Mother enjoyed a robust constitution. When asked about the art of preserving her health. “Do like me”, she said, “I leave to God the responsibility of all my actions contenting myself in obeying Him, by following my Rule. In all that happens to me I see the disposition of Divine Providence; thus I am at rest always.”

### **Confidence in Jesus Christ**

Her love for Our Lord made her say that she could not understand, that she could not even believe that anyone could enjoy pleasure apart from the service of God; but she was equally not surprised to see that those who neglected their spiritual exercises were dejected, dreamy and lacked in devotion. Confidentially she confessed that without perseverance in spiritual exercises, she would never have been able to bear her habitual sufferings.

### **Prayer**

One day she went over to a neighbour's to ask for a service; during the time the lady went to search for the desired object in another room, our Mother knelt down to pray; but forgetting herself a little too long, she was taken by surprise in this posture. "What are you doing there, Mother?" the lady asked her naively. She replied very simply : "I pray a little, it is good to keep busy."

She had understood perfectly well that prayer is one of the most essential obligations of the religious life. The more she advanced in age, the more time she gave to this holy exercise.

### **Devotion to Mary**

The photograph of our venerated Mother is an authentic testimony of her devotion towards Mary, whom she had chosen and had given us for Mother and Patroness. Each time we look at this worthy Foundress, does she not seem to show us her rosary, telling us : "Do like me, never cease praying to the very Holy Virgin; but above all imitate her in her humility, her modesty and her simplicity."

Apart from these usual practices of devotion, our pious Mother made pilgrimages to our Lady of Aumône, Myans, La Salette with a real spirit of mortification and prayer. The companions of her journeys were edified with the very touching marks of confidence that she showed and with her love for her whom she loved to visit.

It is our Mother who established the custom of adding to the Evening Prayer, one Our Father and one Hail Mary in honour of Our Lady of La Salette. Also, she was the first, we have said, who expressed the desire to see the statue of the Holy Virgin placed on the Monticule, as Guardian and Protectress of our whole Congregation.

Mother Claudine comes in cross roads with Father Mermier, who a shrewd observer, appreciates her as " the strong and energetic character" and therefore asks her disclose him her desires and the message he conveys is:

" Mgr. Rey grants you full liberty to give up yourself up to undertaking and does not prevent you from following up the inspirations of grace,as long as they come from God THE WAY IS OPEN"