

## St. Jeanne Jugan

St. Jeanne Jugan, also known as Sister Mary of the Cross, L.S.P. was born on October 25, 1792 in the French region of Brittany during the political and religious upheavals of the French Revolution.

Jeanne grew up as the sixth of eight children to Joseph and Marie Jugan surrounded by a lot of religious and political upheavals. Her father became lost at sea when Jeanne was just four-years-old, and her mother struggled to provide for all the Jugan children.

Her mother worked diligently to make sure her children had everything they needed, including secret religious instruction when anti-Catholic persecutions were taking place.

From a young age, Jeanne learned to knit and spin wool and became a shepherdess. Barely able to read or write, Jeanne took a job as a kitchen maid for a noble family when she was 16. She took the job as the kitchen maid of the Viscountess de la Choue. The viscountess, a devout Catholic, had Jugan accompany her when she visited the sick and the poor. As she matured, Jeanne began finding her passion in working with these people and turned down multiple marriage proposals. She told her mother God had other plans for her.

At 25, Jeanne became an Associate of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, which was founded by St. John Eudes (Eudists). She spent her time praying and working as a nurse in the town hospital. She stayed at the hospital for many years until her own health issues prevented her from performing her physically demanding tasks.

After leaving her job at the hospital, Jeanne became the servant of a member of the Eudist Third Order for 12 years. While working as a servant, Jeanne and her master found the same Catholic faith in each other and set out to begin teaching catechism to the town's children and caring for the poor.

In 1837, Jugan and a 72-year-old woman (Françoise Aubert) rented part of a small cottage and were joined by Virginie Tredaniel, a 17-year-old orphan. These three women then formed a Catholic community of prayer, devoted to teaching the catechism and assisting the poor. In the winter of 1839, Jugan encountered Anne Chauvin, an elderly woman who was blind, partially paralyzed, and had no one to care for her.<sup>[1]</sup> Jugan carried her home to her apartment and took her in from that day forward, letting the woman have her bed while she slept in the attic. She soon took in two more old women in need of help, and by 1841 she had rented a room to provide housing for a dozen elderly people. The following year, she acquired an unused convent building that could house 40 of them. From this act of charity, with the approval of her colleagues, Jeanne then focused her attention upon the mission of assisting abandoned elderly women, and from this beginning arose a religious congregation called The Little Sisters of the Poor.

Jeanne constructed a simple Rule of Life for her new community of women. Each day they went around town requesting food, clothing and money for those in their care. Jeanne's carried on with her new life's work for the next four decades of her life.

More young women started to hear about Jeanne's mission and joined her. Through begging on the streets, Jeanne was able to open four more homes for her needy within those 10 years. By 1850, over 100 women had joined the congregation.

In 1847 based on the request of Leo Dupont (known as the Holy Man of Tours) she established a house in that city. She was much sought after whenever problems arose and worked with religious and civil authorities to seek help for the poor.<sup>[1]</sup>

Jeanne was soon forced out of the leadership role, though. The local bishop appointed Abbe Auguste Le Pailleur as Superior General of the congregation. Jeanne was assigned to strictly begging on the streets until she was sent to retire in a life of obscurity for her final 27 years of life.

After The Little Sisters of the Poor communities began expanding throughout France, their work spread to England in 1851 and the United States founded five of their own communities from 1866 to 1871.

By 1879, Jeanne's community had over 2,400 Little Sisters. On March 1, 1879, Pope Leo XIII approved the Constitution for the congregation for seven years.

At the time of Jeanne's death, on August 29, 1879, most of the Little Sisters had no idea Jeanne was the real founder of the congregation. However, Le Pailleur was investigated and dismissed in 1890 and Jeanne became acknowledged once again as the foundress.

St. Jeanne Jugan passed away at the age of 86. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 3, 1982 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009.

During her canonization Pope Benedict XVI expressed, "In the Beatitudes, Jeanne Jugan found the source of the spirit of hospitality and fraternal love, founded on unlimited trust in Providence, which illuminated her whole life."

She is the patron saint of the destitute elderly and her feast day is celebrated on August 30.

### **Sayings of the Saint**

"My little ones, never forget that the poor are Our Lord; in caring for the poor say to yourself: This is for my Jesus – what a great grace!"

"Be kind, especially with the infirm. Love them well ... Oh yes! Be kind. It is a great grace God is giving you. In serving the aged, it is he himself whom you are

serving.”

“When you will be near the poor, give yourself wholeheartedly.”

“Making the elderly happy – that is what counts!”

“My little ones, we should always be cheerful, for our old people do not like long faces.”

“Refuse God nothing ... We must do all through love.”

“Love God very much, so that you can look after the aged well, for it is Jesus whom you care for in them.”

“Little, very little, be very little before God.”

“It is so good to be poor, to have nothing, to depend on God for everything.”

“If God is with us, it will be accomplished ... God will help us; the work is his.”

“Give us the house – if God fills it, God will not abandon it!”

“We must always say: ‘Blessed be God. Thank you, my God. Glory be to God.’”

“God has blessed me because I have always greatly thanked his Providence.”

“My good Jesus, I have only you.”

“We were grafted into the Cross.”

“Let us sing the glory of our risen Jesus.”

“Jesus is waiting for you in the chapel. Go and find him when your strength and patience are giving out, when you feel lonely and helpless. Say to him: ‘You know well what is happening, my dear Jesus. I have only you. Come to my aid ...’ And then go your way. And don’t worry about knowing how you are going to manage. It is enough to have told our good Lord. He has an excellent memory.”

“The Hail Mary will take us to heaven.”

“See how Jesus, Mary and Joseph loved one another, all three, how happy they looked, with what kindness and gentleness they spoke to each other. In our little family, it must be the same.”

“My children, you love Our Lady? She will be your Mother!”

“When you will be old, you will no longer see anything ... as for me, I no longer see anything but the good God.”

“Eternal Father, open your gates today to the most miserable of your children, but one who greatly longs to see you. O Mary, my dear Mother, come to me. You know that I love you and I long to see You” (her last words).