

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Catherine Labouré

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: November 28

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IN BRIEF

Saint Catherine Labouré

Daughter of Charity, visionary of the Rue du Bac apparitions and messenger of the Miraculous Medal.

Feast day	November 28
Born	May 2, 1806, Fain-lès-Moutiers (Côte-d'Or), France
Died	December 31, 1876, Paris (Enghien hospice, Reuilly), France
Canonized	July 27, 1947, by Pope Pius XII
Era	19th century

In this booklet

Life

Miraculous Medal Prayer: "O Mary, Conceived Without Sin"

Novena to Saint Catherine Labouré

Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, rue du Bac in Paris

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Catherine Labouré

Saint Catherine Labouré was a Daughter of Charity, born in Burgundy in 1806, to whom the Virgin Mary appeared in 1830 in the chapel on the Rue du Bac in Paris. She is at the origin of the Miraculous Medal, one of the most widespread medals in the world. She then spent forty-six years serving the elderly in a Paris hospice, without ever revealing that she was the visionary. She died on December 31, 1876, was canonized in 1947, and is celebrated on November 28, especially in France and in the Vincentian family.

Who was Saint Catherine Labouré?

Zoé Labouré was born on May 2, 1806, at Fain-lès-Moutiers, a village in the Côte-d'Or region of Burgundy, into a farming family. The family was large and deeply Christian. Her mother died in October 1815, when Zoé was nine. According to a memory kept in the family, the little girl then climbed onto a chair to kiss a statue of the Virgin and told her that from now on she would be her mother.

As a teenager, Zoé ran her father's house and farm with her younger sister. She could neither read nor write, and learned only late. She walked several miles to attend Mass in neighboring villages.

The traditional account says that she saw in a dream an old priest who invited her to care for the sick, and that she later recognized him in a portrait of Saint Vincent de Paul, founder of the Daughters of Charity. Her father long opposed her vocation and sent her to work for one of her brothers in Paris, but she finally obtained his consent.

Key dates

- **May 2, 1806**: Born at Fain-lès-Moutiers (Côte-d'Or, France).

- **October 1815**: Death of her mother.
- **January 1830**: Postulant with the Daughters of Charity at Châtillon-sur-Seine.
- **April 21, 1830**: Enters the seminary (novitiate) of the Daughters of Charity, Rue du Bac, in Paris; she takes the name Sister Catherine.
- **Night of July 18-19, 1830**: First apparition of the Virgin in the chapel.
- **November 27, 1830**: Apparition of the Medal.
- **February 1831**: Assigned to the Enghien hospice at Reuilly, in eastern Paris.
- **1832**: The first medals are struck, during a cholera epidemic.
- **January 20, 1842**: Conversion in Rome of Alphonse Ratisbonne, who was wearing the medal.
- **December 31, 1876**: Dies at Reuilly.
- **May 28, 1933**: Beatified by Pope Pius XI.
- **July 27, 1947**: Canonized by Pope Pius XII.

The apparitions on the Rue du Bac

In April 1830, the young Sister Catherine entered the seminary at the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, 140 Rue du Bac. On the night of July 18-19, the eve of the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, she was awakened, according to her account, by a child who led her to the chapel. The Virgin came and sat in the priest's chair; Catherine knelt, resting her hands on Mary's knees, and heard her speak at length of the trials awaiting France and of the mission she would entrust to her. The chair is still kept in the chapel.

On November 27, 1830, during evening meditation, the Virgin appeared to her standing on a globe, with rays of light streaming from her hands. Around her appeared an invocation: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Then the image turned around: Catherine saw the letter

M topped by a cross, the hearts of Jesus and Mary, and twelve stars. She was asked to have a medal struck according to this model, with the promise of great graces for those who would wear it with confidence.

A medal that went around the world

Catherine confided everything to her confessor, Father Jean-Marie Aladel, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentians). At first skeptical, he eventually spoke of it to the Archbishop of Paris, Archbishop de Quélen, who authorized the medal. The first medals were distributed in 1832, just as cholera was ravaging Paris. The healings and conversions attributed to it soon earned it the popular name of "the Miraculous Medal."

In 1842, the sudden conversion in a Roman church of Alphonse Ratisbonne, a young Jewish man from Strasbourg who had agreed to wear the medal, made it known throughout Europe. This spread helped prepare the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Four years later, at Lourdes, the Lady introduced herself to Bernadette with the words: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The devotion is very much alive in the English-speaking world. In Philadelphia, the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, run by the Vincentians, has for decades led a weekly Perpetual Novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, prayed in many parishes across the United States.

Forty-six years of silence

In 1831, Sister Catherine was sent to the Enghien hospice at Reuilly, where the Daughters of Charity cared for the elderly. She stayed there until her death. She looked after the kitchen, the laundry, the henhouse, the door and above all the elderly residents. Her fellow sisters found her self-effacing, a little blunt,

sometimes ordinary. Apart from her confessor, no one knew she was the sister of the medal; even during the inquiry held by the archdiocese in 1836, she refused to make herself known.

Only in 1876, a few months before her death, did she confide in her superior, Sister Dufès. She died peacefully on December 31, 1876. When her body was exhumed in 1933 for her beatification, it was found intact. Since then it has rested in a reliquary in the Rue du Bac chapel, beneath the altar of the Virgin with the globe.

Why do Catholics pray to Saint Catherine Labouré?

Saint Catherine Labouré received an exceptional grace, but never sought glory from it. Her holiness is that of humble, hidden service, day after day, among elderly people who knew nothing of her secret. She handed on a message of confidence in the intercession of Mary, summed up in the short prayer of the medal. She is invoked by those who wear the Miraculous Medal, for the elderly and those who care for them, and by all who want to do good without being seen.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Catherine Labouré in art

- **The habit of the Daughters of Charity**, with the large white winged cornette of her time.
- **The Miraculous Medal**, which she holds or presents.
- **Kneeling beside the Virgin** seated in a chair, her hands on Mary's knees, as in July 1830.
- **The Virgin with rays of light** standing on a globe, in scenes of the November apparition.

Where to pray to Saint Catherine Labouré

- **Paris**: the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, 140 Rue du Bac, where her body rests, as does that of Saint Louise de Marillac.
- **Fain-lès-Moutiers** (Côte-d'Or, France): her family home and the church where she was baptized.
- **Paris**: the Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, Rue de Sèvres, which keeps the relics of the founder of the Daughters of Charity.
- **Rome**: the Church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, where Alphonse Ratisbonne was converted in 1842.



The reliquary of Saint Catherine Labouré in the Rue du Bac chapel.

To pray with her, read the Miraculous Medal prayer, or follow the novena to Saint Catherine Labouré from November 19 to 27, ending on the eve of her feast, on the anniversary of the apparition of the medal.

PRAYER

Miraculous Medal Prayer: "O Mary, Conceived Without Sin"

The prayer most closely linked to Saint Catherine Labouré is the invocation engraved on the Miraculous Medal. Catherine did not compose it: according to her testimony, she saw it written in letters of gold around the Virgin during the apparition of November 27, 1830. Below you will find this text and its context, followed by an original prayer to Saint Catherine.

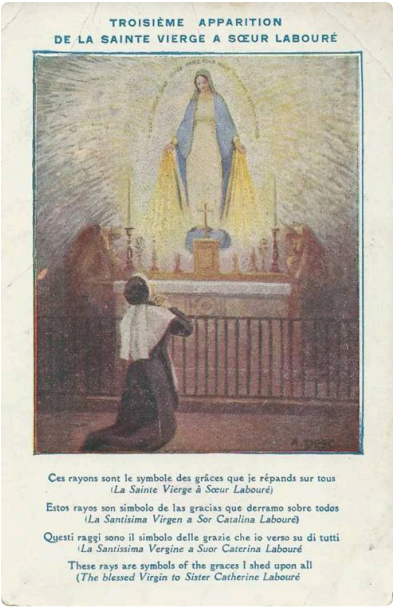
"O Mary, conceived without sin"

On the evening of November 27, 1830, in the chapel on the Rue du Bac, the Virgin appeared to the young novice standing on a globe, her hands shining with light. An oval frame formed around her, bearing these words:

> *"O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."*

Source: accounts of the apparition written by Saint Catherine Labouré at the request of her confessors, and the inscription of the Miraculous Medal struck from 1832 with the approval of the Archbishop of Paris, Archbishop de Quélen (public domain). Twenty-four years before Pope Pius IX defined the dogma in 1854, the prayer already expressed faith in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Many Catholics repeat it several times a day while wearing or holding the medal. It can be prayed on its own as a short invocation, or at the end of a Rosary.



Sister Catherine Labouré with the Virgin, on the night of July 18-19, 1830.

The meaning of the back of the medal

The back of the medal bears no words, but signs to meditate on: the letter M for Mary topped by a cross, recalling her presence at the foot of the cross; the Heart of Jesus crowned with thorns and the Heart of Mary pierced by a sword; and twelve stars, which recall the apostles and the woman crowned with stars in the Book of Revelation (12:1). Catherine also reported that the rays streaming from the Virgin's hands represented the graces she gives to those who ask for them.

Prayer to Saint Catherine Labouré

Saint Catherine Labouré, as a child you chose the Virgin Mary as your mother: teach me to entrust myself to her like a child, in times of joy and of grief.

On the Rue du Bac you received Mary's visit, and you kept this secret for forty-six years in silence and service: give me the humility to do good without seeking to be seen.

You cared patiently for the elderly of the Reuilly hospice: I entrust to you the elderly, the sick, the lonely and all who serve them. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me the grace to turn to Mary with confidence, and to repeat with you: O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Catherine Labouré is celebrated on November 28, the day after the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, kept on November 27 in memory of the apparition of 1830. You can also pray to her on December 31, the anniversary of her death, when receiving or giving a Miraculous Medal, or when caring for an elderly relative.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Catherine Labouré, and discover the life of Saint Catherine Labouré.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Catherine Labouré

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Catherine Labouré. It is not an official liturgical text or a text written by the saint. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on November 19: it ends on November 27, the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, the day before her feast on November 28. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially when you begin wearing the Miraculous Medal.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God through Mary, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then a Hail Mary and the invocation of the medal: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." The small act suggested for the day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

The nine days follow Catherine from her childhood in Burgundy to the chapel on the Rue du Bac and her long hidden years among the elderly of Reuilly. They are a school of trust in Mary and of humble, faithful service.



Saint Catherine Labouré, in a church window or statue.

Day 1: A mother forever

At nine years old, Zoé lost her mother. According to the family memory, she turned to a statue of the Virgin and asked her to be her mother from then on. In grief, faith can become a refuge.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, I entrust to you those who have lost a parent, and my own losses. Be our mother.

Today: Pray for a deceased member of your family.

Day 2: The work of every day

As a teenager, Zoé ran her father's house and farm. Her spiritual life grew in the middle of her work, not alongside it. Chores, meals and fields were the place where she met God.

Prayer: Lord, may my ordinary tasks become a path toward you.

Today: In the morning, offer God the work of the day.

Day 3: Persevering in a vocation

Her father long refused to let her go. Zoé waited patiently, without giving up. Obstacles are not always a sign that God is saying no. Sometimes they are the time he gives us to grow ready.

Prayer: Lord, give me patience and faithfulness in the calls you give me.

Today: Pray for a young person who is discerning a vocation.

Day 4: At Mary's feet

On that July night in 1830, Catherine knelt beside the Virgin and rested her hands on her knees. She would later say it was the sweetest moment of her life. To pray is first of all to stay close to someone.

Prayer: Mary, welcome me close to you as you welcomed Catherine. I have so much to entrust to you.

Today: Spend five minutes in silence before an image of the Virgin.

Day 5: The rays from Mary's hands

On November 27, Catherine saw rays coming from the Virgin's hands: they were the graces given to those who ask for them. Some of the rings on her fingers gave no light: the graces people forget to ask for.

Prayer: O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Teach me to ask.

Today: Ask for a specific grace for someone else.

Day 6: The cross and the two hearts

On the back of the medal, the cross stands above the letter M, over the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mary always leads to her Son and to his cross.

Prayer: Jesus, through the Heart of your mother, teach me to love you even in times of trial.

Today: Wear a medal or a cross, and kiss it as you pray.

Day 7: The secret kept

Catherine let Father Aladel spread the medal without ever putting herself forward. She preferred to remain unknown. Good does not need a signature. Mary was honored; that was enough for her.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to be noticed. May I do good for you alone.

Today: Do someone a favor without telling anyone.

Day 8: Serving the elderly

At Reuilly, Catherine cared for forty-six years for elderly people who were often difficult. Her holiness was hidden in patience and faithfulness. No one around her suspected that the quiet sister in the kitchen had seen the Mother of God.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you elderly people who are alone or dependent, and those who care for them.

Today: Visit or call an elderly person.

Day 9: A peaceful death

Catherine died serenely on the last day of 1876. Shortly before, she had said she would not see the following year. Her whole life had prepared her for this meeting.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Catherine Labouré, pray for me now and at the hour of my death. Amen.

Today: Pray a Rosary, or a decade, for the dying.

Closing prayer

Saint Catherine Labouré, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I carry. You saw the Virgin with her hands full of graces: lead me to her, and through her to her Son. Obtain for me simplicity, humility and the joy of serving. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Catherine Labouré and the Miraculous Medal prayer.

PILGRIMAGE

Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, rue du Bac in Paris

The Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, at 140 rue du Bac in the 7th arrondissement of Paris, is the site of the Virgin's apparitions to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830. The chapel of the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, it houses the saint's body and receives a great many pilgrims from around the world each year, in the heart of a shopping district.

The motherhouse chapel

The Daughters of Charity, founded in the 17th century by Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, settled on the rue du Bac at the beginning of the 19th century, in a former private mansion. The present chapel was built there around 1815. It was here that young Sister Catherine, a novice since April 1830, saw the Virgin on the night of July 18 to 19, then on November 27 and in December of the same year.



The entrance to the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, rue du Bac.

What you will see inside

The chapel was enlarged and decorated over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. The choir is dominated by a large statue of the Virgin with the globe and by a mosaic evoking the apparition. Near the choir, pilgrims venerate the armchair where, according to Catherine's account, the Virgin sat in July 1830. The body of Saint Catherine rests in a glass reliquary beneath the altar of the Virgin with the globe, while that of Saint Louise de Marillac lies in another reliquary in the chapel.

Praying at rue du Bac

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Catherine Labouré. On site, pilgrims often pray before the saint's reliquary and then near the armchair of the apparition, where an intention can be left. Many receive or buy a

Miraculous Medal, which can be blessed. The prayer of the Miraculous Medal naturally accompanies this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.

Other places of Saint Catherine Labouré

- **Fain-lès-Moutiers** (Côte-d'Or): her birthplace, open to pilgrims, and the village church.
- **Châtillon-sur-Seine** (Côte-d'Or): the town where she began her postulancy in 1830.
- **Paris, 12th arrondissement**: the Reuilly neighborhood, where she served for forty-six years at the Hospice d'Enghien.
- **Paris, rue de Sèvres**: the Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul, where the body of the founder of the Daughters of Charity rests.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, where Alphonse Ratisbonne was converted in 1842.

Practical information

The chapel is at the back of a courtyard, at 140 rue du Bac, near the Sèvres-Babylone metro station and the department stores of the Left Bank. Masses are celebrated there every day, and November 27, the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, draws a large crowd. Check Mass, confession, and opening times with the chapel before you come.

Credits and sources

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