



ZÉLIE MARTIN

(1831-1877)

Zélie, daughter of the nineteenth century, the heir of her time.

Second child of Isidore Guérin and Louise-Jeanne Macé, Azélie-Marie Guérin (always known by the nickname Zélie) was born on December 23, 1831 at Gandelain, in the district of Saint Denis sur Sarthon in Orne, where her father, a former soldier of the empire, was a policeman.

She was baptized the day after her birth in the church of Saint Denis sur Sarthon. Her sister, Marie-Louise, was two years older. She became Sister Marie-Dosithée of the Visitation of

Mans. A brother, Isidore, was born almost ten years later, and he became the spoiled child of the family. In a letter to her brother, she herself says her childhood and youth were as *“sad as a shroud, because my mother spoiled you, yet for me, you know she was too strict; although she was so good, she did not know how to treat me, so I suffered a lot in my heart.”*

Zélie, active woman, an entrepreneur, committed to justice ...

After studying at the Convent of Perpetual Adoration on rue de Lancrel in Alençon, she felt a call to the religious life, but, when refused by the [Mother] Superior, she chose vocational training and successfully started manufacturing the renowned Alençon lace. Towards the end of 1853, she registered herself as a “manufacturer of Alençon Lace” at 36 rue Saint-Blaise and contracted with other women who worked from their homes. The quality of her products made her workshop well known. The relationships she maintained with her staff, whom she was said to love as if they were members of her own family, were just like those with her neighbors and acquaintances: we see her always ready to fight injustice and to support those who are in need. The Gospel motivated all her actions.



Zélie, loving wife

In April 1858, Zélie Guerin crossed the bridge of Saint Leonard and spotted a young man whose bearing impressed her. He was Louis Martin, the watchmaker. Three months later, on July 12, 1858 at 10:00 p.m. their civil marriage was held, and two hours later, at midnight on July 13, they exchanged vows in an intimate ceremony in the church of Notre-Dame d'Alençon. Abbé Hurel, Dean of Saint Leonard, officiated.

The love Zélie brought to her husband shines in these words: "Your wife who loves you more than life itself," and "I embrace you as I love you "...

Zélie, mother blessed and tested

From 1860 to 1873, nine children were born in the Martin home, four of whom died in infancy. Zélie experienced joy and suffering during these seasons of births and deaths.

We read in her letters: "I love children dearly, I was born to have them." Later, after the birth of Thérèse, her last daughter: "I have so much suffering in my life." Educating her girls became the passion of her heart. Faith was at the heart and soul of this education. For her children she desired the very best--to become saints!

Zélie, sick yet ever confident

During 1865, a gland in her right breast developed into cancer, which caused Zélie great suffering. "If God wants to heal me, I will be very happy, because in my soul I want to live. It will crush me to leave my husband and my children. But on the other hand, I tell myself: if I am not healed, then perhaps it is in order to be more useful to them should I go."

At thirty minutes after midnight on August 28, 1877, Zélie died, with her husband and her brother at her side.