St. Julie Billiart

April 8

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1751–1816 • France

Seven-year-old Julie Billiart loved playing school. She would gather all the young children of the town and teach them. But she did not teach them math, science, or French; instead, she taught them the catechism, which she had learned by heart even though she was so young. Her love for God was so strong, that, only two years later, she promised Jesus she would never marry and would give her life entirely to Him.

At age sixteen, Julie worked on a farm to make money for her family. The other workers would gather to hear her speak about Christ. They saw that Julie was a special, holy soul, and they called her the saint of their little town of Cuvilly. Then something happened that brought terrible suffering to young Julie. Her family's shop was robbed, and the criminals shot at her father. The terrifying sound of the pistol-shot sent Julie into shock, and she was paralyzed from the waist down. For the next twenty-two years, she was confined to her bed. Julie saw her bedridden state as an opportunity to grow closer to God, and she prayed for many hours of the day. The village children would gather at her bedside, and she taught them the catechism, just as she had when she was a little girl.

It was the time of the violent French Revolution, when authorities persecuted Catholics. But Julie was unafraid and spoke out about the Faith. In fear for her life, her friends hid her on a hay cart and carried her to a place of refuge. There Julie befriended a noblewoman named Françoise, who was also hiding from the authorities. The two women discovered that they shared a deep love for God and a desire to help the poor children of France. Together they founded the Sisters of Notre Dame, whose purpose was the care of children. A year later, a priest instructed Julie to pray for the healing of her body. God answered Julie's prayers, and she was finally able to walk again! Julie was grateful for God's great mercy and knew that she would have to use the newfound strength of her limbs for His service.

And that is what she did. After the French Revolution ended, Julie founded fifteen convents and made the long journeys necessary to visit them as often as she could. The sisters would gather around her as she offered them words of guidance and encouragement in the care of children. Her deep life of prayer strengthened her in her work until she died a holy death. St. Julie Billiart, help me to spread Jesus's message to those around me!