

Testimonies From Eyewitnesses

Concerning the Death and Canonisation of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat

On the Occasion of the Centenary of her Canonisation, May 24, 2025

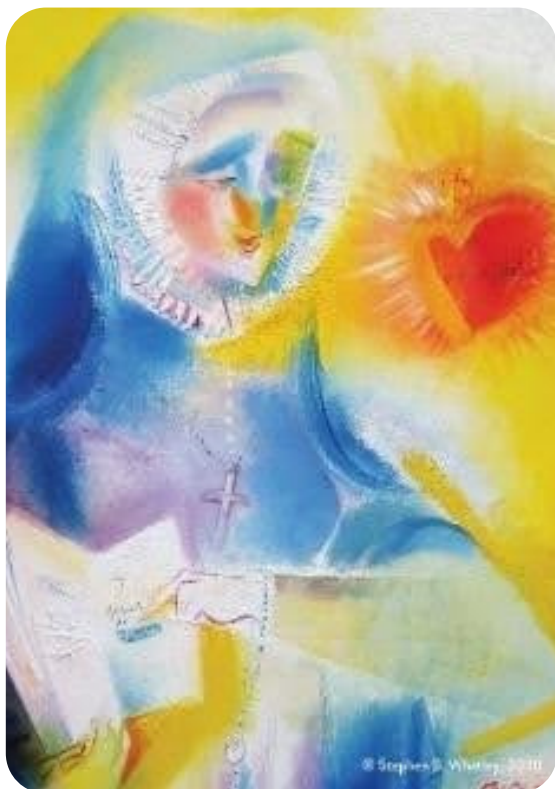
Selected by Claude Deschamps, rscj



Abbreviations of works cited, respecting capital letters and punctuation (* = page break):

- AC = Adèle Cahier rscj, Vie de la Vénérable Mère Barat, 1884
- MLo = Mother Marie de Loë rscj, Superior General, Circular Letters to all the Religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart
- PP I = Pauline Perdrau, Les Loisirs de l'abbaye, volume I. Unpublished Memoirs of Mother Pauline Perdrau on the Life of our Holy Mother, Rome, Mother House, 1934.
- PP II = Pauline Perdrau rscj, Les Loisirs de l'abbaye, volume II. Unpublished Memories of Mother Pauline Perdrau on the Life of our Venerated Mother Goetz, Rome, Mother House, 1936.

During her lifetime, because of the depths of her humility, Madeleine Sophie was already considered a saint.



Adèle Cahier, a Religious of the Sacred Heart who lived and served for many years with Madeleine Sophie as her Secretary General, recounts:

"In 1848, a senior priest from Bourges, Father Michaud, had a long conversation with the Mother General, whom he did not know. [...] Mother Barat's humility struck this clergyman all the more because he had just come to appreciate her rare qualities. He was full of praise for her: "I had found it hard to believe everything I had been told about her," he repeated, "but it was nothing compared to what I saw and heard." Shortly afterwards, he said to a clergyman who was visiting the house: "If you had come a few days earlier, you would have seen the venerable foundress of the Congregation, a woman of extraordinary merit, a saint... What can I say, my dear friend? We had before our eyes a living relic..." AC II, p. 596

Until the very end, Madeleine-Sophie lived in deep union with the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

Pauline Perdrau, Religious of the Sacred Heart and painter of the fresco of Mater Admirabilis, also knew Madeleine Sophie closely and for a long time. She bears witness to Madeleine Sophie's last communion.

After Easter in 1865, a few weeks before her death, after calling the first communicants to her, Madeleine Sophie spoke to them about blessed eternity as a 'permanent first communion'. PP I, p. 478



" On Wednesday, May 24, it was my turn to watch over the venerable Mother General, who remained motionless and silent. At five o'clock in the morning, the Mass bell rang. I left Sister Honorine and went to the chapel. As soon as I received Our Lord, I thought of bringing Him to my beloved Mother so that His immediate touch would make her tremble with life. I lean over her and place her hand on my chest: "He is here," I say to her, **"Jesus in the Eucharist is visiting you, I am bringing Him to you, I have just received Communion".** Her lips move... **"If you understand me, Mother, squeeze my hand"** and the hand that was on my heart pushes my pelerin with force... What a moment! It was heavenly! It still endures. * [...] The day of the Ascension has arrived, Our Mother must leave the earth... we think. [...]

On the evening of the 25th, Our Mother woke up a little, but she was pale. The eternal dawn was about to break... At two o'clock in the morning, someone came to the children's dormitory to fetch me so that we could try to make a lead death mask of our venerated deceased by lamplight. She had passed away at 11:30 and was now with God, radiant... it was true! Everything is arranged to facilitate this filial project: I wipe my eyes, veiled with tears, and we recite the Veni Sancte [hymn to the Holy Spirit]. I work in vain, I start again, and from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. my pencil draws nothing worthwhile... [...] *At five o'clock, I declare that I am confused and sorry, and **I ask for the best photographer, Derdery, on Boulevard des Italiens.** At 7 o'clock, his equipment is set up and **he obtains these beautiful prints, which brought to both worlds the most lifelike image of a Mother who had never consented to have her portrait** taken, as desired by thousands of daughters and children. Reverend Mother Cahier tried in vain, with her characteristic perseverance, to obtain some resemblance in numerous portraits, each more imperfect than the last. As a result, the Society has nothing that artistically reproduces the venerable features of Our Most Reverend Mother Barat, Our Foundress." PP I, pp. 490-492

Immediately after her death, Madeleine Sophie's presence was felt.

Let us hear the testimony of Adele Cahier, in the final lines of the biography she wrote about Madeleine Sophie. Respectfully and convincingly anticipating the Church's proclamation, Madeleine Sophie was immediately invoked as a saint throughout the world, especially by the poor, who were her favourites. Conversions, spiritual favours and healings were reported.

The influence that Mother Barat had exerted on her religious family was not to cease with her life. When she disappeared from among her daughters, her presence became, in a way, more noticeable; they believed they could see her gaze extending unhindered over each of them, penetrating more freely into their souls; their first thought was to prove themselves worthy of her.



(c) Illustration Jean-Pierre Maltier

[...] They felt that her protection could not fail her work, that, now more powerful over the divine Heart she had loved so much, she would continue her mission more effectively. While the rules that the prudence of the Church imposes on her children place limits on the expansion of the tendency that leads them to invoke her, they place no limits on a confidence that heaven has seen fit to justify on a thousand occasions. **The room where Mother Barat breathed her last has become an oratory dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus;** there, people kneel before the pious image of the Saviour and repeat this invocation or *something similar: **“Heart of Jesus, gentle and humble, glorify, glorify your faithful servant by granting us the grace we seek, and make our hearts conform to yours”.** After meditating on the teachings we have heard so many times that we remember them, we rise with new courage to put them into practice. The vault at Conflans is a place of pilgrimage; Religious and children love to visit it and pray at the beloved tomb.

This sentiment, which leads us to invoke those whose lives have left such holy memories, was not only evident in the Congregation with regard to Mother Barat; **such was, we can attest, the general cry: “She is a saint! Let us pray to her!”** The photographer was unable to reproduce her features taken on her deathbed, so numerous were the people who wanted to keep and venerate them. **One of these portraits was sent to the Arab Religious of the Sacred Heart in Zahleh, and its arrival provoked an exclamation of joy.** It was passed from hand to hand, and each one, looking at it attentively, offered her reflections: **She was steadfast, said some; she was good, added others. All exclaimed: She is a saint!** and respectfully kissed the hands of their adoptive Mother. The picture was hung on the wall of the community room.



From all over, people asked for some object that had belonged to the deceased; they asked us to say novenas, and how graciously she responded to this trust! We must not, we do not want to pre-empt the judgement of the Church, but could we remain silent without showing a lack of gratitude?

Mother Barat's privileged ones, the poor, were not the last to invoke her in their afflictions and necessities; they never tired of recounting what they owed to their benefactress. From all classes and from various countries, we have received accounts and testimonies of gratitude for **graces obtained: these are conversions, spiritual favours and healings, the news of which reaches us like an echo of this admirable life.** In front of the venerated image." AC II, pp. 670-671



In 1893, during the exhumation required for her beatification, Madeleine Sophie's body was found intact and incorrupt, while the coffin was in a state of disrepair and saturated with moisture.



"In 1894, I allow myself to place myself twenty-eight years after that painful May 29, 1865; on October 26, 1893, what do I see [says Pauline Perdrau in front of Madeleine Sophie's tomb]? **The Holy Church, which sometimes ostensibly exalts *the humble spouses of Christ, has declared Venerable the Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart. She is currently undergoing the investigations of an ecclesiastical tribunal for her beatification.**

The first tomb was opened on October 2, 1893, in the presence of the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, the promoter of the faith of the tribunal, as well as the Most Reverend Mother Lehon [Superior General], her Assistant Superiors and a few designated Vicars of France. **The open vault is so damp that a worm-eaten coffin appears at first glance to be nothing more than a pile of mouldy wood;** all that can be removed is a broken and rope-bound coffin, placed on a stretcher that four priests carry to the chapel above the tombs. Wood chips and sawdust spill onto the ground through the cracks. Placed in an ordinary coffin without a lead lining, was the Founding Mother, lover of Lady Poverty, buried in the same conditions as her daughters?



Yes, in a poor habit, with a lustrine-lined pelerine, her precious body surrounded by sawdust, reinforced with wood shavings, in old shrouds, without a silver cross or gold ring, was found ossata humilata [humiliated bones]; to the astonishment of the clergy, it was observed, admired and recognised as providential. And what do I see? ***On October 26, in an upper vault in the Chapel of the Seven Sorrows itself, a beautiful coffin lined with white satin is lowered; the body of the Venerable, preserved intact, dressed in a new habit, religious insignia of cross and ring, was reburied in a lead casket, sealed by the archbishop, in the hope of a forthcoming Exaltavit humiles [He exalts the humble] Catholic, Apostolic, Roman. PP II, pp. 332-334**

A statue of Madeleine Sophie Barat in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome?

At the end of the audience granted by Pius XI to the Society of the Sacred Heart on November 7, 1922, the delegation from the General Council, anticipating the imminent canonisation of Madeleine Sophie, wandered around St Peter's Basilica, hoping that one day a statue of Madeleine Sophie would be seen there.



"As soon as the audience was over [...] our Mother [de Loë, Superior General] led the other Reverend Mothers to Saint Peter's, where they all eagerly expressed their gratitude to Our Lord in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, to Saint Peter by kissing his foot and kneeling in confession. We walked around the basilica, admiring once again its splendours and masterpieces, recalling memories of the beatification of our Founding Mother, anticipating the glories of her canonisation, and hoping to see her appear in one of the large niches that *still await the Founding Saints. " MLo p. 126-127

The wish was granted: since 1934, Madeleine Sophie, represented by the statue sculpted by Enrico Quattrini, has welcomed pilgrims from the top of her niche located in the nave of the basilica, above the saint who was so dear to her: Saint Teresa of Avila.

On November 7, 1922, Mother de Loë had already shared with the congregation that "the encouraging visits made to us by our venerable Protector and Monsignor Virili, Postulator of our Causes, make the canonisation of our Blessed Foundress for the jubilee year of 1925 almost certain, " (MLo 118), encouraging them to prepare for it by studying the spirit of Madeleine Sophie. On November 10, 1923, she specified the purpose of this interior preparation.

"I ask our worthy Mother Superiors, all so zealous and so good, to have their communities reread the passages from the life and writings of our Blessed Mother that teach us humility and charity in a special way [...] so that before the canonisation we may make real progress in these two virtues dear to the Heart of Jesus and his humble Servant. " MLo November 10, 1923, pp. 142-143



On 18 January 1924, Mother de Loë noted that the congregation had responded.



"I am no less moved when I see, from the letters I receive from all over the world, how fervently and unanimously our families are responding to the proposals made in my last circular letter to prepare us for the triumph of our humble Mother Foundress. In order not to let this goodwill go to waste, **we have decided in our Roman houses to make a novena to our Blessed Mother with great fervour from the 16th to the 25th of each month** [25 May will be established in the Roman calendar in 1925 as the feast day of Madeleine Sophie, canonised on May 24, 1925] and to put into practice one of the points concerning humility or charity that have already been proposed." MLo p. 147

On December 29, 1924, Monsignor Virili, postulator of the cause for canonisation, presented to Pope Pius XI the virtues that characterised Madeleine Sophie: **humility and charity.**

But what was the secret of her greatness, what was the basis of her apostolate? **Humility [...]. This was the characteristic virtue that the Blessed one laid at the foundation of her Institute**, beginning to practise it herself to a heroic degree: "I will never be a great saint", she often repeated [a phrase she had uttered as a young girl in response to her brother Louis, cf. AC II, p. 570 'We have not forgotten the words of Abbé Barat saying to his sister that she would never be a great saint, nor the reply of the young Sophie: "I will take my revenge by being very humble and I will apply myself to humility as my only resource for pleasing the Lord".'], "**but I will take my revenge by being very humble**". From this humility, a kind of mystical press where the being is crushed by the feeling of divine goodness, **sprang the ardent love that always burned in her for the Heart of Jesus.**



The Heart of Jesus was her ideal; the glory of this Divine Heart was her life's mission, and it was to glorify Him that she prayed, worked, struggled and suffered so much during the sixty-three years of her governing, taking as her motto: Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesu [One Heart and One Soul in the Heart of Jesus].

From this Heart, Madeleine Sophie drew the fire of charity that the Son of God came to bring to earth and which never died out in her but burned ever more brightly, especially in the Christian education of young people, which was so dear to her heart. **Her joy was to be surrounded by little ones**, following the example of the Divine Master: "Sinite parvulos venir ad me" ["Let the little children come to me"].



But this joy and ardour were not without suffering and the cross: **“To live without suffering is to live without love; to live without love is to die”.** She often expressed herself in this way. To reach the Heart of Jesus, it is necessary to pass through the cross: “Per crucem ad cor Jesu” [“Through the cross to the Heart of Jesus”]. This heroine of charity protects her daughters, teaching them to seek, following her example, ‘not the consolations of God, but the God of consolations.’ » (Mgr Virili, Reading of the Decree on the Miracles of Blessed Madeleine Sophie, in MLo pp. 168-169)

Fifteen days later, on 18 January 1925, the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Mother de Loë announced the date of the canonisation to the congregation.

“Today I am finally able to announce the date of the canonisation of our Blessed Mother, which the Holy Father has set for May 24. [...] Our reverend Mother Vicars have already been invited to the beautiful celebrations of the canonisation with at least three companions, as a delegation from the vicariate. How happy we would have been to have you all present, my dear Mothers and Sisters! You understand that this is impossible. Places are limited, even in St. Peter’s, and even more so in our three houses [in Rome: Villa Lante, Trinité-des-Monts, Mother House], which would be so happy to welcome you.” MLo p. 183.187

On May 24, 1925, St Peter’s Basilica was filled to capacity, and joy overflowed during the entrance procession.

Suddenly, thunderous applause broke out: “It’s the Pope,” said our Most Reverend Mother, **Non è il Papa, è la Santa !** [It’s not the Pope, it’s the Saint!] Indeed, here is **the banner of Saint Madeleine Sophie advancing amid the enthusiastic applause** of her Daughters and the children; one side depicts her in glory; the other, amid the little children of Trastevere, a picturesque scene, truly inspired. The Sacred Congregation of Rites directly precedes it; four descendants of our Holy Mother’s family carry the tassels of the banner; a group from the Society of Jesus forms a procession of honour and leads it to the column on the right, on which it leans. It is an indescribable moment! **The ovations continue throughout its journey; they redouble as it passes through the groups of students from the Sacred Heart; they clap their hands, stamp their feet; some leap up as if to reach it.** The emotion of the nuns, less expressive, is even deeper; it grips the heart and brings tears to the eyes.” MLo p. 214-215



This joy erupts during the Te Deum sung immediately after Pope Pius XI pronounces the words of canonisation.

“Then the Te Deum is intoned by the Pope, continued by the cantors, to whom *the voices and hearts unite. At the same time, fanfares sound from the dome; the bells of St. Peter’s Basilica give the signal, which is answered by the joyful ringing of all the churches in Rome, announcing the good news of the canonisation.” MLo pp. 219-220

She remains present during the recessional procession.

“It is all over; the Holy Father, returning to the altar, has completed the Holy Sacrifice, given the Pontifical Blessing and, after his thanksgiving, climbs back onto the Sedia [a sedan chair, the popemobile of the time]. [...] His guard of honour surrounds him once more; once again, **the crowd cheers as he passes by, as if in holy delirium; they can no longer contain their love and enthusiasm and, this time, burst into cheers and acclamations.**



We see, in an unprecedented spectacle, waves of white tulle, blue, pink and green ribbons, our children waving them in the air like signals of joy; our alumnae, lacking ribbons, use their handkerchiefs.” MLo 229-230

Also present were Abbé Pernot and Abbé Dusaussay, descendants of the Barat family, as well as the parish priest of Saint Thibault Church (Joigny) where Madeleine Sophie was baptised. (MLo p. 232)

The festivities then continue throughout Rome in the evening.



“At nightfall, the name SANCTA MAGDALENA SOPHIA could be read in letters of fire on the large entrance gate on Via Nomentana [where the Mother House was located]. Similarly, at the top of the belvedere [which overlooks Rome above Villa Lante], the initials M. S. and S. C. shone around the luminous cross. The illumination of Villa Lante delighted the Trastevere. The illumination of Trinité-des-Monts rivalled in splendour, it was said, that of the Vatican Basilica, and seventy-five times the Holy Sacrifice was offered on its fifteen altars on the morning of May 25, the first feast day of Saint Madeleine Sophie.” ML p. 231

The following day, May 26, the explosion of joy continued during the papal audience with the Religious and children of the Sacred Heart.

“The 26th of May was a magnificent continuation of the celebration and the most beautiful day of the octave. At five o’clock in the evening, this time, cars and trams transported almost the entire Motherhouse, the Trinité-des-Monts and Villa Lante to the Vatican, where the Pope kindly granted an audience to the Daughters and children of Saint Madeleine Sophie, on his return from his daily walk, that is to say around six o’clock [...]

***The audience granted by His Holiness Pius XI to the children of the Sacred Heart** was to follow that of the Religious and take place in the courtyard of Saint Damasus. Rainy weather forced a change of plans, and the huge beatification hall, built above and on the scale of the porticoes of Saint Peter’s, had to replace the large courtyard. **Despite being 110 metres long and 15 metres wide, this hall struggled to contain the thousands of people who flocked there long before the appointed time.**

In the centre, a double row of Swiss Guards marked out the route for His Holiness; on the right, the eager stream of black mantillas: alumnae, Children of Mary, all displaying the beloved medal; it could also be seen shining on the chests of a group of nuns from various orders; on the left, the children from our boarding schools formed lines of white that stretched as far as the eye could see, undulating like a field of lilies. The scene was charming. **The organising stewards came and went, arranging the lively crowd on both sides as they saw fit.**



One of them, greatly interested in this unusual gathering, said to the Mothers present: **“Sing a song to restore calm”**. **Seeing them hesitate, he took charge and soon a thousand voices repeated the hymn;** “One day I will see, in heaven in my homeland,” while the good steward, standing in the middle, beat time with beaming satisfaction. [...]



***The wait dragged on; it was past seven o'clock when a forerunner of the procession appeared. A respectful and solemn silence fell as if by magic;** all life passed before their eyes. The procession passed by, then the Holy Father appeared in his serene and smiling majesty. From the Sedia, he towered over the crowd and blessed them. **At the sight of him, the flame of the “Children of the Sacred Heart, true Children of the Church” and of the Holy Father, burst forth like a jet of compressed fire; thunderous applause and warm cheers, ‘Vivat’ in every language resounded under the high vaults, as in St. Peter’s.**

The ladies waved their handkerchiefs; the children waved their blue, green or pink ribbons; enthusiasm burst forth from all sides and His Holiness passed gently by, like a Father passing among his own, looking at them with delightful kindness. The throne was at the back of the vast hall; our Mother General and her Council stood at the foot of the platform, facing the two representatives of the episcopate: Monsignor Chesnelong, Archbishop of Sens, whose diocese includes the small town of Joigny, the homeland of our Saint, and Monsignor Lecomte, Bishop of Amiens, the cradle of the Society of the Sacred Heart. The Pope was seated, surrounded by his noble guards; Monsignor Caccia, Master of the Chamber, and Monsignor Migone, Secret Chaplain to His Holiness, stood to the right and left of the throne. A young Roman girl, a former pupil of the Trinité-des-Monts, led to the feet of His Holiness by a master of ceremonies, spoke in French, in a clear and expressive voice, on behalf of all the pupils of the Sacred Heart, both absent and present. [...]

***After these words [the Pope's speech in response to the young girl's address], the Sovereign Pontiff *descended from the platform, climbed back onto the Sedia and crossed the great hall amid an ovation, prolonged for the Religious of the Sacred Heart when the white vision had disappeared. People shouted: 'Long live our Mother General! Long live the Mothers! Long live the Sisters! Long live the Sacred Heart! A noble guard reports that His Holiness said as he was leaving: "They make a lot of noise, but they are dear to my heart! It is one of the most consoling, cordial and enthusiastic audiences I have ever received!" MLo 233.241-243.254-255**



From the letter of Claire Castaing, Superior General, addressed to Madeleine Sophie, communicated to the Sacred Heart family throughout the world, Religious and lay people.

Read and print this letter written on the 25th May, 2025

Dear Sophie, [...]

I remind you that we are celebrating the centenary of your canonisation, oh, not to praise you, but to let you inspire the path and missionary priorities of your 'Little Society' today, in response to the challenges of our blessed and broken world. [...]

On this feast day, I would like to give thanks for the fire you passed on to your sisters and to this vast international community of children, young people, women and men who continue to live your charisma, this 'grace received for the common good', your presence and your spirit. And I urge you to intercede for each and every one of us so that, through the total gift of ourselves to the Heart of Jesus, we may allow ourselves to be transformed, so that our apostolic creativity may unfold in response to the needs of today's young people and so that new workers may come to 'bring fire' to the world.



Lord, through the intercession of your Son, Mary and Madeleine-Sophie, we ask you for the grace to:

- Find you and celebrate you in our daily lives, with their shadows and lights, the weaknesses and strengths;
- Draw from the living Source of your Son's Heart and take care of your inner life;
- Let us be transformed by Your Spirit, the educator of all, who makes all things new;
- Follow Your Son generously in His Mission;
- Unite us to Him and offer ourselves out of Love for the Life of the world.

Amen!



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