

# **The life and legacy of Blessed Pauline Jaricot**

Last fall, the Vatican announced that the beatification of Pauline Jaricot, a 19th-century French woman, will be held May 22. This decision follows her declaration as venerable in 1963 by Pope St John XXIII and the confirmation of a miracle attributed to her 10 years ago.

## **A verified miracle**

In 2012, a 3-year old girl named Mayline Tran of Lyon, France, was unconscious after choking on a piece of food. She was on life sustaining equipment, and the doctors had concluded there was no hope for her recovery. Her parents refused to disconnect the equipment and instead turned to Venerable Pauline Jaricot.

The family, friends and classmates of Mayline began to pray a novena to Pauline asking her to intercede with Our Lord Jesus on behalf of Mayline. Not long thereafter, the child began to recover and eventually was completely healed. The ecclesiastical tribunal of the Archdiocese of Lyon studied the case from July 2018 until February 2019 and determined that a miracle had taken place; the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints reviewed and accepted the tribunal results. In May 2019, a panel of experts examined the case and were convinced that the cause of the child's healing was due to a miracle and not from any medicine or medical procedure. A year later, Pope Francis officially recognized the miracle as a result of the intervention of Venerable Pauline Jaricot.

## **A special calling**

Born into a well-to-do family in Lyon, France, on July 22, 1799, Pauline and her brother, Phileas, grew up wanting to

become missionaries to China. For Pauline, this was not possible because women did not become missionaries to foreign lands. Only Phileas would experience their childhood dream.

In her teenage years, Pauline gravitated toward the lifestyle of the rich Lyon families. When she was 15, she had a terrible fall that caused some paralysis, and it took months for her to recover. Once over this health issue, she resumed her affinity for the local social life and reportedly had many admirers. But in 1816, her life changed after listening to a Lenten homily about the vices associated with vanity. It was like an awakening, and she came to believe that God had a special calling for her. She gave up her secular lifestyle, started dressing differently, preferring simple attire, and gave her time to helping the sick and poor of Lyon. At age 17, she took a vow of perpetual virginity, and it was at this young age that she became aware of the constant needs of the French mission and missionaries in China. The situation in China touched Pauline, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, she responded in a way that served her God, her Church and her country. She came up with a unique idea to raise funds for the China mission.

Her family owned a silk factory that employed some 200 women. Pauline appealed to these women to support the missionaries by praying every day for their success and by making a small weekly contribution to the missions. This idea quickly spread, and Pauline encouraged each participant to invite 10 other people to pray and make the contributions. The idea was dubbed the "circle of 10." The two hundred participants quickly grew to 2,000, and the program was so successful in assisting the mission in China that other French foreign missions sought her assistance, the first being the Diocese of Louisiana in America in 1822. Soon, the initiative was acknowledged by and centralized in the Vatican. It became known as The Society for the Propagation of Faith. The fundraising methods have evolved over the years, but this program, now a pontifical mission,

continues to raise funds for missions throughout the world. Today, it universally impacts more than 1,000 dioceses.

## **Spiritual renewal in France**

In 1826, Pauline recognized what she considered a falling away from the Church and from God by many of her countrymen; there was a void of religious fervor, a need for spiritual renewal. She contemplated what an ordinary layperson like herself could do to bring about a renewal. Pauline turned to the Blessed Mother and the holy Rosary. Calling on her friends and associates, she convinced them to organize into groups of 15, and every day, each person would pray one decade of the 15-decade traditional Rosary. Her thinking was that people might not pray the whole Rosary daily but they would be willing to pray one decade. This program began with a few groups but grew to more than 150,000 groups by the time of Pauline's death in 1862. Pope Gregory XVI (r.1831-46) in 1831 granted canonical status to what has become known as the Living Rosary Association. In her wisdom, Pauline saw this program expanding to Catholics everywhere, and indeed it continues to thrive with over 12 million members worldwide.

## **A miraculous recovery**

At age 32, Pauline had a heart attack and spent time in a hospital. She had trouble regaining her health, lived with heart disease and was generally in a sickly state. Different people told her about the miraculous healings taking place at the shrine of St. Philomena in southern Italy. In 1863, Pauline, accompanied by some friends, started from France to the shrine at Mugnano, Italy. On her way, she took time to rest in Rome. Knowing of her work with the Catholic missions, Pope Gregory XVI met with her. Many sources say the pope was shocked at Jaricot's poor health. After a stay in Rome, Pauline continued her journey.

Arriving at the shrine, Pauline spent an extended time praying

before the relics of St. Philomena and, in the presence of numerous witnesses, was miraculously healed. On the return to France, she once again stopped in Rome to visit the pope. Pope Gregory couldn't believe it was the same person who had visited with him earlier. Pauline became devoted to St. Philomena.

## **Bankruptcy and poverty**

With an inclination for factory workers, Pauline sought to come to their defense during the Industrial Revolution. The revolution spawned many new industries, but with it came poor treatment, poor pay and poor working conditions for employees. After much prayer and contemplation of how she could somehow improve this situation for the workers, she decided she would purchase a factory and establish model working conditions, including reasonable compensation for the employees. Not only did she use a large amount of her own money, but she encouraged her friends to invest in the idea. Unfortunately, those she trusted with managing the project squandered the money and eventually led Pauline into bankruptcy. The loss of money for her was not nearly as bad as the humiliation over the fact that she had lost the investment of others. She used all her funds trying to pay people back, and, at the end of her life, she was living in poverty.

## **Cause for sainthood**

Pauline Jaricot's cause for sainthood was opened in 1930, and 33 years later, Pope St. John XXIII declared her venerable after concluding that she had lived a life of heroic virtue. The Church can research and debate the life of an individual and agree that he or she lived a virtuous, holy life, but it takes that person's intercession with God, a miracle, before the individual can be beatified. Another miracle is required for canonization. Venerable Pauline Jaricot, by the grace of God, has fulfilled all expectations to be called blessed.

The May 22 beatification of Pauline Jaricot will be celebrated by Cardinal Luis Tagle from the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which in June 2022 becomes the Dicastery of Evangelization. This Congregation has oversight of the Propagation of Faith, created by Ms. Jaricot 200 years ago. Once the beatification ceremony is completed, Blessed Pauline may be venerated at the local and regional level, normally within those diocese(s) associated with the person's life.

*D.D. Emmons writes from Pennsylvania.*