

# THE SONG AT THE SCAFFOLD

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A 10-WEEK BOOK STUDY



SESSION FIVE: CHAPTER 5, PAGES 29-37

People to know:

Louis XVI – King of France at the dawn of the Revolution [1789], executed in 1793, the year the Reign of Terror began. His queen: Marie Antoinette.

Robespierre – the leader of the Reign of Terror and its victim in 1794

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – “noble savage” – his political theory was to throw off all law, Church and State, and revert to the natural state.

Voltaire – Frenchman living in and writing essays on England – made Reason his god, Enlightenment thinking – freedom from Church dogma and the tyranny of the King.

Pope Pius VI – decried the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, an attempt to subordinate the Roman Catholic Church to the secular French government. Many Catholics turned against the Revolution when this decree came out in 1790.

Madame Acarie – see the note at the bottom of page 16

Madame Louise of France – see the note at the bottom of page 17

CHAPTER FIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

(HOW WOULD YOU TITLE THIS CHAPTER?)

The Infant Jesus is in shadow and the flames of the candles are tinged with darkness. How is this image emblematic of what will unfold in this chapter?

## The Revolution progresses:

- ❁ Convents are ransacked and looted. This was described as the “natural response of the people” to the decisions of the National Assembly.
  - ✚ The Spring and Summer of 2020 saw many cities afire from arsonists, private property pillaged, and portions of the city taken over as “autonomous zones.”
  - ✚ How does this differ and how does it resemble the French Revolutionaries’ sacking of the convents?
- ❁ The Carmelites professed: “The Infant King will give us strength.”
  - ✚ Their devotion to the Lord included submission to His Will.
  - ✚ They united their suffering to the Cross as brides of Christ.
  - ✚ They expected persecution and martyrdom; they asked only for the strength to bear it well rather than asking for deliverance.
- ❁ Do you think that your suffering can be redemptive?
- ❁ Do you think devotion to prayer and sacrifice, even unto martyrdom, is effective?
  - ✚ For the world?
  - ✚ For the souls of the nuns?
- ❁ Which was more a dreadful possibility for the nuns:
  - ✚ Persecution?
  - ✚ Martyrdom?
  - ✚ Prohibition of perpetual vows?
  - ✚ Dissolution of their order?
- ❁ Mother Teresa advises the two novices to “offer up” the public avowal of their perpetual vows as a sacrifice in obedience to the “cruel law.” See the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila on page 34. This is a complete surrender of self-will to the Will of God and echoes St. Paul in Philippians 4:12 – “I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.”
- ❁ This embrace of their cross would make them “Carmelites in the full sense of the word.” Pope St. John Paul II underwent a similar “secret vocation” as he trained for priesthood in the shadow of World War II.
- ❁ Blanche’s deteriorating condition caused the Prioress to consider advising Blanche to quit the convent and return to the world.
  - ✚ Given Blanche’s fear and state of nerves, would “the world” present fewer fears than she faced in the convent?
  - ✚ Could “the world” offer Blanche more or less security than the convent?
- ❁ The image of the Infant Jesus, toppled and decapitated, ends this chapter. Dwell on the image and what it meant for Blanche.