

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque

And the Sacred Heart of Jesus

by Emily Beata Marsh, FSP



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Illustrated by Dani Lachuk



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CONTENTS

1. Early Difficulties	1
2. A Miraculous Cure	11
3. Changes at Home.	17
4. A New Name	23
5. A Special Visitor.	29
6. Mystery Solved.	35
7. A New Home	41
8. Great Challenges	49
9. A Big Decision	55
10. Jesus' Sacred Heart.	61
11. Doubts	69
12. A Sign from God	75
13. My "Perfect Friend"	81
14. The First Promises	89
15. Father Claude	97
16. A Change of Heart.	103

17. The Final Promise.	111
18. "Have Mercy on Me"	117
Prayer	124
Glossary	129

EARLY DIFFICULTIES

"Margaret? Margaret!" The shrill scream echoed throughout the Alacoque (Ah-lah-COKE) house on the outskirts of the small French village of Vesovres.

Nine-year-old Margaret Alacoque ran down the stairs as fast as she could. Aunt Benoite (BEN-wat) did not like to be kept waiting.

"Margaret, where have you been?" Aunt Benoite said angrily.

"I finished all the inside chores for today," Margaret panted, "and I was—"

"Never mind," Aunt Benoite interrupted. "Your grandmother wants a cup of tea. Quickly, go fetch a bucket of water!"

"But I was—" Margaret started to say.

"Don't talk back to me, young lady!" Aunt Benoite exclaimed. "Get going. And don't question me again!"

Margaret trudged to the kitchen to get a pail. *She's been treating me like a servant for the past year,* Margaret thought as she walked outside. *But it hasn't always been this way. . . .*

“Do you remember what it was like before Papa died?” Margaret asked her older brother Chrysostom (KRIS-uh-stuhm) that evening. Almost every evening, Margaret and her brothers—John, Claude (khlod), Chrysostom, and James—gathered with their mother, Madame Philiberte (FILL-ee-ber) Alacoque.

“Of course I do,” Chrysostom replied. He looked at their mother, who was talking with John. “It was a happy time. But you know Papa was very generous and loaned a lot of money to people. When he died, there wasn’t any money to support us. That’s why Uncle Touissant (TOO-sahn), Aunt Benoitte, and Grandmother Jeanne (zhahn) came here to run the farm.”

“Why can’t John do it?” Margaret asked. “He’s sixteen now.”

“We have to go to school first,” Chrysostom explained. “When we finish we’ll return and run the farm. But in the meantime. . . .”

“In the meantime, we’re like servants in our own house!” Margaret grumbled.

“Now, now,” Madame Alacoque said, overhearing them. “What’s all this?”

"I miss my old life, when Papa was here and we were happy and I had time to play!" Margaret complained to her mother.

"I know it's not easy," Madame Alacoque said. "But we have to trust that God will take care of us. Look, we still have a place to live, don't we? And food to eat?"

"Yes, *Maman* (MAH-moh), Margaret replied.

"Good," Madame Alacoque said. "Now let's thank God and the Blessed Mother. Whose turn is it to lead the Rosary tonight? John?"

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," John began. Soon the entire Alacoque family was absorbed in their nightly custom of praying together.

"*Je vous salue, Marie. . . . Hail Mary. . . .*" John prayed.

"*Sainte Marie. . . . Holy Mary. . . .*" the family responded.

Madame Alacoque smoothed Margaret's hair as they prayed. The next day, Margaret's brother John found his mother in the kitchen. Aunt Benoitte and Grandmother Jeanne were not around, but his mother was hard at work cutting vegetables for the evening

meal. John sat down next to Madame Alacoque.

"*Maman*, Aunt Benoitte and Grandmother Jeanne have been yelling at Margaret a lot," John said. "It bothers me."

"Yes, I worry about her sometimes," Madame Alacoque murmured. She stopped chopping carrots for a moment and said, "I think we should send her to the Poor Clare nuns at Charolles (SHA-rhol). They have a good boarding school there, and she would be fairly close by."

"Oh, that's a good idea *Maman*, I think Margaret would be happy there," John replied.

Madame Alacoque paused. "I'll miss her, but it's for the best," she said with certainty. "I'll talk to your Uncle Toussaint about it in the morning."



Margaret was nine years old when she left for the Charolles boarding school. She liked learning from the nuns and making friends. Sometimes Margaret and the other girls played tag in the garden and used sticks to move hoops along the ground.

Whoever reached the big tree first was the winner. Margaret liked winning!

But Margaret was not always happy.

"What's the matter, Margaret?" her friend Isabelle asked her one day. Margaret was sitting under a tree in the garden.

"Oh, nothing," Margaret sniffled. "I just . . . I just miss my home and my brothers and *Maman*. . ."

Isabelle sat down and said, "I miss my family, too. My *maman* makes the most delicious cookies. My little brothers eat them up so fast!"

Margaret laughed. "My brothers would do the same," she said. "But they are all older."

Soon Margaret and Isabelle were chatting and laughing.

"Did you write your essay yet, Margaret?" Isabelle asked her.

"I started, but the assignment is very difficult," Margaret replied.

"I know!" agreed Isabelle, "Sister Marie Josephine is a hard teacher!"

The bell rang. "Ugh," Isabelle groaned. "Time for Sister Marie Josephine's class!"



One day, while she was playing in the garden with the other girls, Margaret heard the sound of the nuns chanting midday prayer in the chapel. She slipped away and stood outside one of the chapel windows. Kneeling on the ground, she made the Sign of the Cross and looked up.

The sunshine, the blue sky, the sisters' singing . . . it's all so beautiful, she prayed. Thank you, God, for giving us so many good things!

Margaret could hear Isabelle calling out that it was time to return to class, so she quickly stood up. *The sound of the sisters' voices is so heavenly, she thought as she made her way back to her classmates. And they are not just singing, they are praying—they are talking to God! Maybe some day I will become a sister. . . .*

In class, the girls were preparing for their First Holy Communion. Margaret listened eagerly to Sister Marie speak about Jesus and the Eucharist.

"Are you excited for your First Holy Communion?" Sister Marie asked Margaret after class.

"Oh, yes!" Margaret exclaimed.

"What are you doing to prepare your heart?" Sister Marie asked.

"What do you mean?" Margaret replied.



Margaret enjoys a break from her studies.

“Well, Jesus in the Eucharist is truly going to come into your heart,” Sister Marie said. “Every time you pray, it’s as if you’re opening the door of your heart wider and wider for Jesus to come in.”

“Oh, I had not thought of that!” Margaret said. “I’m going to open my heart wider to Jesus right away!”

Soon, the day came when Margaret was ready to receive Jesus for the first time. Margaret was so excited!

“*Corpus Christi . . . The Body of Christ,*” the priest said.

“Amen,” Margaret whispered. She went back to her pew and knelt down. *Dear Jesus, she prayed with her eyes closed. You are in my heart. I love you . . . and you love me. I am in your heart just as you are in mine. I want to stay close to you.*

After her First Holy Communion, Margaret tried to spend even more time praying. Whenever she heard the sisters chanting their prayers, she would run to kneel outside the chapel. Margaret still liked to play, but she also now spent more time talking to Jesus in her heart. She was very happy at Charolles.

Then, one morning Margaret woke up and she could not get out of bed. She had a

high fever and she ached everywhere. She could hear the sisters whispering in the corner of the room.

“She’s very sick,” Sister Marie said. “I hope her family comes soon.”

Margaret tried to keep her eyes open, but it felt like the room was spinning.

What’s happening? she thought. *Where’s Maman?*