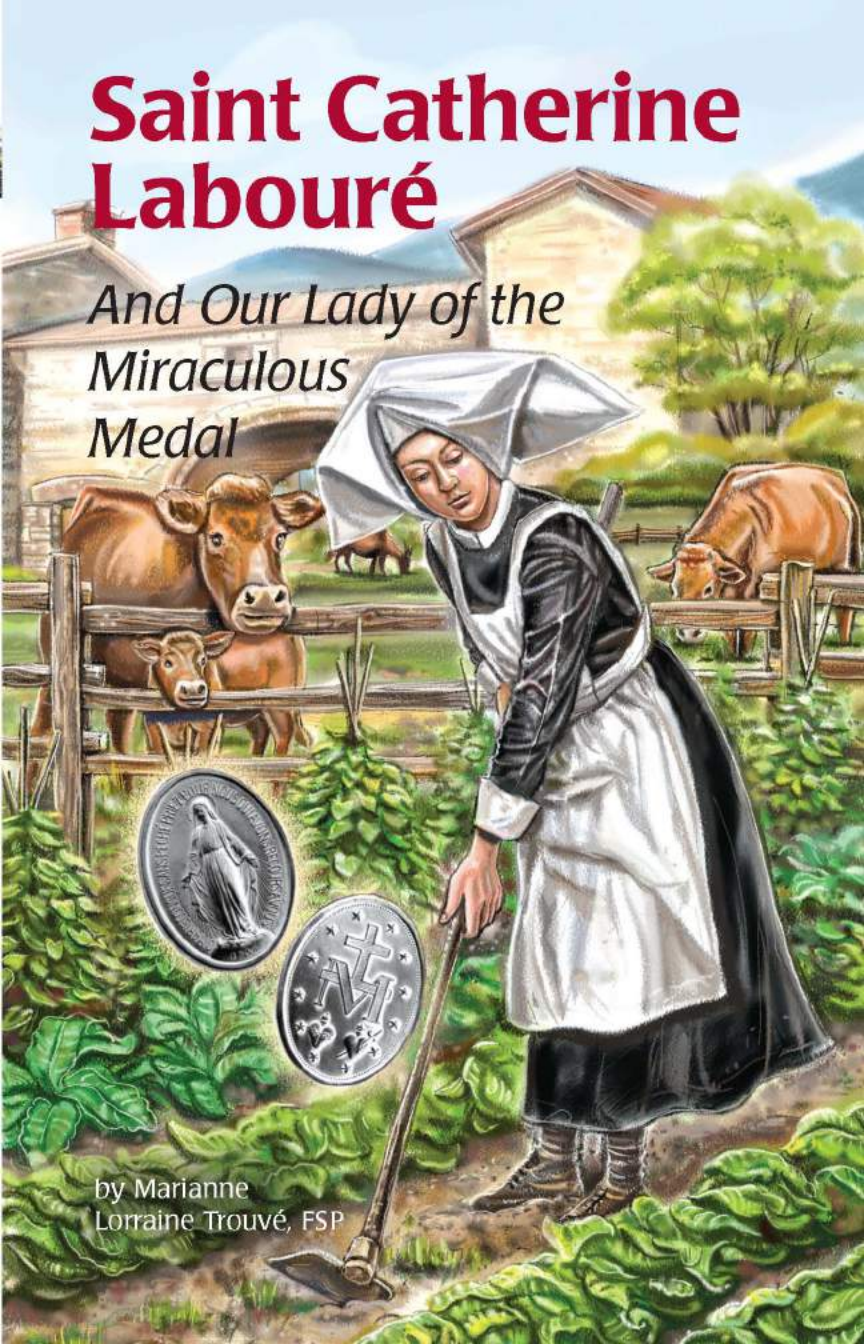


Saint Catherine Labouré

*And Our Lady of the
Miraculous
Medal*



by Marianne
Lorraine Trouvé, FSP



Saint Catherine Labouré

And Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

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PROLOGUE

After a full day of work on the family farm, Catherine tumbled into bed and fell fast asleep. She started dreaming. The vivid images of her dream showed Catherine the parish church in her hometown of Fain les Moutiers (pronounced *fahn lay MOO-tee-ay*). She was praying in the Lady chapel (the chapel dedicated to the Blessed Mother). It was also called the Labouré chapel, named for her family because they had paid for repair work that it had needed.

As she was praying, she saw an old priest come into the chapel and go to the altar. He had a short beard and a kind-hearted face. He was wearing white vestments. Facing the altar, he started to celebrate the Mass. (At Catherine's time, priests didn't face the people but the altar during Mass. They also used Latin for the prayers of the Mass.) Before the opening prayer, he turned around and said, "*Dominus vobiscum!*" which means "The Lord be with you." As the old priest said this, he looked straight at

Catherine. She felt that he could see straight into her heart.

The Mass continued. At the end of Mass, the old priest turned around and looked at Catherine. He beckoned to her, as if he wanted to tell her something, but she drew back, unsure, and left the church.

As the dream unfolded, Catherine found herself at the bedside of a sick woman, helping to take care of her. Suddenly, the mysterious priest was there again! He was wearing a black cap on his head. Catherine was confused. What was going on? Then the elderly priest smiled at her and said, "My daughter, it's good to care for the sick. God has plans for you. Don't forget it!" Then he vanished, and Catherine walked home.

Catherine woke up abruptly. She remembered every detail of the dream, but most of all, the old priest's words: "God has plans for you." She still didn't know what this meant, but she felt happy. She thought about her life and pondered those words, "God has plans for you." What could it mean?

LIFE ON THE FARM

“Come on, Zoe, let’s feed the pigeons!” Tonine (pronounced *TWA-neen*) Labouré tugged at her sister’s sleeve. Two years older than Tonine, nine-year-old Catherine was often called Zoe, after the saint on whose feast day she had been born. Catherine had entered the world on May 2, 1806.

“All right, Tonine, let’s get some grain.” The girls lived on a big farm with their parents and eight brothers and sisters. Their farm was located in the small town of Fain les Moutiers, in a part of France called Burgundy. Catherine loved to feed the animals and run through the fields on the farm, but her favorite place was the large building for the pigeons. The Labouré family had more than 600 pigeons, which they used for food and sold at the market.

The girls filled their aprons with grain and went to feed the birds. “Watch out, Tonine, here they come!” The girls threw the grain up into the air and laughed with

delight as the birds swooped down to get something to eat. They flapped their wings and cooed as they competed for the grain. But Catherine spread it out generously, making sure they all had enough.

She was always that way, generous with others. She kept special watch over her little brother Auguste. A few years earlier, he had fallen out of a cart and hurt his legs. From then on he was crippled. Catherine always took good care of him and made sure he was included in everything.



Early on the morning of October 9, 1815, sadness came over the Labouré household. Catherine's mother, Madeleine, was dying. Pierre Labouré, Catherine's father, kept watch by his wife's side. One by one, the ten children of the Labouré family came into the room and gathered around her bed.

Catherine started to cry. As the tears rolled down her cheeks, the family recited prayers for the dying. Quietly her mother slipped away from earth.

"Mama, Mama!" Catherine cried out. Then she ran out of the room, sobbing. The other children were all crying too.

Later, Catherine came back to her mother's room. She saw a statue of our Blessed Mother Mary on top of a piece of furniture. Catherine couldn't reach it, so she got a chair and stood on it. Reaching up, she hugged the statue and prayed to Mary, "Now you will be my mother!" In her heart Catherine felt a sense of warmth and protection, and she knew that Mary would always look after her.



What would happen now? Her father couldn't take care of the farm and of all the children by himself. Some of the older boys had already left the farm, seeking their own way in the world. Even so, Pierre needed help. So he called Catherine and said, "Catherine, I want to send you and your sister Tonine to your Aunt Marguerite. She lives in Saint Rémy (pronounced *sahn RAY-mee*), only five miles away. She will take care of you and be like a mother to you."

Catherine's face fell. "But Father, I don't want to be away from you. I'd rather stay here with you."

Pierre's eyes filled with tears. "I know, my little one. I would much rather have you

stay with me. But I just can't handle everything right now. You need a mother."

Sadly, Catherine agreed. She couldn't do much else. So she and Tonine went to their aunt's house. Her aunt had six children of her own, so Catherine and Tonine were mostly left to themselves. The maid took care of them, but it wasn't like having a mother. It was hard.

Finally, after two years, Catherine's father sent word for them to come back home. Catherine was overjoyed. She and Tonine went back to the farm.



Good news awaited Catherine upon her return home.

"Catherine, it's time for you to make your first Communion," her father told her. "You are old enough now."

Catherine's eyes lit up. "When will that be, Father?"

"In a few months," Pierre replied.

To prepare for this special day, Catherine received some lessons. She didn't know how to read or write. Her mother had wanted to teach her, but with all the farm work to take care of, she hadn't been able to.

So Catherine memorized her lessons. She understood that when she received Communion, she would receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

The great day arrived—January 25, 1818. Catherine went to church, dressed in her finest clothes. During the Mass, she told Jesus, “I want to receive you so much, Lord. Thank you for coming to me!” After she received our Lord, she prayed with all her heart and told Jesus how much she loved him. Something special stirred in her heart that day. It was the beginning of a desire to give herself completely to Jesus.

But for now, the farm awaited her.

A NEW ROLE

While she was away, Catherine's oldest sister, Marie Louise, had helped to take care of all the farm work. But she had a dream for her life and was about to fulfill it. One day while the family was together, Marie Louise brought up the subject.

"Father," she began, "I have to tell you something that I want very much."

"What is it?" he asked.

"For a long time now I have been thinking about becoming a Daughter of Charity. I want to help the poor and give my life to God."

"But what about the farm?" he asked. "I still need your help to run it and get all the work done."

Marie Louise looked at Catherine. "Well, Father, I was thinking that Catherine is back home now . . ." she began.

"Catherine? But she is only twelve years old!" Pierre protested.

Catherine sat up attentively. She listened and then thought things over. After a little while, she spoke up.

“I can help take care of the farm!” she announced.

A surprised look spread over her father’s face. “What! Do you really think you can?” he asked her.

“Yes!” she replied. “Tonine and I will be able to manage!”

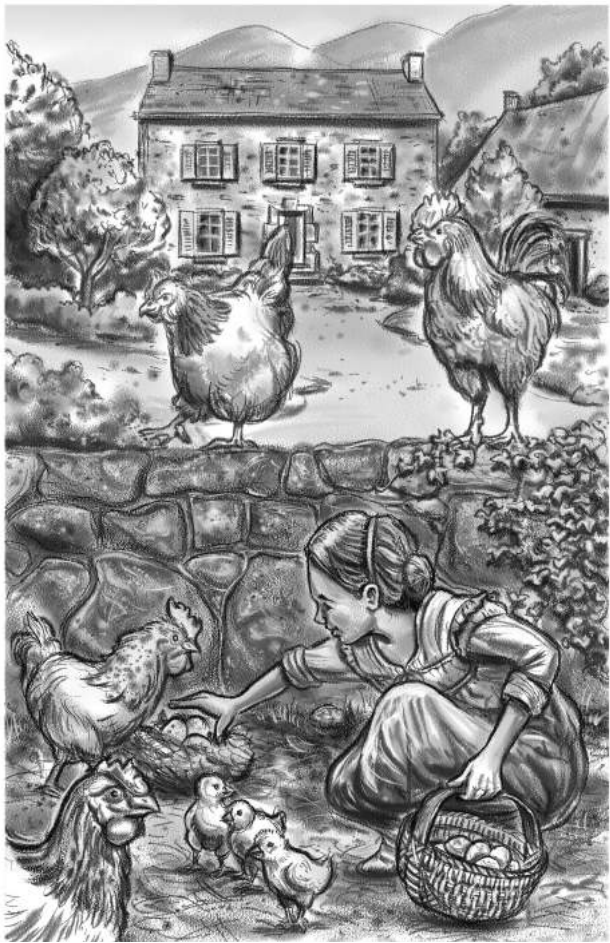
Her father thought for a while. Then he said, “Well, if you are willing, I will let you. Then Marie Louise can go to the Daughters of Charity.”

So it all worked out. Catherine took over running the farm. Her father was still in charge, but he couldn’t manage it by himself. He gave Catherine the freedom to run things. They had workers who helped in the fields, and Catherine was in charge of them all!



Catherine arose at four every morning. “Thank you for this day, Lord!” she whispered as she climbed out of bed.

She washed, dressed, and headed out to milk the cows. She brought the fresh milk inside and prepared breakfast for everyone.



"I can help take care of the farm!" she announced.

“Tonine, will you help me feed the animals?” Catherine asked after breakfast.

The two girls washed the breakfast dishes and skipped outside. After feeding the animals, Catherine collected the eggs that the hens had laid and brought water from the well. Soon it was time to cook lunch.

“Here comes Catherine!” one of the workers called. All the field hands stopped working and gathered around Catherine. Each day, she brought lunch to the field for the workers.

“What a good cook she is!” one of them said as he ate. “And she is so kind!”

After lunch, Catherine continued to work: gathering firewood, helping in the garden, doing laundry, and baking bread. After supper, she joined the family for night prayers; then she pulled out her sewing.

“Will you go to the market tomorrow, Catherine?” her father asked her.

“Yes, tomorrow is Thursday, market day,” Catherine replied. “We have lots of vegetables to sell. And I’m sure to meet other farmers and get new ideas from them.”

Even with all the work she was doing, Catherine managed to find time for more prayer. Whenever she could, she would go

to the village church to pray. She loved these special times of silence, when she would quietly tell Jesus everything in her heart.

On Sundays, Catherine and Tonine walked to Mass together. No priest lived in their own town, so they walked about three miles to the next town of Moutiers-Saint-Jean (pronounced *MOO-tee-ay sahn JHAH*). They talked and laughed as they traveled along the beautiful country road.

Sometimes Catherine went to Mass during the week, too. She would walk to Moutiers-Saint-Jean and go to the chapel of the Daughters of Charity. After Mass one day she stopped to talk to one of the sisters.

“What do you do all day, Sister Soucial (pronounced *SOO-see-al*)?” Catherine asked with curiosity.

“We take care of the needs of poor people. We feed them, clothe them, and go visit the sick. Saint Vincent de Paul often said, ‘The poor have much to teach you. You have much to learn from them.’”

“That sounds like a beautiful way to live. My older sister Marie Louise left home to join your community. Sometimes she writes, but I don’t hear from her much. I just wanted to find out more about your life.”

Sister Soucial smiled. Then she added, "We also pray for everyone. Prayer is so important. God knows how to help those whom we can't help."

"I must get back home now," Catherine said. "There's a lot of work waiting for me!"

As she walked back home, she thought about what the sister had said. Something was stirring in Catherine's heart.