SILENT HOMILIES

Little Treasures

OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE

The Tears Nobody Could Ignore



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures

Small books on questions a Catholic is actually asked.

Our Lady of La Salette

The Tears Nobody Could Ignore

A little book for the Catholic who has heard of a weeping Lady
and would like the story, the message,
and the Church's judgement,
rather than a rumour from the internet.

Before You Begin

†

On 19 September 1846, two children were looking after cows in the French Alps when they saw something they would remember for the rest of their lives. A woman was sitting on a stone with her face in her hands. She was crying.

The children did not know who she was. They could not have imagined that people would still be talking about their experience 180 years later. The woman they described became known to Catholics as Our Lady of La Salette. Her message was surprisingly ordinary. She spoke about Sunday Mass, prayer, the name of Jesus, and the way people were living. Yet she also spoke about suffering, hunger and the need for conversion.

The story raises some difficult questions. Why would the Mother of God appear in tears? Can someone who is in heaven still suffer? Did the Church really approve the apparition? What should Catholics make of the frightening secrets attributed to the children? And what happened to those children after the crowds had gone home?

In this little book, I want to take you back to that afternoon in September 1846 and introduce you to the two children who said they saw Our Lady. We will look at what she told them, why the Church took their account seriously, and what happened to them afterwards. We will also deal with the more difficult questions, especially the tears, the warnings about punishment, and the controversial secrets that appeared many years later.

You do not have to believe in an apparition to be a faithful Catholic. Our faith rests on Jesus Christ and what God has revealed through him. But when the Church judges that a reported apparition may be accepted, it is worth asking what we can learn from it. In the case of La Salette, I think we may be surprised by how familiar the message is. The children

heard about things that still belong to our lives: Sunday Mass, prayer, the way we speak about Jesus, and what happens when we gradually stop making time for God.

Contents

Before You Begin 4
1. A woman sitting on a stone 7
2. Two children nobody expected 9
3. Why was Our Lady crying? 12
4. The Sunday we slowly lost 15
5. The Holy Name of Jesus 18
6. The harvest that failed 21
7. The cross she carried 23
8. What did the Church actually approve? 26
9. What happened to Maximin and Mélanie? 28
10. The mountain of prayer 30
11. What would Our Lady say to us today? 32
12. When the tears have stopped 34
What can I do after reading this? 36
A prayer of the shrine 37
Sources and Further Reading 38
A little further down the mountain 40

Chapter 1

A woman sitting on a stone

†

Most of us would have walked past the two children without paying them much attention. They were looking after cows, as children in that part of France often did. There was work to be done, and somebody would be waiting for the animals to come home. Neither child had any reason to think that this Saturday would be remembered after the names of the local farmers had been forgotten.

On 19 September 1846 Mélanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud were doing that work. She was fourteen. He was eleven. They had little schooling, and they had hardly known each other before they were hired. In the afternoon, after they had eaten the food they had brought, they went looking for the cows. What they described afterwards was a globe of light, and in it a woman seated on a stone, her face in her hands, weeping. What followed brought priests, a bishop and, in time, pilgrims to a pasture that had not been a place of pilgrimage.

They called her the Beautiful Lady. She was dressed as a country woman might have been dressed, with a long gown, a shawl, an apron, and a crown or cap of roses. On her breast was a crucifix, and with the crucifix a hammer and a pair of pincers. The light, they said, seemed to come from that cross. She rose and asked them to come nearer. The words kept from the earliest accounts are simple: come near, my children, do not be afraid. I am here to tell you a great piece of news.

She spoke first in French. The children did not follow it well, so she said she would tell them otherwise, and she went on in the dialect of the place. She spoke about Sunday, about the name of her Son, about spoiled crops, and about prayer. Then she asked them to make it known to all her people. The light closed, and she was gone. They went down and told it. That is

how a story which began on a stone reached a farmer, then a parish priest, and in time the bishop.

A Reflection

There are people we see almost every day without really noticing how they are. We ask whether everything is all right, and when they say yes, we carry on. Sometimes we know perfectly well that something is wrong, but we are afraid that asking another question will lead to a conversation we do not have time for. I have often thought about the fact that the first thing the children noticed at La Salette was a woman crying. Before they understood her message, before they knew who she was, they had encountered somebody in tears. Luke tells us that Jesus saw the widow at Nain, walking behind the coffin of her only son, and had compassion on her. He did not wait for her to ask. Perhaps there is somebody close to us who needs that kind of attention. We may not be able to solve their problem. But we can sit with them, listen properly, and make sure they do not have to carry everything alone.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to notice those who are suffering. Give me the patience to listen and the generosity to help. Amen.

Chapter 2

Two children nobody expected

†

Mélanie was born at Corps on 7 November 1831. She spoke the local dialect more easily than French, and she had scarcely been taught to read. Maximin was born at Corps on 26 August 1835. His mother, Anne-Marie Templier, had died, and he was known as a lively boy with little schooling. On 19 September they were on the slopes above the village because they had both been hired to watch cows, not because anyone had prepared them for a vision.

The Church did not accept the children's story simply because it was unusual or moving. The Bishop of Grenoble, Philibert de Bruillard, ordered an investigation. Priests questioned the children, examined their accounts and considered objections. The enquiry continued for several years. One particularly difficult episode involved Maximin and a priest who was already famous for his holiness. His name was Father John Vianney, the Curé of Ars. People travelled considerable distances to seek his advice and make their Confession to him. After Maximin met him, reports circulated that the boy had admitted he had not really seen Our Lady. This was a serious allegation. If one of the witnesses had withdrawn his testimony, the Church would have had to consider what that meant for the apparition. Maximin subsequently denied having retracted his account. He explained that he had not properly understood the conversation and had answered questions without following them clearly. The surviving reports do not give us a complete and reliable transcript of everything said during the meeting. We should therefore be careful about claiming to know exactly what happened. The important point is that the difficulty was not simply ignored. It became part of the wider investigation. On 19 September 1851, five years after the reported apparition, Bishop de Bruillard issued his favourable judgement. That did

not make Maximin or Mélanie saints. Nor did it mean that everything they might say in later life would carry the authority of the Church. It meant that the bishop had judged the reported apparition worthy of acceptance and authorised the associated devotion.

Neither child would have been an obvious choice to carry an important religious message. They had received very little education, and they were not especially knowledgeable about their faith. They were working children, accustomed to spending long hours looking after animals. That does not prove that their account was true, of course. The bishop still had to investigate it. But it does make me think about something we sometimes forget in the Church. We can become so impressed by qualifications, confidence and the ability to speak well that we overlook people who have none of these things. The children were not asked to explain complicated theology. They were asked to tell people what they believed they had seen and heard. The Church then had the responsibility of examining their testimony.

A Reflection

Sometimes the person who first helped us to believe in God later disappoints us. It might be a priest, a teacher, a parent, or somebody we once admired. When that happens, we can begin to question everything they taught us. The Gospels are remarkably honest about the weaknesses of the apostles. Peter promised that he would never abandon Jesus, yet before the night was over he had denied knowing him three times. After the Resurrection, Jesus did not pretend that nothing had happened. He asked Peter whether he loved him, and entrusted his sheep to his care. The truth of the Gospel does not depend upon the perfection of the person who first explained it to us. We must never excuse wrongdoing, especially when somebody has been hurt. But neither should we imagine that God can work only through people who never fail. When we meet a disappointing witness, we may need to distinguish the good we genuinely received from the faults of the person who gave it.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to recognise your truth even when those who teach it disappoint me. Keep my faith firmly rooted in you. Amen.

Chapter 3

Why was Our Lady crying?

†

Something about La Salette troubles people when they first hear it. If Our Lady is in heaven, why was she crying? Heaven is the place where suffering has ended. Revelation says that God will wipe away every tear. So how could two children have seen the Mother of God with her face in her hands?

It is a fair question. When Catholics speak about heaven, we do not mean a better version of this life, in which people are still frightened or waiting to see what happens next. Mary shares the glory of her risen Son. The Church does not teach that she spends eternity in tears because a village has neglected Mass. The children were not looking through a window into heaven and writing a report. They described an encounter in which she was shown to them in a particular way, and the tears were part of what they were shown.

Perhaps the nearest comparison we have is the concern of a parent for an adult child who is making decisions that will cause serious harm. The parent may have offered advice many times. They may have tried to help, only to find that their help was refused. The tears come from love and from knowing that another person is free to make choices we cannot make for them. Of course, that comparison only takes us so far. Our Lady is in heaven, and we must not imagine that she experiences heavenly life as though it were simply another version of our earthly life. The tears described by the children belong to the way she appeared to them. They help us understand her maternal concern, but they do not mean that the happiness of heaven has been taken away from her.

The Gospel already knew that concern. At Cana she notices that the wine has run out, and her word to the servants is: do whatever he tells you.

At the Cross she stands near him. Luke says she kept things and pondered them in her heart. None of those scenes is La Salette. They are the reason a Catholic can understand La Salette without turning Mary into a rival of Christ. Catholics honour her because she is his mother and because she is with him, not because she offers a kinder Gospel than the one he preached. Public Revelation is complete in him. An approved apparition does not add a chapter. It can help people who have grown deaf to the chapter they already have.

There is a sentence in the message that has been misused. She says that if her people will not submit, she is forced to let go the arm of her Son, and that the arm is heavy. This is the language of prophetic warning. It is not a picture of Mary holding back an unwilling and angry Christ. Catholics ask Mary to pray for them because she is the Mother of God and because she is with her Son. The Hail Mary is a request for her prayer, not a second way of salvation. Jesus is the one mediator. Her prayer does not make her more merciful than he is. It joins her concern to his. The shrine's title for her is Reconciler of Sinners, which only makes sense if the reconciliation is his. The Church already knew her sorrow under another title. Our Lady of Sorrows is the Mary of Calvary. The Stabat Mater sings that standing. La Salette does not replace that feast. It shows the same mother concerned for a people who have grown careless of the cross she wears.

A Reflection

One of the hardest experiences for a Catholic parent is watching a son or daughter gradually leave the faith. Perhaps they once served at the altar, made their First Holy Communion with great excitement, and prayed with the family. Years later, they may have no interest in going to church at all. Parents sometimes blame themselves. They go over the past, wondering whether they said too much, said too little, or made some mistake that changed everything. There is no simple answer to that pain. Every person has freedom, and even the best example does not guarantee another person's choices. But the Church gives us something we can continue to do: we can pray. At Cana, Mary noticed a difficulty before the servants knew what to do about it. She brought the need to Jesus. We can do the same with the people we love. We cannot make their decisions for them, but we can bring their names to Christ, again and again, without turning every family conversation into an argument about religion.

A short prayer

Holy Mary, you stood by the Cross. Teach us to pray for the people we are tempted to give up. Amen.

Chapter 4

The Sunday we slowly lost

†

Over the years, I have spoken to people who tell me that they still believe in God but no longer attend Sunday Mass. They are often sincere. They pray in their own way, try to treat others well, and cannot understand why the Church places such importance on being at Mass every Sunday. Some remember being taken to church as children but have gradually lost the habit. Others have had difficult experiences in the Church and find it hard to return. I understand why somebody might ask whether praying at home is enough. God certainly hears us wherever we pray. But Holy Mass is something more than the prayers we say by ourselves. Christ gathers his people around the altar and gives himself to us in the Eucharist. The sacrifice he offered once upon the Cross is made sacramentally present. We receive his Body and Blood. This is why the Church has always treated Sunday Mass as central to Christian life. It is not simply a religious meeting that we attend when we have time. It is a gift Christ has given his Church, and he asks us to take part in it.

This is why Sunday mattered from the beginning. It was the day of the Resurrection, the day the Church gathered to break bread. Acts already shows that gathering. St Justin, in the second century, describes Christians meeting on Sunday to hear the memoirs of the apostles and to receive the Eucharist. The Lady's complaint, in 1846, was local and plain. In summer only a few older women went to Mass, and the others worked. In winter the young men, when they had nothing else to do, went to make fun of religion. The churches had not been closed. People were using Sunday for work, and sometimes the young men came to Mass in order to mock religion. The Catechism says the Sunday Eucharist is the foundation of Christian practice, and that the faithful are obliged to take part unless a serious reason excuses them. Illness, and the care of someone who cannot

be left, can excuse. A shift that truly cannot be moved may excuse that Sunday. It does not follow that every work commitment does. A Saturday evening Mass fulfils the Sunday obligation. A habit of preferring anything else does not.

A family may stop attending Sunday Mass without ever deciding to leave the Church. One Sunday somebody is ill. Another Sunday there is a journey, or a children's activity, or a family arrangement. These things do not all carry the same weight, and the Church does not ask us to neglect people who genuinely need our care. But gradually a different habit can develop. Instead of arranging other activities around Mass, we attend Mass only when nothing else has been planned. I have met Catholics who still love the Church but cannot remember when they last attended Sunday Mass regularly. Sometimes nobody intended to stop. It simply happened, one Sunday at a time. That is why the message of La Salette remains uncomfortable. Our Lady did not introduce a new devotion. She asked people to return to the Eucharist they already knew. Perhaps the first step is simply to look at the coming weekend and decide when we will go to Mass.

A Reflection

Children learn what matters to their parents long before they understand the reasons. They notice what the family makes time for. They know which appointments cannot easily be missed and which activities everybody tries to attend. Sunday Mass teaches something in the same way. Children notice when their parents kneel to pray, receive Holy Communion reverently, or make the effort to attend Mass even when Sunday is busy. They may not understand the theology of the Eucharist, but they recognise that something important is happening. Parents cannot force their children to keep the faith when they grow older. Every person must make their own response to God. But the example given at home matters. A child who sees that Sunday Mass is a normal and valued part of family life receives a lesson that no textbook can provide. We teach our children many things because we want them to have a good future. Teaching them to love the Eucharist is also part of preparing them for life. It helps them discover the One who will remain with them when we cannot.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, help us to love the Eucharist and to give Sunday Mass its proper place in our lives. Amen.

Chapter 5

The Holy Name of Jesus

†

We hear the name of Jesus so often that we stop noticing how it is used. It appears in films, in talk at work, and sometimes at home, with no intention of speaking about Christ at all. It has become a word of surprise or frustration. When someone calls your name, you turn, because they are addressing you. For Christians the name of Jesus is the name of the one who saved us. Paul tells the Philippians that God has given him the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. That is why Catholics have treated the Holy Name with reverence. In the fifteenth century St Bernardine of Siena preached that name in the towns of Italy, holding up a wooden tablet painted with the letters IHS, the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek. People who had been divided by faction were asked to put the tablet over their doors. The point of the preaching was not a badge. It was that the name belonged to the Saviour, and that a town could be reminded of him in public. The devotion to the Holy Name is much older than La Salette. But when Our Lady spoke to the children in 1846, she gave them an example they would have recognised. She complained that men driving their carts were using the name of her Son while swearing. It was ordinary speech, heard during an ordinary day's work. That was precisely the problem.

Not everybody who uses the name of Jesus carelessly intends to insult him. For some people it has become a habit, something they say when they are surprised, annoyed or frustrated. Intention matters when we consider a person's responsibility for what they say. But it is still worth asking why the name of the Lord has become such an ordinary expression in our conversations. We would usually be careful about speaking disrespectfully of somebody we love. Learning to treat the name of Jesus with reverence can begin quite simply, by paying more attention to our words and

gradually changing an old habit.

The children were told to make the message known to all her people. Part of what they carried down was this request: stop using my Son's name to swear by. It is not the whole of the Gospel. It is a place where the Gospel was being handled carelessly, in public, by men who would have been offended to be called unbelievers.

A Reflection

There is a lovely detail in the Acts of the Apostles that we can easily overlook. Peter and John were going into the Temple when they met a man who had been unable to walk since birth. He was sitting there asking for money. Peter had no money to give him, but he did have something else. He spoke to him in the name of Jesus Christ, and the man stood up and began to walk. I wonder how many times that man had heard people speaking about God while passing him on their way to pray. He had been sitting outside the Temple for years. He knew what it was like to watch religious people come and go. That day, the name of Jesus was not simply something Peter spoke about. Peter trusted in the Lord whose name he used, and the man received a gift that changed his life. We cannot perform miracles whenever we wish, and we should never pretend that a person who remains ill simply lacks faith. But there is a question here for us. When we speak about Jesus, does our behaviour help other people understand why his name matters? Someone may never enter a church, but they may know that we are Catholics. They hear the way we speak to colleagues, see how we treat somebody who is difficult, and notice whether we are willing to help when it costs us something. Reverence for the Holy Name belongs in our prayers and in the words we use. It should also be visible in the way we live.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, your name is above every name. Keep it on our lips as a prayer, and not as a habit. Amen.

Chapter 6

The harvest that failed

†

She spoke of spoiled potatoes, of wheat that would fail, of walnuts and grapes, of a famine if people did not turn back. She said she had already shown them, the year before, in the potatoes, and that they had taken no notice. When they found the potatoes rotten they swore, and they put her Son's name in the oath. If they were converted, she said, the stones would become heaps of wheat, and the potatoes would be sown in the ground. If not, the children under seven would tremble and die in the arms of those who held them, and the adults would do penance by hunger.

This should not be softened out of the story, and it should not be turned into a rule for every illness and every failed crop. Jesus refused that rule. When people told him of the Galileans Pilate had killed, he said they were not worse sinners than the others, and that unless his hearers repented they would perish as well. When something terrible happens, we should never assume that we know which sins caused it. Jesus warned his disciples against judging people in that way. The potato blight that reached Europe in 1845 was not a metaphor in the Alps any more than it was a metaphor in Ireland. A rotten crop meant a hard winter. The Lady's examples belong in that world.

The prophet Joel also spoke to people who had experienced devastation and were being called to return to God. He did not simply announce punishment. He reminded them that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and rich in kindness. That matters when we read the message of La Salette. The warnings about hunger and failed harvests are frightening, especially when we remember how many families in nineteenth-century Europe depended entirely on the success of their crops. But the message also contained an invitation to change. It would be wrong to turn that invitation into a promise that good Catholics will never

become ill, lose their jobs or experience hardship. Jesus never promised us a life without suffering. He did teach us to repent, to trust his Father, and to show compassion to those who are in trouble.

A Reflection

When somebody becomes seriously ill, people sometimes begin looking for an explanation that goes beyond the medical facts. They wonder whether God is teaching the family a lesson, or whether some past mistake has brought this suffering upon them. I would be very careful about such claims. In the Gospel of John, the disciples asked Jesus whether a man had been born blind because of his own sin or the sin of his parents. Jesus rejected the assumption behind their question. When a family is frightened, grieving or struggling to pay the bills, they do not need somebody telling them which sin has caused their suffering. They need help, compassion and prayer. The message of La Salette contains serious warnings about conversion. We should not remove them because they make us uncomfortable. But we must read them in the light of Jesus Christ, who calls us to repentance while also commanding us to care for the suffering. Sometimes the most Christian response to another person's hardship is not to explain it. It is to help them through it.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to recognise where my own life needs to change. Teach me to show compassion to those who suffer. Amen.

Chapter 7

The cross she carried

†

The children described a crucifix on the Lady's breast, with a hammer and a pair of pincers beside it. These were unusual details, and they deserve a little explanation. In traditional Christian imagery, the hammer recalls the nails driven into the Cross. The pincers recall the removal of those nails when the body of Jesus was taken down. These objects bring us back to the suffering and death of Christ. We should remember that this is a Christian interpretation of the objects the children described. It is not an explanation that Our Lady herself gave them. But the crucifix needs no complicated explanation. The woman who spoke about Sunday Mass, prayer and the Holy Name of Jesus carried the image of her crucified Son close to her heart.

When we put the different parts of the message together, we begin to understand why the crucifix is so important. Our Lady spoke about Sunday, the day on which Christians celebrate the Resurrection of her Son. She spoke about his Holy Name, which people had begun to use carelessly. She asked them to pray and to change their lives. All these things concern our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Conversion is a word we hear frequently in church, but we may not always stop to consider what it means. It is more than feeling sorry for something we have done. It involves turning towards God and allowing that decision to affect the way we live. A person who has stopped attending Mass may need to make the effort to return. Somebody who has treated a family member badly may need to apologise. Another person may have been carrying serious sins for years and needs the courage to go to Confession. These are not dramatic events that will attract public attention. But they can be important moments in a person's relationship with God.

The crucifix reminds us that forgiveness is possible because of what Christ has done for us. He offered himself once upon the Cross for our salvation. At every Holy Mass, that one sacrifice is made sacramentally present. We do not crucify Jesus again. We are brought into contact with the saving sacrifice he has already offered.

I find it significant that the children described the crucifix resting on Our Lady's breast. She was not drawing attention to herself as though she had come with a different message from the Gospel. Everything she asked of the people was meant to lead them back to her Son.

A Reflection

There is something moving about Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. By the time they came to take care of the body of Jesus, the crowds had gone and the shouting had stopped. There was no miracle for them to watch. There was the body of a man who had died, and the work that needed to be done. John records the weight of the myrrh and aloes. Anyone who has cared for someone seriously ill, or helped a family after a funeral, may recognise that scene. There are moments when love has very little to say. It makes the telephone call, brings the meal, stays a little longer, or does the job nobody else has noticed. The Gospels remember those two men because they came when there was nothing left to gain from being seen with Jesus. Perhaps this is something we need to remember in our own Christian lives. We may admire the saints who preached to thousands. Yet most of us will never have an audience of thousands. We will have a family, a neighbour, a sick friend, or somebody who needs us to turn up when it would be easier to stay at home. Joseph and Nicodemus remind us that love for Christ can be shown in the work nobody applauds. They cared for his body when the events of Good Friday seemed to have ended in defeat. We know what happened on Easter Sunday. They did not yet know it in the way we do. They simply did what love required of them.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to love you in the people who need my help. Give me the courage to stay beside them when there is nothing to gain and no one to thank me. Amen.

Chapter 8

What did the Church actually approve?

†

If you search the internet for Our Lady of La Salette, you will soon find some rather alarming material. There are supposed secrets, predictions of terrible events, accusations against people in the Church, and claims that certain documents have been hidden. Some of these pages begin by reminding readers that the apparition was approved by the Church. That statement is true, but it can also be misleading if it is used to suggest that everything subsequently published under the name of La Salette carries the same approval. This is where we need to understand exactly what the Church investigated and what the bishop actually decided. Otherwise, a Catholic may accept a much later text simply because it has been attached to the name of an approved apparition.

The children also said that Our Lady had entrusted a secret to each of them. In 1851, written accounts of these secrets were sent to Pope Pius IX. They were separate from the public message. Many years later, Mélanie published a much longer version of her secret. This later text contained dramatic predictions and accusations. It became the subject of considerable controversy. The Holy Office subsequently took action against a publication containing this material. That history matters because people sometimes assume that every text associated with La Salette has the same authority. It does not. The bishop's judgement in 1851 cannot be used as automatic approval of everything published decades afterwards. If somebody sends you a frightening prediction attributed to Our Lady of La Salette, the first question should not be whether the prediction sounds extraordinary. It should be whether the text is authentic and what, if anything, the Church has actually said about it. The original public message called people to prayer, Sunday Mass, reverence for the name of Jesus, penance and conversion. We can respond to that message

without becoming absorbed in sensational predictions about the future.

A Reflection

There is something strangely attractive about a frightening prediction. Somebody announces that a terrible event is about to happen, claims to know a secret that others have missed, and suddenly people begin forwarding the message to their friends. It can happen even among Catholics who would normally be very sensible about other matters. Jesus warned his disciples not to be led astray by people making dramatic claims about the end. He also told them to remain watchful. Christian watchfulness is not the same as collecting predictions. A person may spend hours reading supposed secrets about the future and still avoid a conversation they know they need to have with somebody in their own family. The Church's careful judgement about private revelations is a protection for us. It allows us to appreciate a genuine call to conversion without becoming frightened by every new claim that appears online. We do not need to know everything that will happen tomorrow. We do need to live faithfully today.

A short prayer

Holy Spirit, guide us towards the truth. Help us to recognise what comes from God and to avoid being misled by frightening claims. Amen.

Chapter 9

What happened to Maximin and Mélanie?

†

When people hear that two children witnessed an apparition of Our Lady, they sometimes imagine that the rest of their lives must have been peaceful and holy. The reality was much more complicated. Maximin and Mélanie became known far beyond their own village, but the attention they received did not make their lives easy. Both experienced difficulties, and some of their later decisions caused controversy. Maximin did not become a priest, and he did not settle easily. He tried one path and then another. In 1870 he was called up and served at Fort Barraux, near Grenoble. He returned to Corps and lived poorly, helped by the Fathers of the shrine with the bishop's agreement. In November 1874 he went up to La Salette and told the story of the apparition again, for the last time. On 1 March 1875, at Corps, he made his confession, received Holy Communion, and died a few minutes later. He was not yet forty. A profession of faith in the apparition is recorded from the end of his life, and his heart was placed in the basilica, as he had asked.

Mélanie's path was longer and more troubled. She entered religious life and was known as Mary of the Cross. She also published the expanded secret that the Church did not receive as part of the approved message. She died at Altamura, in Italy, in December 1904. She was found dead on 14 December. In the town she had been an old French woman who went to Mass. Her identity was known more clearly after her death than before it. She had returned to the sanctuary for the last time in September 1902.

Neither child lived an easy life after the apparition. Their later decisions sometimes caused controversy, and historians are right to examine those events carefully. But an extraordinary religious experience does not make a person incapable of mistakes. Nor does a troubled life, by itself, prove that an earlier testimony was false. The Church's judgement about La Salette

concerned the reported apparition and its message. It was not a declaration that Maximin and Mélanie would always act wisely. We can respect the Church's judgement while remaining honest about the difficulties in their lives.

A Reflection

There is a rather uncomfortable story about Jonah in the Old Testament. God sent him to Nineveh to warn the people that they needed to change their lives. Jonah did not want to go. Eventually he went, delivered the warning, and the people repented. You might expect Jonah to be delighted. His preaching had achieved exactly what a prophet should hope for. But he was angry because God had shown mercy to the people. I find that part of the story particularly interesting. Jonah had delivered God's message, yet he still had a great deal to learn about God's heart. It reminds me that we can be right about something important and still be wrong in the way we treat people. We may defend the teaching of the Church, know our prayers, and speak confidently about the faith, while struggling to be patient or forgiving. God did not abandon Jonah because of his difficult character. He continued to teach him. Perhaps we should remember that when we encounter the complicated lives of other Catholics, including people who have done great things for the Church. We can be grateful for the good they have done without defending every mistake. We can also remember that our own conversion is not finished.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us to see the good in others without pretending that they are perfect. Help us to judge with honesty and charity. Amen.

Chapter 10

A mountain that became a place of prayer

†

On 25 May 1852 the bishop, then in his eighty-seventh year, went up to about 1,800 metres to bless the first stone of the shrine. The accounts say he made the ascent on horseback. He had approved the apparition in September 1851. Within a year the mountain had a foundation stone, and he had founded the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette to make the message known. He resigned his see that July, and he died at Corenc in 1860. His heart is in the basilica.

The mountain did not become important because it offered a beautiful view. It became a place where people came to pray, to examine their lives and, often, to return to the sacraments. The Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette were established to serve that purpose. The Sisters of Our Lady of La Salette also share in the work of welcome and reconciliation. Today the sanctuary is very different from the pasture where the children looked after cows. Pilgrims enter the basilica, attend Mass and have the opportunity to go to Confession. Some arrive with a strong faith. Others have not entered a confessional for many years. The Missionaries also use a beautiful invocation which many pilgrims know: Our Lady of La Salette, Reconciler of Sinners, pray without ceasing for us who have recourse to you. These words were not part of the message spoken to the children in 1846. They are a prayer used in the Church's devotion to Our Lady of La Salette.

A Reflection

Many people return from a pilgrimage with photographs, souvenirs and wonderful memories. They may have visited beautiful churches, attended Mass in places they had only read about, and experienced a kind of peace that is difficult to find in ordinary life. All of that can be good. But the question comes after we return home. Perhaps somebody went to Confession during the pilgrimage for the first time in many years. Will they now try to go regularly? Perhaps a family began praying together. Will they continue when work and school begin again? A pilgrimage is not meant to be a short holiday from our usual responsibilities. It should help us return to those responsibilities with a deeper faith. The message of La Salette was given to children who had to go back down the mountain. They could not remain there admiring what they had seen. Whatever grace we receive at a shrine must eventually find its way into the life we live at home.

A short prayer

Our Lady of La Salette, Reconciler of Sinners, pray for us, and lead us back to your Son. Amen.

Chapter 11

What would Our Lady say to us today?

†

We cannot know what Our Lady would say if she appeared in another place or another century. We should not invent a new message and put it into her mouth. But we can ask a different question. What would the message of La Salette mean for Catholics living today?

In 1846 she spoke to two children who worked in the mountains. Their lives were very different from ours. Yet the concerns she expressed remain familiar. She asked whether people prayed. She spoke about Sunday Mass. She called them to respect the name of her Son. She asked them to change their lives. The children admitted that they did not pray very much. She did not respond by giving them a complicated programme of devotions. She encouraged them to pray morning and evening, even if they could manage only an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

When people decide to begin praying again, they sometimes make the mistake of trying to change everything at once. They plan long periods of prayer, buy several devotional books, and decide that from now on their spiritual lives will be completely different. A few days later, work, tiredness or family responsibilities interrupt the plan, and they become discouraged. Our Lady's advice to the children was much simpler. She encouraged them to pray morning and evening, even if they could manage only an Our Father and a Hail Mary. I think there is wisdom in beginning there. A person who has not prayed for years can start with a prayer that takes less than a minute. It may seem a very small beginning, but it is a beginning that can become part of daily life.

One of the things that strikes me about La Salette is that Our Lady was speaking to people who already knew something about Christianity. They had churches, priests and Sunday Mass. Many would still have considered

themselves Catholics. Yet the practice of their faith had become less important to them. I think that is why the message is still worth reading today. We may know our prayers, have been baptised and confirmed, and consider ourselves members of the Church, while giving very little attention to our relationship with God. La Salette invites us to look at that relationship seriously, without pretending that knowing about our faith is the same as living it.

A Reflection

Sometimes the hardest part of returning to Confession is simply walking through the door. I have met people who have been away from the sacrament for twenty, thirty or even forty years. They worry that they have forgotten the prayers. They imagine that the priest will be shocked by what they have to say. Some are embarrassed because they cannot remember exactly when they last went. If that describes you, you do not need to arrive with a perfect speech. You can begin by saying, Father, it has been a very long time since my last Confession, and I need some help. A priest can guide you through the sacrament. The father in the parable did not stand at the door checking whether his son had remembered every word of his apology. He was delighted that his son had come home. Confession is not an examination in which we must remember the correct answers. It is a sacrament in which we honestly confess our sins, receive God's forgiveness through the ministry of the Church, and begin again.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, give courage to those who are afraid to return to you. Help them to discover your mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Amen.

Chapter 12

When the tears have stopped

†

The children said that the Beautiful Lady was crying when they first saw her. But she did not remain seated on the stone. She stood up. She spoke to them. She explained what troubled her, and she asked them to make her message known. Her tears were followed by an invitation. If the message had been only a warning about punishment, it would have left people with very little hope. But Our Lady also spoke about what could happen if people changed their lives. The warning was serious because their choices mattered. And their choices mattered because it was not too late.

Jesus tells us something similar in the parable of the prodigal son. The young man had wasted his inheritance and brought suffering upon himself. Eventually, he recognised what he had done and decided to return home. He prepared an apology. He knew he had no right to demand the life he had abandoned. But his father saw him while he was still a long way off and ran to meet him. The son still needed to turn around and come home. Yet he did not have to persuade his father to love him.

Perhaps we have neglected Sunday Mass. Perhaps prayer has almost disappeared from our lives. Perhaps we have been carrying a sin for years because we are frightened of going to Confession. The answer is not to remain frightened. We can begin again. The children went down the mountain and returned to their ordinary lives. Most of us will never visit La Salette, and none of us needs an apparition before we can turn to God. We already know where to find him. Christ is waiting for us in the sacraments of the Church, in his Word, and in the prayer we offer each day. The message of La Salette does not ask us to spend our lives looking for extraordinary signs. It asks us to respond to the Gospel we have already received.

A Reflection

There is a small detail in the Gospel account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus that I have always found worth thinking about. The two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem. They were disappointed, confused, and trying to make sense of the death of Jesus. The risen Lord came alongside them, but they did not recognise him. He could have told them immediately who he was. Instead, he walked with them, listened to their account of what had happened, and helped them understand the Scriptures. They recognised him later, when he broke the bread. I think about that when somebody tells me they have been away from the Church for many years and do not know how to return. They may feel embarrassed or think that God must be disappointed with them. Sometimes they imagine they have to put their entire life in order before they can begin praying again. But the story of Emmaus reminds us that Christ is able to approach people while they are still confused and travelling in the wrong direction. He does not wait until they have understood everything. The disciples still had to listen, welcome him and eventually turn back towards Jerusalem. We also have decisions to make. But we do not have to make those decisions without his help. Perhaps the most encouraging thing about La Salette is that the message was given to people who had neglected God, not to people who had already become perfect Catholics. They were being invited to come home.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, you wipe away tears. Bring us home while the invitation still stands. Amen.

What can I do after reading this?

†

If Sunday Mass has gradually disappeared from your life, make a decision to return. Remember that attending Mass on Saturday evening can also fulfil the Sunday obligation. If illness, essential caring responsibilities or circumstances beyond your control genuinely prevent attendance, the Church recognises that serious reasons can excuse us. If you are unsure about your circumstances, speak to your parish priest. Do not assume that every work commitment automatically makes attendance impossible.

If prayer has shrunk to nothing, the Lady's own suggestion is enough: evening and morning, even an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

You do not need to travel to La Salette to receive God's forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available in your own parish. If you have been away for many years, ask a priest to help you begin.

If you have become accustomed to using the name of Jesus carelessly, begin by paying attention to the words you use. A habit may take time to change, but reverence can begin with a small decision.

If someone in the house has been away from the Church for a long time, pray for that person by name.

If you want the message in the Church's own telling, the Sanctuary of Notre-Dame de La Salette publishes it. Prefer that to a page of secrets.

A prayer of the shrine

†

The Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette use this invocation. It is not a sentence spoken on the mountain in 1846. It is the prayer the shrine has kept.

Our Lady of La Salette, Reconciler of Sinners, pray without ceasing for us who have recourse to you.

Sources and Further Reading

†

The following sources provide the historical background, Church teaching and documentary evidence used in preparing this booklet. Where accounts differ, I have tried to distinguish established facts from later interpretations.

The apparition

Sanctuary of Notre-Dame de La Salette, lasalette.cef.fr, account of 19 September 1846: Maximin Giraud, 11, and Mélanie Calvat, 14, above La Salette-Fallavaux. The Lady spoke first in French; the children did not follow it, and she continued in the local dialect. The public message includes spoiled potatoes, already noticed the year before, and the promise that if the people were converted the stones would become heaps of wheat. This booklet follows that public telling, not a later expansion.

The approval

Philibert de Bruillard, Bishop of Grenoble, pastoral letter dated 19 September 1851, fifth anniversary: the apparition bears in itself all the characteristics of truth, and the faithful have grounds for believing it indubitable and certain. Some catalogues place the text among the November papers. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 67: private revelations do not belong to the deposit of faith.

The enquiry

Catholic Encyclopedia, La Salette: the bishop appointed a commission; opposition remained in Grenoble and Lyons. The Ars episode is reported, not transcribed. Father Jean Stern notes that Maximin's explanation, that he had not heard the Curé distinctly, is at least how Canon Rousselot presented it.

The later secret

Mélanie Calvat published L'Apparition de la Très-Sainte Vierge at Lecce on 15 November 1879, with the imprimatur of Bishop Salvatore Luigi Zola. That is not the 1851 text sent to Pius IX. The Holy Office decree of 10 May 1923, printed in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 15 (1923), p. 287, condemned the 1922 Société Saint-Augustin reprint. The printed title in that decree gives the year 1845, which is a misprint for 1846. A Holy Office letter of 8 January 1957, to the procurator of the Missionaries, said the decree covered that reprint even without the added letter of Dr Mariavé. The 1851 public message was not the booklet condemned in 1923.

The children and the shrine

Maximin Giraud, born 26 August 1835, died at Corps on 1 March 1875 after confession and Communion. Mélanie Calvat, born 7 November 1831, found dead at Altamura on 14 December 1904. First stone blessed 25 May 1852; the ascent on horseback is the shrine's traditional account. Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette founded in 1852. The invocation Reconciler of Sinners is the shrine's prayer, not a sentence from 1846.

Scripture and doctrine

Biblical allusions follow the sense of the RSV-2CE: John 2:1–11; John 9:1–3; John 19:25–27 and 19:38–42; Luke 13:1–5; Luke 15:11–32; Joel 2:12–13; Philippians 2:9–11; Acts 3:6 and 20:7; Revelation 21:4. Catechism 67, 1366 and 2181 on private revelation, the one sacrifice of the Mass, and the Sunday obligation.

A little further down the mountain

†

Before one of these little books reaches a reader, there is usually quite a lot of work that nobody sees. I have to find the right documents, check historical accounts, consult the teaching of the Church, and sometimes rewrite a chapter several times because the explanation is still not clear enough.

I do this because I believe that ordinary Catholics deserve books that take their questions seriously. The faith of the Church is rich and beautiful, but it should not be difficult to understand simply because the language is complicated.

Preparing these Little Treasures takes time, and there are also practical costs involved in researching, preparing and publishing them. If you have enjoyed this booklet and would like to help me continue the work, you can offer a contribution through the website. Any support, however small, would be a genuine help and would allow me to prepare more books for readers.

Please do not feel that you owe me anything for reading this book. I am simply glad that you have read it. If you are able to support the work, thank you. If you cannot, you can still help by passing the booklet to somebody who might enjoy it, or by keeping this little apostolate in your prayers. And if somebody asks you what you have been reading, you might tell them about two children who went up a mountain to look after cows and came home with a story that people are still discussing nearly two centuries later. Perhaps that will make them curious enough to read it too.

www.silenthomilies.com

© 2026 Silent Homilies. All rights reserved.