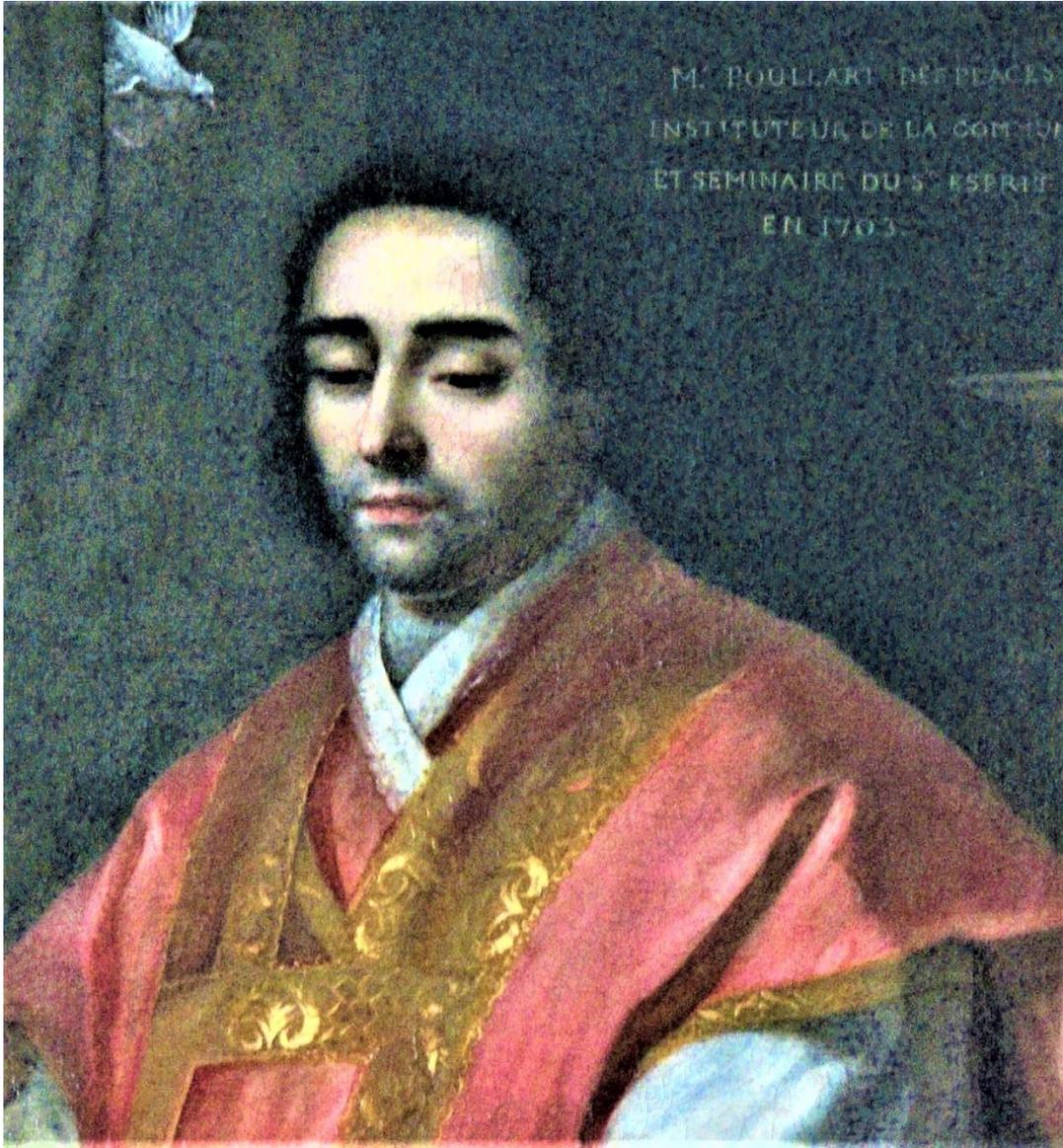


## **Poullart des Places Novena**

**23<sup>rd</sup> September – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021**



**Walking in the path of virtues**

**In the Footsteps of Claude-François Poullart des Places**

**A.M.D.G.V.q.M.**

## **Why a novena on the virtues of Poullart des Places?**

On June 12, 2010, Fr. Jean Savoie submitted to the Congregation of the Causes of Saints the Positio of the virtues of Claude-François Poullart des Places: it clearly showed the heroic virtues of our founder. This Positio (version 1) was not accepted by the Congregation of the Causes of Saints because it did not correspond to the new norms for the presentation of causes.

Fr John Fogarty, Superior General, asked me in May 2018 to take up this work again for our founder's cause. Following the new norms given in the Congregation's work "Le cause dei Santi", I was able to complete this work - 800 pages - and send it on 29 April 2021 to Fr Orlando Zanovelli, Postulator General of our Congregation. The very next day, 30 April, Fr Orlando officially deposited the Positio of the Virtues (version 2) with Mgr Maurizio Tagliaferri, relator appointed by the Congregation of the Causes of Saints. Having ten other causes to study, the relator thought he would be able to examine the dossier of our founder in September-October: let us hope that this Positio (version 2) will be accepted. I entrusted this cause to his great friend, St Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, when I went to pray near his tomb at St Laurent-sur-Sèvres (Vendée) on the eve of the Assumption on 14 August.

Since the Positio was deposited, the General Council has asked me to prepare a novena of prayer for Poullart des Places, based on this research on the virtues of our founder. The Congregation of the Causes of Saints asks that the heroic nature of the founder's virtues be explained according to a very academic plan: theological virtues (faith, hope, charity); cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance); virtues of the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience); other virtues particularly lived by the Servant of God (humility, piety...). Rather than following this classical pattern, we will contemplate the heroic virtues of Claude-François by following his personal journey, thus discovering his spiritual growth in the path of holiness. To help our prayer, I have chosen only a few highlights from the virtuous life of our founder.

We will live this novena just before the opening of the General Chapter in Bagamoyo (3-24 October 2021). Naturally, I propose that each day of this novena we take the prayer for the General Chapter. The phrases of the prayer are numbered, allowing the prayer to be recited in whole or in part.

For the advancement of his cause, we must pray to Poullart des Places in all our communities; we must beg him in the trials of illnesses, accidents; we must dare to ask him for benefits, for healings.

### **Prayer for the beatification of Claude-Francois Poullart des Places**

*“God of infinite goodness, We praise and thank you for the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, which you have given to your Church through the work of Claude-Francois Poullart des Places.*

*May the witness of the life and holiness of Claude, especially his compassion for the poor enlighten and guide us May it move us to live mission with the love which the Holy Spirit spreads in our hearts; may it inspire us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers for his harvest and communicate his concern to contribute to the formation of saintly missionaries Grant us the grace of his beatification as well as the particular favour.... for which we ask today through his intercession, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”<sup>1</sup>*

***Your testimonies are important. Please send them to us.***

P. Yves-Marie FRADET, C.S.Sp.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prière pour la cause de Poullart, au verso de l'image (Province de France, 1991)

## Prayer for the General Chapter – Bagamoyo

### Bagamoyo – Tanzania

“Behold, I am doing something new” (Is 43:19)  
XXI GENERAL CHAPTER



1. God of new beginnings,  
God of our founders and ancestors in the faith...
2. As we prepare for the next General Chapter in Bagamoyo, Tanzania  
we give you thanks  
for the charisma bequeathed to us by  
Claude Poullart des Places and François Libermann
3. Renew our vision  
to discern the horizons of the Spiritan mission  
to which you call us  
in today's complex world.
4. Open our ears  
to listen to your ever-creative word  
and to hear the voices of those who hope  
and long for a better world.
5. Renew our words  
to proclaim the joyful gospel of Christ  
and to speak of your love and mercy to all peoples.
6. Inspire in each of us  
your life-giving Spirit of renewal.
7. May we rejoice in the richness of our diversity,  
and strive to live within our spiritual family  
a deeper communion of life and mission!
8. May Mary, faithful disciple of Pentecost  
give us, by her example,  
the courage to support and defend the weak and vulnerable  
against all those who oppress them!
9. Father, we present our prayer to you  
through Jesus Christ, the companion of our lives  
in the Spirit that unites us. Amen.

## DAY 1 - THURSDAY, 23 SEPT. - RADICAL FAITH IN GOD

A brilliant young student, Claude defended the Grand Acte at the Parliament of Brittany in August 1698, then obtained his law degree in Nantes: in the eyes of men and his parents, he was at the height of glory with a future all mapped out for him: lawyer at the Parliament of Brittany. He lived as a rich young Christian man. In August 1701, he decided to make a serious retreat.

### ***Faith in a God of love, Father of mercies (August 1701)***

“The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:5). God’s love for him - "Prior dilexit nos - God first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). This is the experience of young Claude at his conversion retreat, as his notes Reflections on the Truths of Religion testify:

*“You were looking for me, Lord, and I was running away from you [...] How kind you are, my divine Saviour! You do not want my death, you only want my conversion [...] I effectively recognise your love! You love me, my divine Saviour, and you give me very tangible signs of it. I know that your tenderness is infinite, since it has not been exhausted by constant ingratitude [...] I am convinced, my God, of the horror of sin. How happy I am to recognize its enormity [...] But you are the Father of mercies.”*<sup>2</sup>

The infinite love of God arouses in him a desire for radical conversion:

*“I must change my nature... I must strip myself of the old Adam and put on Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>. For from now on I must be entirely yours, my divine Saviour [...]. You want me, my God, to be a man, but a man according to your own heart.”*<sup>4</sup>

Claude was eager for glory; from now on he will seek the glory of God. He will strip himself of the old Adam: ambition, vanity, esteem from the world. He dreamed of being great according to the world, he will seek to be a man according to the heart of God. A decisive turning point in his life!

### **Faith in Christ who shed his blood for him - prayer to the Trinity (Dec. 1701).**

A few months later in Paris, in a Prayer to the Trinity, he was able to find more personal accents in faith in Christ who shed his blood for him:

*“Most holy and most adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom I adore [...] Grant me the grace, O my God, to engrave in my heart [...] the death and passion of my Jesus, his sacred life and his holy incarnation, so that I may remember them unceasingly. May the lost moments of my past life be ever present to me, with the horror of my sins [...] I would rather die on the gallows and on the wheel than consent to commit a single small venial sin [...] provided I do not offend you [...] I ask you for all these graces [...] through the precious blood which my loving Saviour Jesus Christ was kind enough to shed for me on the tree of the cross<sup>5</sup>.”*

### **Word of God (Gal 2:15, 19-20)**

<sup>15</sup> *“We also have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the law... 19 I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. My present life in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.”*

- Renew my faith in the infinite love of the Father of mercies.
- Renew my faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

Our Father...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

---

<sup>2</sup> Réflexion sur les vérités de la Religion, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain, p. 279-288.

<sup>3</sup> Ces expressions sont de saint Paul : cf. Ga. 3, 27 ; Ep. 4, 22-24 ; Col. 3, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Réflexions sur les vertus de la religion, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines op. cit. p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> Prière à la Trinité, Fragments d'un règlement particulier, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines, op. cit. p. 315.

## **DAY 2 – FRIDAY 24 SEPT. - OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD**

*The call of the rich young man – “...Come, follow me... He went away sad” (Mt 19:21-22)*

Already after a retreat in 1698, Claude had spoken about the call to the priesthood. But Claude's priestly project completely upset the plans of his parents, who foresaw a brilliant future for him in the parliament of Brittany, in order to regain the old titles of nobility. So as not to upset them, Claude studied law for two years in Nantes. On his return, he tried on the lawyer's robe prepared by his mother, looked at himself in the mirror and then returned it, swearing that he would never wear it again! Claude dared to say no to his parents! Wishing to see things more clearly, he stayed a year in his father's business.

### ***Election retreat - Choosing a state of life - Obeying the will of God***

To be sure that he was doing God's will, he decided to continue his conversion retreat with a retreat of election. His retreat notes Choosing a State of Life open with a prayer:

*“O my God, [...] I renounce ... my own will to follow blindly yours. Speak, O my God, to my heart, I am ready to obey you [...] It is to you, O my God, that I must turn to determine myself according to your will”<sup>6</sup>.*

For the various states of life open to him, he examines the arguments for and against, with such lucidity about his ambition and desire for glory, that he cannot decide.

*“O my God, destroy in me all worldly attachments [...] May I no longer, in the state I will choose for ever, have any other view than that of pleasing you [...] Make me find an Ananias who will show me the true path as he did to Saint Paul. I will follow his advice as your commandments”<sup>7</sup>.*

### **Obedience to his spiritual director - Radical choices decisive for the Glory of God**

This “Ananias”, his spiritual director, shows him the will of God, which is much more demanding than he thought. Claude went to do his theology in Paris, at the Collège Louis-le-Grand run by the Jesuits, and not at the Sorbonne University, which was the only one authorised to award university degrees, necessary to obtain gratifying ecclesiastical posts. He wanted to be a priest for the glory of God, according to God's heart. His decision was made: the rich young man said yes to God's call to the priesthood and decided to leave his parents and go to Paris for training. *“Very passionate about glory and everything that can elevate a man above others by merit”*, as he says himself<sup>8</sup>, he renounces, for love of God, the brilliant future that his father was preparing for him in the world and all ecclesiastical careers. Like Abraham, Claude obeys God's call. His life is an adventure of faith, in which he allows himself to be guided towards a “country” that God will gradually show him. God leads the young Claude to total self-denial, which will make him a poor man among the poor.

### **Obedience to the Church, faithfulness to the Pope**

His obedience to God also involves obedience to the Church and the magisterium of the Church. It was to remain in this obedience that he gave up attending the Sorbonne University, whose theological teaching was marked by Gallicanism and Jansenism.

### **Word of God (Gen 12:1-4)**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Abraham, “Leave your country and your relatives and your father's house for the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you a great people, and I will bless you and make your name great; be a blessing! <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you... Through you all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.” <sup>4</sup> Abraham left, as the Lord had said to him”.

- What sacrifices does obedience to God require of me even today?
- Where am I in my obedience to the Church, to the Congregation, to my superiors?

Our Father ...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

---

<sup>6</sup> Choix d'un état de vie, Chr. De Mare Aux Racines op. cit. p. 300, 302 -

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem* Chr. DE MARE., p. 311 ; *Biographia ex Documentis* p. 597 – Texte p. 606.

<sup>8</sup> Choix d'un État de vie, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines, op. cit. p. 303

## **DAY 3 – SAT. 25 SEPT.– CHARITY TOWARDS GOD –**

### **A LIFE OF INTENSE PRAYER**

On his arrival at the Collège Louis-le-Grand in Paris, Claude is in the throes of his conversion and election retreat. He already had a profound interior life: he was quickly noticed by the most fervent students, who co-opted him to join the secret Assembly of Friends, the AA. Upon joining the AA, he drew up a plan of life: Fragments of a Particular Regulation. The four pages that remain of this writing give the many daily exercises of piety that our young student imposed on himself.

### **Fragments of a Particular Regulation - A Life of Intense Prayer**

In these prayers we find formulas that are still familiar to us: in addition to the Pater, the Ave Maria and the Credo, the Veni Sancte Spiritus, the De Profundis for the dead, the litanies of the Blessed Virgin and those of the Holy Name of Jesus. Others are texts that Claude simply borrowed from the prayer books used in the colleges of the Society of Jesus, in particular the manual of the AA, which he had just received<sup>9</sup>. Some, however, are personal, like the prayer to the Trinity. His prayer to the Father of mercies, to Christ who shed his blood for him, is addressed to the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary:

*“Most holy and adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom I adore by your holy grace with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength [...] I ask you [...] your holy love, that of the Blessed Virgin the grace to know and to carry out with perfect resignation your holy will, which are the three graces I ask of you above all things”.*<sup>10</sup>

It is “very remarkable that a young man could write such a prayer”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Numerous and long daily prayers**

The prayers he undertakes to say every day, morning and evening, already represent two hours of prayer. In addition to this, there are the prayers he says every time he comes in or out of his room, and many visits to the Blessed Sacrament (on his way to class and between classes, after lunch and dinner). Throughout the day, he likes to recite “*The Sancta Maria to ask for the lights of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Blessed Virgin.*”<sup>12</sup> Claude is not a prisoner of formulas but leaves room for the free inspiration of the Spirit: he recites the prayer to the Holy Trinity in its long formula “*more or less in this way twice a day in the morning and in the evening*”<sup>13</sup> and in its shorter form as well.

### **A man of prayer, a contemplative in action**

These prayers may seem too heavy for us to bear, like the breastplate for young David. They are, in fact, like the scaffolding needed to build a life of intense prayer. Nothing is too long for those who love. Beginners, with their hearts burning with the love of God, always need strong, numerous practices to create a habit of prayer: a permanent presence to God, the “practical union” according to Libermann. This is Claude’s desire:

*“that my heart and my mind, being filled only with you, I may always be in your presence”.*<sup>14</sup>

### **Word of God**

Everyone can read again in silence the extract from the above Prayer to the Trinity “Most Holy and Adorable...”

Our Father ...

Prayer for the General Chapter.

---

<sup>9</sup> Pratique de dévotion et des vertus chrestiennes suivant les Règles des Congrégations de Nostre-Dame, Paris, 1654, IV-76 p. ; Pratique des vertus chrestiennes propres à la Congrégation de Nostre-Dame, (Arch. S.J. de Toulouse, CA.109). Ces deux manuels rarissimes sont reliés ensemble. J. Michel, L'influence de l'Aa, op. cit. p.14.

<sup>10</sup> Prière à la Trinité Fragments d'un règlement particulier, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines, op. cit. p.315.

<sup>11</sup> P. Seán FARRAGHER, CSSp., Témoin au procès diocésain de Paris.

<sup>12</sup> Fragments d'un règlement particulier, Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines, op. cit. p.314.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem* p.315.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem* p. 315.

## DAY 4 – SUNDAY 26 SEPT. – FOLLOWING THE POOR AND HUMBLE CHRIST

**August 1701: full of vanity and ambition - very passionate about glory.**

In his retreat notes in August 1701, Claude paints a “truer than life portrait”<sup>15</sup> of himself:

“very passionate for glory and for all that can raise a man above others by merit; full of jealousy and despair of the successes of others ... slave yet to greatness ... unable to suffer a reported affront.”<sup>16</sup>

In his march towards holiness, the “most formidable obstacle is ambition, which is my dominant passion [...] this vanity with which I am so full”<sup>17</sup>. He makes a bold request to God:

“Lord ... confound my glory. Let me find mortification everywhere, let men reject and despise myself. I consent, my God, provided you love me very much.”<sup>18</sup>

**Arrival at Louis-le-Grand - the life of M. Le Nobletz - Prayer at the Trinity**

On arriving in Paris, he read something providential, which led him to follow the poor and humble Christ:

Reading the life of **M. Le Nobletz**, a missionary priest who died in the odour of sanctity in Brittany, was no small help to him **in despising the world...** His mortifications were so austere that his confessor was often obliged to moderate their pious excesses.<sup>19</sup>

In his life plan and personal prayer to the Trinity, morning and evening, he begs God to humble him:

“Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom I adore [...] May it please you to grant me faith, humility [...] great confidence in you, great mistrust of myself [...] contempt for the esteem of the world [...] begging you, my God, to humble me in all other places that you please”<sup>20</sup>.

**Mystic of poverty - stripped of everything, living only on alms**

In this same prayer to the Trinity, the rich young man, son of the “biggest businessman in Rennes”<sup>21</sup>, asks God for radical poverty:

“All that remains for me to ask of you, my God, is the complete deprivation of all earthly and perishable goods. Grant me this grace again by detaching myself absolutely from all creatures so that I may be, inviolably, yours alone”<sup>22</sup>.

He will go a long way to achieve heroic poverty, a *Mysticism of Poverty*:<sup>23</sup>

“I wanted to see myself one day stripped of everything, living only on alms after having given everything. Of all temporal goods, I wanted to reserve only my health, of which I wished to make a complete sacrifice to God in the work of the missions, too happy if, after having set the whole world ablaze with the love of God, I had been able to give even the last drop of my blood.”<sup>24</sup>

Claude renounced the riches accumulated for him by his father. He renounced benefits and legacies. At the beginning of 1703, he “left a benefit of four thousand livres.”<sup>25</sup> “In 1706 he refused three benefices resigned in his favour in the Court of Rome<sup>26</sup>. He only wanted to receive the life annuity of sixty livres demanded by the bishop of Rennes, from the poorest seminarians<sup>27</sup>. Poor with the poor.

**Word of God:” (Phil 2, 6-8)**

“He, being in the divine form, did not jealously guard the rank that made him equal to God. 7 But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming like men. And having become like a man, 8 he humbled himself even more, accepting even death, and death on a cross!

*Our Father...*

*Prayer for the General Chapter...*

<sup>15</sup> J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Places*, ch. VI Un caractère sentimental p. 57-71.

<sup>16</sup> Choix d'un état de vie, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines op.cit.* p. 303 –.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, Ch. DE MARE, *Aux racines op.cit.* p. 292

<sup>18</sup> *Réflexions sur les vertus de la religion*. Chr. DE MARE *Aux racines op. cit.* p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> Ch. BESNARD, *Manuscrit*, p. 276 ; P. COULON, *Poullart des Places, op. cit.* Annexe IV p. 204 -

<sup>20</sup> *Prière à la Trinité*, *Fragments d'un règlement particulier* Chr. DE MARE *Aux racines op. cit.* p.315-316

<sup>21</sup> A. RIAUD, *Poullart des Places, op. cit.* p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Fragments d'un règlement particulier*, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines, op. cit.* p. 315 ;

<sup>23</sup> J. MICHEL, art. Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart des Places et sur la genèse de son œuvre VI- 1. Une mystique de pauvreté, dans Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines op. cit.* p. 112ss

<sup>24</sup> *Réflexions sur le passé*, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines, op. cit.* p. 322-323.

<sup>25</sup> Billet de bien II – 27 décembre 1702 – J. MICHEL, *L'influence de l'AA, op. cit.* p. 40;

<sup>26</sup> J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Place, op. cit.* p. 181-182.

<sup>27</sup> J. MICHEL, *L'influence de l'Aa, op. cit.* p. 40-41.

## DAY 5 – MONDAY 27 SEPT. DEDICATED TO THE SPIRIT OF FIRE OF LOVE

While in his “Rennes” writings Claude did not speak of the Holy Spirit, the Fragments d’un Règlement Particulier, his life plan, mentions him twice: at the beginning and in the prayer to the Trinity:

“... and the Sancta Maria to ask for the lights of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Blessed Virgin...  
Most Holy and Adorable Trinity, Father, Son and **Holy Spirit** whom I adore...”<sup>28</sup>.

In Claude, his faith in God and his attachment to Christ are opened to the Holy Spirit.

### **Pentecost 1702: I will open my heart to the Holy Spirit**

On entering the AA, Claude received the manual *The Practice of the Virtues*<sup>29</sup>; in it he discovered texts “of the greatest interest for Spiritans<sup>30</sup>: ch. VII for the Pentecost novena and ch. VIII for the Feast and the Octave. For him, it is not a simple spiritual exercise of devotion. Claude is in a period of great spiritual fervour: he lives Pentecost deeply like the Apostles in the Cenacle with the Virgin Mary, longing for the coming of the Spirit, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*”.

“On the day of Pentecost and throughout the week, I will open my heart to the Holy Spirit, so that **he may fill it, possess it intimately, and be the spirit of my spirit and the heart of my heart. I will present it to him, so that he may consume it as a victim of the flames of his love...**

*To accustom myself to consider the Spirit of God dwelling intimately in myself; that this Spirit is a spirit of love who asks nothing else but to kindle in my heart the flames with which he burns the Father and the Son, and thus to surrender my heart to him... so that it may breathe nothing but the love of God.*<sup>31</sup>

### **18 months of Spiritual Consolations: a “spiritual flight” (June 1702 - December 1703)**

The Spirit blows where it wills. Pentecost 1702 was a “runway” for a “spiritual flight”<sup>32</sup>. For eighteen months, Claude experienced abundant spiritual consolations. Like the Virgin Mary in her Magnificat, he later testified to this in his Reflections on the Past:

“I received **consolations in abundance**, [...] It is fitting that I recall ... those moments of **fervour** which I had the happiness of feeling in my first return to God [...] **I could hardly think of anything but God** [...] **I wished only to love him** [...] I could often not hold back **torrents of tears** [...] I had the pleasure for eighteen months of living in this way”<sup>33</sup>.

### **Consecration to the Holy Spirit before the Black Madonna - Pentecost 27th May 1703**

At the beginning of Lent in March 1703, Claude decided to go and live with his twelve poor schoolboys at the Gros-Chapelet. More than food, he shared what made him live, the fire of love of the Spirit. This could not but arouse in the group an ardent desire: to live together in the same consecration. Living deeply in the Holy Spirit since Pentecost 1702, Claude proposed to them, like water flowing from a spring, to consecrate themselves to the Holy Spirit on 27 May, the day of Pentecost. Thus, before the Black Virgin, Our Lady of Good Deliverance, in the church of St-Etienne-des-Grés,

“*Messire Claude-François Poullart des Places, in the year one thousand seven hundred and three, on the feast of Pentecost, being then only an aspirant to the ecclesiastical state, began the establishment of the said community and seminary consecrated to the Holy Spirit, under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin*”<sup>34</sup>.

### **Word of God (Acts 1,4-5; 2,1-4)**

“1<sup>5</sup> John baptized with water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit in a few days. ...2 1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place, 2 when suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a violent gust of wind, filling the whole house where they were standing. 3 They saw tongues appearing, as if they were made of fire, and they were divided, and one of them rested on each of them. 4 Then **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.**”

Our Father...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

<sup>28</sup> Fragments d'un règlement particulier Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines*, p.314-315.

<sup>29</sup> La Pratique des vertus chrestiennes, propres à la Congrégation Notre-Dame, Paris, 1654 156 p.

<sup>30</sup> J. MICHEL, *L'Influence de l'Aa*, op. cit. p. 67

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem* p. 69-70.

<sup>32</sup> J. MICHEL *Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart dans Chr. DE MARE, Aux racines op.cit. p. 112.*

<sup>33</sup> *Réflexions sur le passé*, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines op. cit. p. 326*,

<sup>34</sup> Arch. C.S.Sp. *Registre des Associés* commencé en 1734 seulement, mais les précisions sur la fondation sont reproduites d'un "ancien registre". Cité par J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Places*, op. cit. p. 139.

## DAY 6 – TUESDAY 28 SEPT. – CHARITY TOWARDS POOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

### *In Paris, a growing commitment to the poor.*

Already in Rennes, Claude was visiting the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Yves. When he arrived in Paris, his devotion to the poor intensified, as is attested by the “billet de bien” (no. IX) of Pentecost 1702:

*“Another maintains and pays the pension of a poor schoolboy, buys old clothes to clothe other poor people [...] He often goes to hospitals; he gives instructions twice a week to twenty poor Savoyards and also relieves them for temporal matters”*<sup>35</sup>

According to Father Thomas, two strong convictions animated young Claude in this apostolate:

*“It was a consolation...to be able to relieve (Christ his Liberator) in the person of the poor who are his members. For this purpose he withdrew all that he could, even his own necessities.”*<sup>36</sup>

*“He assembled from time to time little Savoyards and taught them catechism as he could find the occasion, convinced that their souls were not less dear to Jesus Christ than those of the greatest lords, and that there was as much and even more fruit to be hoped for.”*<sup>37</sup>

P. Thomas underlines the ingenuity of his charity and clarifies for us the meaning of his asceticism:

*“His very modest pension...he found a way to give a large part of it to the poor [...] To relieve the needs of many others, charity, when joined to mortification, makes one ingenious in finding in one’s own necessities a kind of superfluity to give to the poor”*<sup>38</sup>

### **Helping the “poor schoolboys”**

Claude lived the impulse of the Spirit of Pentecost: Veni Pater pauperum, come Father of the poor.

**“What the Holy Spirit himself made known to him on** <sup>page 315</sup> **as the best way to achieve this end was to help with the subsistence of the poor schoolchildren.”**<sup>39</sup>

The Spirit of charity led Claude to an ever stronger commitment to the poor schoolboys:

- From May 1702 onwards, he provided board for his first pupil J.-B. Faulconnier;<sup>40</sup> he took full responsibility for him on a permanent basis and associated him with his charity work for the poor.
- Soon, at the beginning of the school year in 1702, there were five, then twelve. Poullart rented rooms in the Gros-Chapelet building in rue des Cordiers, near the Collège Louis-le-Grand. This allowed him to see them more often, to bring them the leftovers from the Jesuits’ meals, and to give them talks for their spiritual formation. But he continued to live at the Collège Louis-le-Grand.
- At the beginning of Lent in March 1703, Poullart took a further decisive step. He left his room at the Collège Louis le Grand to go and live with the 12 poor schoolchildren at the Gros-Chapelet. Like Christ who came to earth, Poullart will evangelise the poor by living with the poor. A further step in the mystique of poverty inspired by the Spirit of Love.

This house of charity is the cradle of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. This life of poverty and charity attracts the poor students, who soon number 40. Claude soon has to rent out all the rooms in the Gros Chapelet, the small house, and those in the adjoining building, the White Rose, the large house.

### **Word of God: Acts 2:42-47:**

**“<sup>2</sup>And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>3</sup>And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>4</sup>And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>5</sup>And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>6</sup>And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>7</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

Our Father...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

<sup>35</sup> Billet de Bien IX – Pentecôte 1702, J. MICHEL, *L'influence de l'Aa*, op. cit. p. 38 ;

<sup>36</sup> P. THOMAS, *Manuscrit* dans KOREN p. 266 et dans COULON *Poullart des Places*, op. cit. Annexe I p. 180.

<sup>37</sup> P. THOMAS *Manuscrit* dans KOREN p. 268 ; P. COULON, *Poullart des Places* op. cit. Annexe I p. 181.

<sup>38</sup> P. THOMAS, *Manuscrit Ibidem* KOREN p. 267-268, P. COULON, , op. cit. p. 180-181.

<sup>39</sup> P.J. PICOT DE CLORIVIERE, *La Vie de Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, p. 314-315.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Baptiste FAULCONNIER deviendra plus tard curé de la paroisse de St Hilaire-St-Mesmin, au diocèse d'Orléans.

## DAY 7<sup>ÈME</sup> – WEDNESDAY 29 SEPT. -- CHASTITY - THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN MARY

### *Child dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin - Protection of the Virgin*

From his earliest childhood, Claude wore white for seven years in honour of the Immaculate Virgin. Later, he would often kneel before the statue of Our Lady of Miracles in the church of Saint-Sauveur: "and he especially asked for the grace of perfect purity."<sup>41</sup> The Virgin protected him in his female relationships in Rennes and Nantes. Having arrived in Paris, Claude continued to implore her protection:

*"... and the Sancta Maria to ask for the lights of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Blessed Virgin [...] Every morning [...] I will recite the Sancta Maria, etc. to place myself particularly under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, whose particular child I was once, having been vowed to her by my parents, who made me wear the white for seven years in her honour."<sup>42</sup>*

At the Collège Louis-le-Grand, Claude was one of the ardent defenders of the Immaculate Virgin. In the prayer to the Trinity, morning and evening, on entering and leaving his room, he asks for chastity:

*"Most Holy and Most Adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit [...] May it please you to grant me faith, humility, chastity, purity of intention"*<sup>43</sup>

### *Prayer of the AA - novena for the feast of the Conception of the Virgin December 1702 -*

Claude discovers the meditations proposed by the AA. The octave of Pentecost ends with Mary:

*"Invoke the Holy Spirit, who prepared the soul and body of **the Virgin** to receive the divine Word, that he dispose my soul by charity, **my body by purity**, to that ineffable union which his love seeks in the Eucharist."*<sup>44</sup>

The feast of the *Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary* made him discover the two aspects of purity:

*"The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin is chiefly considerable for the advantages of **the purity** in which she was conceived. **Purity in her soul** by a complete exemption from all forms of sin. **Purity in her body** ... She had to have both in order to be a worthy Mother of God and to conceive a Son who is **purity** itself; you must therefore work to acquire both in order to be a son of Mary and to receive Jesus Christ.*

*"I will begin to prepare myself for this four days ahead: On the first day, I will try to conceive a holy idea of that **incomparable purity** which raises the glorious Virgin above all the children of men and makes her worthy, from the first moment of her conception, of the admiration of the angels and of all the affections of the most Holy Trinity [...]. I will say the Office of the Conception these days ... to honour **the three prerogatives of her purity**, which burst forth **in her soul** by the ruin of sin, **in her understanding** by the holiness of her thoughts, **in her will** by the innocence of her affections."*<sup>45</sup>

### In Place of the Word of God - **General and Particular Regulations (1705)**

1. *All the pupils shall adore especially the Holy Spirit to whom they have been specially devoted.<sup>46</sup> They shall also have a singular devotion to the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.*<sup>47</sup>

2. *They will choose the feasts of Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception as their principal feasts. They will celebrate the first to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love,<sup>48</sup> and the second to*

<sup>41</sup> J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Places*, op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Fragments d'un règlement particulier* Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines*, op.cit. p. 314. Ce détail est mentionné par Pierre THOMAS, dans son *Manuscrit*, p. 228.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, DE MARE p. 315.

<sup>44</sup> Texte du Manuel des Congrégations mariales, *Pratique des Vertus*, p. 78-79. cité par J. MICHEL dans son article "Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de *Poullart des Places*..." in Chr. DE MARE, *Aux Racines*, op. cit. p.116.

<sup>45</sup> J. MICHEL dans son opuscule "L'influence de l'Aa ... op. cit. p.70-71.

<sup>46</sup> Dévoués : consacrés. La maison a été inaugurée aux fêtes de la Pentecôte, mais la consécration spéciale au Saint-Esprit a une portée bien plus profonde que ce souvenir. (Lécuyer).

<sup>47</sup> Selon une tradition orale la cérémonie d'inauguration de la communauté s'est déroulée dans la chapelle N.-D. de Bonne Délivrance, en l'église Saint-Etienne-des-Grès. Mais la formule va beaucoup plus loin : le fondateur compte sur la protection de la Vierge pour que les élèves appartiennent entièrement au Saint-Esprit auquel ils ont été offerts. (Lécuyer).

<sup>48</sup> Telle est donc la grâce que Poullart des Places met au principe même de son œuvre : la charité dont la source est en Dieu et que l'Esprit Saint répand dans les cœurs comme un feu. (Lécuyer).

*obtain from the Blessed Virgin an **angelic purity**: two virtues which must form the whole foundation of their piety.*

Father Lécuyer specifies in his commentary: *“the angelic purity which is desired here is not only bodily chastity, but a purity which imitates as far as possible that of Mary, free from all stain of sin: refusal of all defilement of sin, of all compromise, in order to be able to give oneself entirely to God.”*

Our Father...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

## **DAY 8 – THURSDAY 30 SEPT. – TO EVANGELISE THE POOR - PRUDENCE AND AUDACITY -**

Poullart des Places lived two essential virtues for any founder: prudence and audacity.

### ***Prudence in discerning his vocation.***

In order to discern his vocation, Poullart made an election retreat in August 1701. At the end of his choice of a state of life, he was still undecided. Cautiously, he goes to consult his spiritual director:

*“I am going Lord, to discover myself without hiding anything from your ministers. By your holy grace, may I find an Ananias who will show me the true way as he did to St. Paul. I will follow his advice as your commandments.”*<sup>49</sup>

His spiritual director confirms his vocation to the ecclesiastical life, but advises him to take a radical path: to study theology in Paris at the Jesuit College Louis-le-Grand and not at the Sorbonne.

### ***Caution in founding the work.***

When he began to help and support "poor schoolboys", Claude submitted his project to his spiritual director who approved and encouraged him, while the principal of the College promised to help him with the subsistence of his poor schoolboys. Claude told Grignon de Montfort, who came to see him in the summer of 1702, that he had been confirmed in his plans by enlightened people. At Christmas 1704, he testifies: “It is true that I did not undertake the thing without permission from my director”.<sup>50</sup>

### **Training poor schoolboys to evangelise the poor.**

Shortly after Pentecost 1702, Poullart discovered what God expected of him:

“M. Desplaces felt that God wanted to use him to populate his sanctuary and to train his people as teachers and guides. He also understood that, in order to succeed, he could do nothing better than to continue to help poor schoolchildren.”<sup>51</sup>

To Grignon de Montfort who asked him to join him in the missions, Claude replied:

“If God gives me the grace to succeed, you can count on missionaries. I will prepare them for you and you will give them ministry to carry out. By this means you will be satisfied and so will I.”<sup>52</sup>

### ***The audacity of a simple tonsured man to found the work of the poor schoolboys.***

Prudence does not prevent boldness. Assured of God’s will for him, with no other resources than the modest pension paid to him by his father and what he was promised by the principal of Louis-le-Grand, a student himself and a simple tonsured cleric, at the age of 23, he boldly undertook a work of charity: he rented rooms in a building next to the Collège Louis-le-Grand so that he could gather together the poor schoolboys and better accompany them. He went to live with them. They live only on alms!

### **Caution in the titles and names of the work.**

*“In official acts, he never uses any other title than that of ecclesiastic. In his General and Particular Regulations, he never speaks of seminarians or of a community, but of a house of students, of individuals [...] Legally, his work is only a work of charity, in order to avoid the edict of 1666, which rigorously forbids the establishment of any new community without first obtaining Letters Patent.”*<sup>53</sup>

Prudently, Claude did not ask for the recognition of his work as a seminary: the canonical status of seminary was delivered by the ecclesiastical authority, in this case the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Noailles, who directed him towards the Gallican Sorbonne. It was prudent to wait!

### **Word of God (Mt 10:16, 19-20)**

16 “Behold, I send you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be wise as serpents and gentle as doves ...19 Do not be anxious about what to say or how to speak; whatever you have to say will be given to you at the time, 20 for it is not you who will speak, but the Spirit of your Father who will speak in you.”

Our Father...

Prayer for the Chapter...

<sup>49</sup> *Choix d'un état de vie*, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines*, op. cit, p. 311 ;

<sup>50</sup> *Réflexions sur le passé*, Chr. DE MARE, *Aux racines* op. cit. p. 326.

<sup>51</sup> Ch. BESNARD, *Manuscrit p. 277s*, cité dans P. COULON, *Poullart des Places op.cit.* Annexe IV p. 205.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem* Ch. BESNARD, *Manuscrit p. 279* cité dans P. COULON, *op.cit.* Annexe IV p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> J. MICHEL, "Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart des Places DE MARE, *Aux racines*, op. cit. p.114s.

## Day 9 – Friday 1st Oct. HOPING AGAINST HOPE

In daring to embark on the work of charity for the poor students, Poullart des Places trusted in Providence, hoping against hope in times of trial (Rm 4:18).

### ***The moment of doubt - darkness of faith - the hour of temptation***<sup>54</sup>

Claude, a simple tonsured cleric, was alone in caring for all his poor students, about fifty of them. His heroic charity eventually exhausted him. Throughout 1704, young Claude went through the ordeal of the spiritual night. During the Christmas holidays, he made a new retreat; in his Reflections on the Past, he evoked the great spiritual consolations he had experienced previously for eighteen months. He feels that he no longer loves God, that he is a mask of devotion! He goes so far as to doubt his foundation.

*“The source of my slackening (or to speak more correctly and as I should) of my fall and my error, is [...] to have undertaken the establishment of the poor students [...] I did not have enough spiritual resources for that, and I had not yet acquired enough humility to put myself in all safety at the head of such a good work [...] It is true that I did not undertake the thing without the permission of my director. But it is here that my conscience reproaches me [...] I do not perhaps admit all the views of my ambition and my vanity [...] These reflections penetrate me with pain”.*<sup>55</sup>

### ***Appeal to collaborators - misappropriation of the work***

Humbly, he consults his spiritual director, who helps him to discern: his spiritual dryness does not come from a proud personal ambition, but from the heaviness of the task. Claude needed collaborators to continue the work that the Spirit had inspired in him. From January 1705 onwards, Claude called upon collaborators: Le Barbier, a priest from Rennes, and then in October, Garnier, a sub-deacon from Saint-Malo. The burden became less heavy; it was immediately the end of the spiritual ordeal. He continued the work of the poor students and resumed the path of ordinations.

### ***The terrible year 1709***

The winter of 1709 was very harsh and caused a great famine. Many died of cold and hunger. Claude had to provide food and clothing for a growing community - soon to be 70! Out of love for his pupils, Claude imposed great hardships on himself. On 29 September 1709, he fell ill; he could not be hospitalised, the hospitals were full of patients!

### ***Patience in his sufferings on his deathbed.***

In the midst of his sufferings, which he endured with patience, Claude desired the abode of God:

*“He was attacked by pleurisy joined to a continuous fever and a violent tenesmus which caused him extreme pain for four days. They could not wring from his mouth a word of complaint, still less of impatience... The very failure of nature seemed to give him new strength to repeat often these words of the holy King David: How lovely are your tabernacles, O God of hosts! my soul can no longer sustain the ardour with which it yearns for the dwelling of the Lord. (Psal. 83, vv. 2-3)... He was given the last sacraments early, and after receiving them with full awareness and perfect freedom of spirit, he expired gently.”*<sup>56</sup>

Hoping against hope, Claude dies detached and trusting in God for the future of his work. He was only thirty years old! Poor he lived, poor he died, poor he was buried. On 3 October, his body was buried in the common grave reserved for the poorest clerics, in the small cemetery at the head of the church of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, in the shadow of the chapel of the Virgin.

### ***Word of God (Jn 15,13-14, 16-17)***

“15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. I call you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you, that you may bear fruit and your fruit may remain. 17 What I command you is to love one another.”

Our Father...

Prayer for the General Chapter...

<sup>54</sup> J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Places, op. cit.* ch. XIV – L'heure de la tentation p. 161-173.

<sup>55</sup> *Réflexions sur le passé* DE MARE, *Aux racines op. cit.* p. 329 ; J. MICHEL, *Poullart des Places, op. cit.* p. 167-168. –

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem* Ch. BESNARD, *Manuscrit* p. 281-282 – DE MARE, *op.cit.* p. 370 ; P. COULON, *Poullart des Places, op.cit.* p. 207.