



St. Catherine Labouré

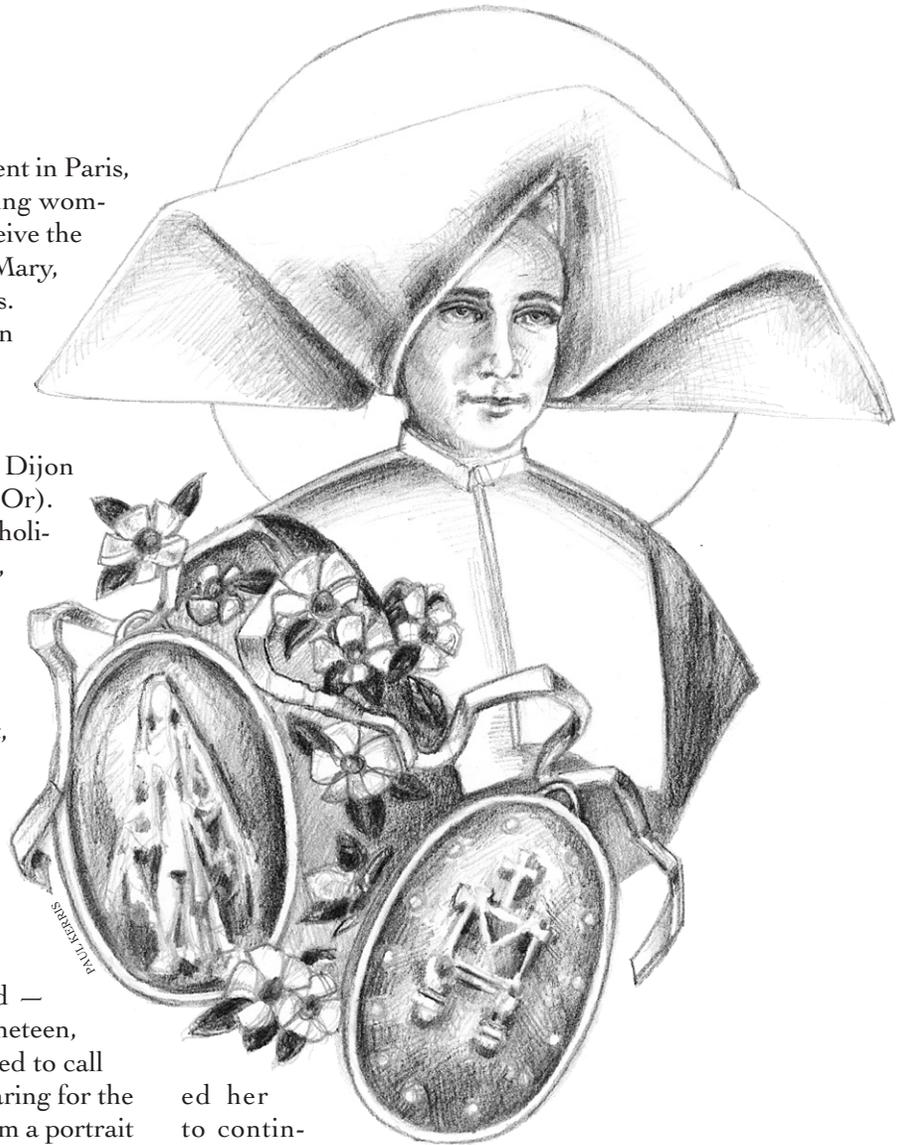
BORN 1806; DIED 1876
VIRGIN AND RELIGIOUS
FEAST DAY: NOVEMBER 28

IN 1830, in an unremarkable convent in Paris, God chose an unremarkable young woman, St. Catherine Labouré, to receive the first of numerous apparitions by Mary, the Mother of God, in modern times.

Catherine was the ninth of eleven children born to a well-to-do farmer, Pierre Labouré, and his wife Madeleine Gontard in the French village of Fain-les-Moûtiers near Dijon (in the modern province of Côte d'Or). Her mother was her first teacher in holiness, and she was devastated when, at the age of nine, her mother died. Shortly after her mother's funeral, Catherine wrapped her arms around a statue of Our Lady in her mother's bedroom and declared that, from then on, Our Lady would be her mother.

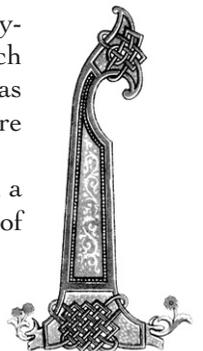
When her older sister entered the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul three years later, Catherine managed the household, which included her father, four siblings still at home — one an invalid — and over a dozen farmhands. At nineteen, she began having dreams that seemed to call her to religious life, specifically to caring for the sick, and could not tear her gaze from a portrait of the founder of the Daughters of Charity she once saw when visiting a hospice. Her confessor felt that these experiences were a call to the Daughters of Charity. When she was twenty-two, she asked her father's permission to enter the convent, but met with his opposition for two years.

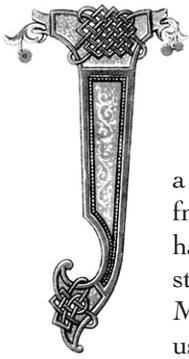
At twenty-four, Catherine joined the Daughters of Charity. She was sent for her novitiate — the period before she took vows — to the order's convent at rue de Bac, Paris. Almost immediately she began to see a vision of our Lord whenever she saw the consecrated host. She told her confessor of these visions and, sensibly, he instruct-



ed her to continue her training as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. A few months later, in July 1830, Catherine was awakened by a beautiful child, who led her to the convent's chapel. At midnight, Our Lady appeared to her, giving her messages for herself, her own religious order and the companion men's order, the Vincentians, and prophesying evil times ahead for France, some of which would begin soon while others would occur as much as forty years later (the prophecies were fulfilled).

Four months later, Catherine experienced a second vision. Our Lady appeared in the form of





a picture, with beams of light streaming from rings on each of her outstretched hands toward a globe on which she was standing, surrounded by the words “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee” (this was twenty-four years before Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception). The picture then reversed, and Catherine saw a capital M, with a cross above and below two hearts, one crowned with thorns and the other pierced with a sword, representing the hearts of Jesus and Mary, the whole encircled with twelve stars. She was told to have a medal struck with this design, and Mary promised that anyone who wore it with devotion would receive God’s grace through her intercession. This vision occurred several more times over the next ten months.

Catherine told her confessor about these events as well and, although he was skeptical, he spoke with the Archbishop of Paris, who gave permission for the medal to be made and distributed. The first fifteen hundred of these “Miraculous Medals” were struck in May 1832. Since then, many miraculous events have been attributed to devotional use of the medal. One of most famous was the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne in 1842. Of Jewish birth, he agreed (with great reluctance) at the request of a friend



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to wear the medal. When in a church in Rome, he saw a vision of Our Lady in the form of the medal. Convinced by this miracle, he became a Catholic, was ordained a priest, and served as a missionary to Jews in the Holy Land for the rest of his life.

Catherine spent the remainder of her life caring for aged men in the Hospice d’Enghein, doing perhaps much the same kinds of tasks as she had done as a teenager at home, from the most menial kitchen jobs to household oversight. She was especially careful of her charges’ spiritual welfare. In the forty years that she was responsible for these men, none died without receiving the last sacraments. She also showed great concern for the spiritual health of her siblings and various in-laws. In old age, she became portress for the hospice. Although some members of her community suspected that she was the visionary of the Miraculous Medal, only her confessor knew this to be the case until shortly before her death, when she told her superior.

Catherine’s life is of value not merely because she was the instrument of a remarkable way to experience devotion to Our Lady. She is also the very model of the silence of Our Lady and of her submissiveness to the will of God, seeking holiness in the most everyday routines of her life.

