

**PILGRIMAGE TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD MOTHERHOUSE
IN ANGERS, FRANCE
& OUR PATRON SAINT MARY EUPHRASIA PELLETIER,
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Who was Rose Virginie Pelletier? Where did she live? What kind of person was she? What did she achieve in her lifetime?

I have always been interested in the ancient archaeological bibliography and had visited many holy sites around the world. Being a Board member I was curious to know something about the Foundress of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

Our visit

Wow! What a surprise when our prayers were answered and our visit to Angers was so smoothly arranged by Sister Susan Chia, our Province Leader and Sister Joan Lopez. Our pilgrim group of ten had just returned to Paris from our Order of Malta May Pilgrimage to Lourdes. It was a beautiful spring time in Paris as we left by the 9.45am TGV for Angers. Waiting for us 45 minutes later at the Station was Sister Tarcila Abano who then took us by car to arrive at the Motherhouse fifteen minutes later.



The beautiful building (left) is on the compound of an abandoned textile factory which was later renovated and expanded with the help of two main benefactors Count Augustin de Neuville and a baroness, Madame la Comtesse d'Andigne. Both kept a holy rivalry in assisting Sister Mary Euphrasia in her projects at Angers. As we walked through the building and grounds absorbing the quiet and peaceful surroundings we learnt more of who Rose Virginie Pelletier was.

The Motherhouse of Our Lady of
Charity of the Good Shepherd, Angers, France.



Count Augustin De Neuville



Madame d'Andigne

Rose Virginie and Her Early Church Life - A Call by God

Rose Virginie was born on 31 July 1796, two years after her parents arrived in Noirmoutier with some 200 prisoners during the turbulent period of the French Revolution (1789-1799). Her father was a doctor and her mother was a charitable woman. Her parents were forced to leave their homeland in Soullans into exile to live on this island, while many thousands around them were arrested and executed.

Like any child of her age, Rose Virginie was very playful and bright, but for twenty years there was no school at Noirmoutier, until the Ursuline Sisters arrived. At the age of 12 years Rose started her first school.

She went to catechism classes at the local church of St. Philbert, founded by a seventh century monk who had evangelized that region. 'Noirmoutier' was named after the monks who lived there and were dressed in black.

Regularly every day she prayed the Holy Rosary five times every evening for that holy church.

When her father died, her mother decided to leave Noirmoutier and returned home to Soullans, and decided to send Rose Virginie to a boarding school in Tours. Growing up as a boarder, Rose experienced the loneliness and sufferings of a hard boarding life.

When her mother died in 1813, she was so devastated and thought she would "die of sorrow". In the nearby convent she found solace, where she saw the Mother Superior of the Refuge of Charity which was founded by St. John Eudes in 1641 to guide outcast women to God. This refuge had housed many women persecuted by the revolution, where many thousands had been executed. The living conditions were harsh and the Mother Superior told her that "their mission was to make known the love of God to these young girls, but this task was not easy." At that young age, she was moved to seek admission into the Refuge, but the Mother Superior counselled her, "we will accept you here, if God calls you here."

However her secret escapades to the Refuge and convent were discovered by her boarding house matron and was met with severe punishment and strong reprimand. Her guardian, her sister's husband, was opposed to her vocation, as he felt she was underaged.

Taking Her Vows

On her 18th birthday she was free at last, and on October 20, 1814, on the Feast Day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Rose Virginie entered the Refuge of our Lady of Charity to be a member of the religious Order. Before taking the Habit, she had chosen for her religious name "Teresa" to follow after the great Saint Teresa of Avila. She was told to look for a less famous patron saint and found St. Euphrasia (382-412), a virgin. From then on Rose Virginie became known as Mary Euphrasia Pelletier. At the convent, she was the joy to the older sisters, who found her to be gifted in Catechism classes and to be an extraordinary person. On September 9, 1817, Mary Euphrasia took her first vows.

Darkness of the Soul and Prayers

In trying to save the souls of many of broken teenagers and younger sisters living in the refuge, she herself went through many personal violent struggles herself. But she would always pray to God "O Lord, renew my soul and my heart. I feel so powerless and sinful. What anxiety I endure. Everything is so dark, but I would love my girls to receive the light and peace from you."

Her Appointment as Mother Superior

At the age of 29 years she was elected Superior of the Refuge at Tours. God had given her the qualities needed to lead others. The Priest of Tours told her “He will always be your strength and you will say ‘Yes’. It is God’s Will!” Her refuge expanded and in four years their refuge housed 70 boarders and 80 orphans.

As the new Mother Superior, she founded the ‘Magdalens’, who were all sisters consecrated to God for Prayer and Work, somewhat like the Carmelites. On 11 November 1825, on the Feast day of St. Martin, patron saint of Tours, four young boarders received the Habit of the Sisters Magdalen.

Moving to Angers. Founding of the Good Shepherd Refuge. Benefactors.

Back in Angers, Father Breton, the Priest in charge of the Cathedral was worried about the squalor in many parts of Angers, especially as the hostel which housed the penitents at the House of the Good Shepherd which had been closed during the Revolution.

One day an important visitor arrived. This was Count Augustin de Neuville, whose Mother, before she died had left a legacy of 30,000 francs to build in the name of her husband a Good Shepherd House in Angers for the lost souls. Bishop Montault, the local bishop decided to reopen the refuge of the Good Shepherd House, and found an old disused mill to found the Community. He invited Sister Mary Euphrasia to be the Superior of this Refuge in Angers.

On 6 June 1829 the eve of Pentecost, the four sisters and Superior Mary Euphrasia arrived to found the Good Shepherd Refuge in Angers.

When they arrived at the town gates of Angers by carriage, they got off and carried their baggage and walked on foot to Brault Street. They felt that it was ‘unbecoming for apostles’ to enter by carriages!

While they set about rebuilding the mill to be a livable refuge Fr. Breton helped by fund raising from the local population. The refuge soon started to take boarders, but with the scarcity of food there was a lot of hardship.

On 31 July 1829 the Good Shepherd Refuge was dedicated, and Sister M. Paul Bodin was appointed the first Superior. 1831, Mary Euphrasia took over and was named its Superior.

Mary Euphrasia’s charism touched many people, such as Count Augustin and Madame d’Andigne. Count Augustine eventually sold all his estates and gave everything to Mary Euphrasia and the Refuge of the Good Shepherd. He died almost penniless. In remembrance of his dedication and contribution, a portrait of him is in their house today.

Building more Refuges. One Order. Support by the Bishop and Pope

Confronted by so many requests for refuge from all over the country, such as Le Mans, Poitiers, and Grenoble, the Bishops begged her to open more refuge in their dioceses. Mary Euphrasia felt that the time had come to put one family and putting all the resources and staff in Common.

The project was supported by the Bishop Montault, who supported their zeal and success for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He said “Henceforth all the houses founded from Angers will be mutually supportive and will regard Angers as their Motherhouse”.

Her work spread and despite the jealousy of several local priests, she received the important support of Cardinal Odescalchi who was influential in the Papal court of Pope Gregory XVI in Rome. He presented her petition to the Pope to form a Generalate. On 16 January 1835, Pope Gregory XVI formally approved the Generalate and the formation of the Order of Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers.

From her little room overlooking the gardens, Mary Euphrasia continued to build her Refuge for women all over the world. Today there are houses in ASIA-PACIFIC (Australia, China, Hongkong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam). EUROPE-RIMOA (Angola, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Netherlands, Portugal, Reunion, Scotland, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria). NORTH & SOUTH AMERICA (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saipan, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Virgin Islands).

Mary Euphrasia Pelletier died in 1868, was canonized on May 2, 1940.

Our Visit

At our arrival to the Motherhouse we were taken through the whole building, we visited the chapels where the sisters did their daily prayer, the shrine where her incorrupt body lay, then went up to her bedroom to



Motherhouse, Angers France



The incorrupt body of St. Maria Euphrasia Pelletier [1796-1868]

see her bed and office, the portrait of her receiving the Papal Blessing from Pope Gregory XVI to form her Order, the portrait of one of her greatest benefactors, Count Augustin de Neuville and in the adjacent office where she did her work.



The bed of St. Mary Euphrasia, adjacent to her office. Painting of Pope Gregory XVI blessing Maria Euphrasia for the approval of the Generalate of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd



After lunch, we presented a DVD copy of the Musical Charity Show “The return of the Prodigal Son” to Superior Marie-Luc. The show had raised funds for Marymount Centre and Ahuva Home for the refuge of women and children in crises in 2007. Later we were asked to sing a song for them and we sang “Praise her with a Flower”.

Presenting the gift of the “Return of the Prodigal Son” DVD to Sister Superior Marie-Luc Dordonat and Marie-France Tulasne. Sister Tarcila (second from right translating)

As we walked through the beautiful gardens with roses, we met the Provincial Superior and her Council of France. At their last Provincial Chapter, France formally accepted Belgium and Hungary, with each country having a council. The full Provincial Council includes representatives from each of the three countries.

With the Provincial Council of France, who we met by chance in the gardens of the Motherhouse, Angers.



On the beautiful grounds, we saw the houses of the Sisters in formation, St. Nicholas Home for retired Sisters. We strolled through the tall maple trees, the underground tunnel which Mary Euphrasia together with the help of an architect and sisters had helped build.



St. Nicholas Abbey now a retirement home for active & contemplative Sisters



The maple trees in the garden of the Motherhouse



The underground tunnel, built to connect the Motherhouse to St. Nicholas Abbey

We said our farewell to Sister Tarcila who had looked after us so well during our short day tour to Angers.

Thank you to our Good Shepherd Sisters at the Motherhouse for a wonderful experience and for allowing us to live in the life of a Saint and to experience her periods of desolation, yet always filled with the Joy of our Lord, would experience the joys of the consolations and peace as she build the Kingdom of God in the lost souls!

Acknowledgements

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