

The Letter to Anne de Guigné's Friends

The reputation of saintliness

On April 24th 2006, Pope Benedict XVI sent a letter to the members of the plenary meeting of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in which he reminded them that the reputation of saintliness was an absolutely fundamental condition for a beatification and canonisation cause to be opened in the church.

Here is what the pope said: “The diocesan pastors, when deciding *coram deo* which are the causes which deserve to be opened, will, first of all, decide if the candidats for the honours of the altars really have a solid and widely confirmed reputation of saintliness, of miracles or of martyrdom. This reputation, the 1917 Code of canonical Law stipulated that it should be *spontaneous, not obtained artificially or as a result of propaganda, but coming from honest and serious people and having increased from day to day and always existing for the majority of the people*¹ is a sign from God which indicates to the Church those who deserve to be placed on the lamp to shine *for all those who are in the house*” (Mt 5, 15).

In Anne de Guigné's case, her reputation of saintliness spread very rapidly throughout the whole world after her death. 100,000 copies of the leaflet written in 1924 by Father Lajeunie o.p. *The gracious story of little Anne de Guigné* were diffused, without great publicity, in a few years. One could have feared that the Second World War would carry away the memory of this little girl. But it was not so, and even today, this reputation is solidly established. The bibliography of works concerning Anne, consist of over one hundred books or booklets published since her death. The visits to her tomb in Annecy-le-Vieux or to her bedroom in the Villa Saint Benoît in Cannes where she went up to Heaven, have never ceased, although their annual number is variable.

During the 30's, the bishop who was then in charge of the diocese of Annecy proceeded with extreme prudence. Being moved by the growing reputation of the

1 Quoted in Latin in the original letter: “*spontanea, non arte aut diligentia procurata, orta ab honestis et gravibus personis, continua, in dies aucta et vicens in praesenti apud maiorem partem populi.*” (Can. 2050, 2).

little member of his diocese and with the flood of demands for the Church to recognise Anne's "saintliness", Mgr. De La Villerabel asked himself if he was not, in all conscience, obliged to introduce the cause. The prelate hesitated, however, and asked for a *sign*. He was, at that time, building a seminary in Thonon and he was short of 400,000 francs to finish it. He therefore asked God, for the coming year, which he noted day by day, to increase his usual revenues, at least up to that sum. At the end of the year the the sum was nearly attained: "But this is not, he said to Father Lajeunie who reports this incident, how God wanted to give me his sign. Several days before the deadline, I received a visit from a gentleman who said to me: *Your Grace, I have, at my disposal, the sum of 400,000 francs. I intended this money to be given to some good works, when suddenly, the thought came to me that you were building a seminary in Thonon and I thought this money might be useful to you. I have brought it to you*". The sign was striking: the bishop decided to instruct the the inforamatory process.

For Anne, her posthumous reputation was combined with a reputation for saintliness during her life on earth, observed especially during the last years of her life by the people who knew her best, her family and her governess.

We have told you about the rapid diffusion of Anne's reputation of saintliness after her death in 1922. In the present text, through contemporary testimonies, it is the exceptional radiance of this child's virtues that we would like to emphasize.

First of all, her mother's testimony: "[...]From the age of four up to her death, her effort towards perfection was always present: no ups and downs or rest periods [...] Nothing spectacular... no brilliant deeds, but her slightest acts were inspired by the divine Spirit and she put all her love into it. Naturally, the more she grew up, the more she advanced along this path and the more it became visible to her family circle..." (Letter to Mademoiselle Basset on April 25th 1955)

To such a point that Madame de Guigné, when talking about the last months of her daughter's life, confided: "It was visible to everyone that God had some special projects for this soul, on which he had bestowed such graces and whose ardent generosity had never refused him anything. It was not without profound emotion that I asked myself what God was preparing for this child. It was for the glory of Paradise while passing through the Calvary of suffering and the wrench of separation."

Mademoiselle Basset, Anne's governess, left many memories of her young pupil. It is she, who "wonderstruck" by her unusually mature perfection, spoke to Father Bernadot about it. The dominican advised her to record the child's acts and sayings as they occurred. Thus, thanks to her, we have so many accurate memories of Anne. Mademoiselle Basset wrote in 1972, for the re-edition of the

booklet of her memories of Anne, this astonishing statement: “I always had the feeling that I should not keep such a treasure to myself: *Anne de Guigné was a light in my life*, may she also be thus for everyone, for she is truth.”

Towards the end of July 1921, Germaine, Simone and Andrée de C. came, with their mother to La Cour. Simone was Anne’s close friend and the fortunate beneficiary of many of her confidences. The children played for a long time in the garden. When the time came to leave, Anne’s great friend began to cry. “Don’t cry, her mother said to her, you will see Anne again at Allues and next year we will come back here.” But the child said quietly to her mother: “I do not believe that I shall see Anne again.” – “What do you think?” – “Believe me, Mother! She loves Jesus so much that he will soon take her with him.”

Other testimonies show that Anne touched people out of her normal family circle. The Cornulier family, related to the Guigné family, spent the summer at the villa La Tour, on the banks of the Annecy lake. Anne and her brother and sisters often came to spend an afternoon there. One day she met there, Jeanne Voillaume, a cousin of the Cornulier and ten years older than her. They played together in the garden and went on the lake in a boat. Nobody had the opportunity of talking to Jeanne about Anne de Guigné at that moment. In a letter in February 1922, Hélène de Cornulier told her: “You perhaps remember the cousins that you saw last year at la Tour? Anne has just died.” This is the answer she received: “You tell me laconically that Anne is dead. It is true that I only spent, at the most, three hours with her. Well! I can assure you that I shall never forget the impression of extraordinary purity that she left with me.”

In 1950, Sister Marie-Dominique Poinset, arriving in Annecy-le-Vieux, asked someone in front of the church the way to La Cour and to the cemetery: “The person I spoke to, saw that I was looking for places connected with Anne. Spontaneously she told me: *I saw her take communion here. When one has seen that, one can not forget it.*”

These testimonies gathered here and there amongst many others, show evidence that Anne’s “saintliness” was already well established in her lifetime, at least during the last years of her short life.

A benedictin monk