



Statue of Anne Javouhey as a little girl found in the Church of St. Martin in Seurre, where she was baptized on the Feast of St. Martin.

Anne Marie Javouhey was born in 18th century France, a time which Dickens characterized as “the best of times, the worst of times.” Like our own twentieth century world, 1779 was a time of political, social and religious upheaval. While the wealthy dined in lavish splendor, oppression, injustice and extreme poverty were the lot of the ordinary folk living in the cities of Europe.

As Anne Marie was growing up in the prosperous Burgundian farming village of Chamblanc, France moved irrevocably toward the

French Revolution. Deeply rooted in the farming traditions of faith-filled Catholics, Anne Marie learned prayer, generosity and conviction from her parents, Claudine and Balthazar. Being the strongest personality of her brother and three sisters, it soon became evident that she had a keen intelligence, a perceptive understanding of human behavior, and a compelling charm.

When Nanette, as her family called her, reached the age of ten, the French Revolution changed history. The divisions existing among the social, political and economic classes had grown deep and bitter. The violent uprising of 1789 was the response to centuries of oppression and injustice. Crops had failed more than once, plunging many into poverty and hunger. When one year, the dense ash clouds from the volcanic eruption in Iceland so overshadowed the land that the crops across the farmlands surrounding Paris failed due to the lack of sunshine, the tipping point was reached.

Because the hierarchy of the Church had in the past aligned itself with the wealthy nobility, it soon found itself the target of the reformers. Decades of seething resentment erupted in the confiscation and destruction of Church property, the martyrdom of hundreds of priests and religious men and women, and the establishment of a constitutional clergy, who were made to swear allegiance to the new republic. Any priest who refused to take an oath of obedience to the ‘people’s church’ became a hunted man. Yet, many refused to become the pawns of a political system intent on destroying Catholicism in France

Suddenly into the ordered, carefree, and at times, self-centered life of Anne Marie Javouhey, came men who were fugitives because they refused to compromise their integrity. These years—the years of the Reign of Terror—deeply touched the impressionable young Nanette. With her family and friends she began to worship in secluded barns

The Early Years: A Historical Context (Continued)



The Javouhey Family Home

Anne Marie was born in Jallanges in a farm her parents rented. When she was five, they moved back to their own home in Chamblanc, where she grew up. The home belongs to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. A Cluny community lives there and welcomes pilgrims coming to learn more about Anne Marie and her work.

and pray in blacked out rooms. In these events she began to understand the radical call which lived Christianity demands. Her contact with the renegade priests, who were willing to die for their faith in service to the people of France, left her asking herself, “For what am I willing to die? For whom am I willing to live?”

Pondering these questions in the depths of her heart, Anne Marie gradually began to take on the role of protector of the underground priests. The intelligence, creativity and initiative became focused on hiding and guiding priests. Her strength of purpose enabled her, with calmness and directness, to serve wine to searching soldiers, hanging their coats in a nearby wardrobe where a hunted priest was hiding.

Not thinking it enough to protect these men, she began to share the dangerous task of their mission in teaching the faith. Instead of gathering children for sport or games, Anne Marie now began to gather them to prepare minds and hearts for the reception

of the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. Her courage was becoming bolder since any of these children could have reported her as an accomplice to the priests. Though warned by her family of the danger, she felt impelled to face it and then go on with the task of proclaiming the gospel.

As she intuitively and generously responded to the needs she saw around her, once again the questions “For whom am I willing to live?” “For what am I willing to die?” echoed in her heart. In beginning to answer these questions, her understanding of her call became clearer. However, as she became more and more involved in service, conflict with her indulgent father grew. Balthazar, who had spoiled the irrepressible and charming Nanette, now found the committed, courageous and head-strong Anne Marie difficult to understand. And between them tension grew. This was only the beginning of a journey which would lead her in ways neither of them ever imagined.

For more information click here:

Province Website: www.clunyusandcanada.org

Province Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/clunyusacanada/>

Cluny Congregation Website: <http://sj-cluny.org/?lang=en>

Cluny Global Concerns: <https://www.facebook.com/ClunyGlobalConcernsCommittee>