

TO
HEAVEN
ON
FOOT
And other essays

by SISTER MARY LINSCOTT, SND

for
Sister Loretto Julia
1919-1969
with affectionate gratitude

FOREWORD

A canonization is a major event. It glorifies God, it enriches the Church with a new pattern of holiness, and it brings a message to the world in which it takes place. Its significance is widespread. By it God draws attention, as it were, to his working in one of his children but the focusing of attention is for the benefit of all. In some way, all can understand something of the divine message and appreciate the divine action in a new saint. A canonization will take place, therefore, at a time when God's revelation through the person canonized can be particularly meaningful.

This is true in the case of St. Julie Billiart, foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who was canonized by Pope Paul VI on June 22, 1969. The most significant reaction to this canonization was the spontaneous recognition by people in all walks of life that Julie, a French peasant woman born in 1751 and living almost all her life in a small corner of Picardy and the Low Countries, is not only relevant to the twentieth century Church by the nature and development of her Apostolate, but is by her very personality and approach to life truly a saint for our time.

People expressed this recognition in different ways. Pope Paul singled out the perceptiveness with which Julie understood the call to the work of Christian education as being grafted into the very vocation of the Church and into that of Christ himself. Other preachers referred to her unique awareness of the goodness of God, to her sense of the holy, both transcendent and immanent, to her loyalty to the Church, to her ideas about prayer, and particularly the prayer of the religious actively engaged in apostolic works. Members of her congregation liked to dwell on her dynamic and attractive personality, her optimism and her joy. From persons with no religious affiliation came praise for the courage and indomitable hope in her dedicated life: for her concern for the poor, the sick, the underprivileged, the third world of her day; for the practical energy and sense of humor which enabled her to do so much good, and for the vision which made that good lasting. All agreed that this newly canonized saint has an appeal beyond the ordinary for our time, here and now.

Because of this, and because there is so little written about Julie's spirit and ideas, it was decided to publish the present collection of essays. They are a series of studies of different aspects of Julie's life and thought originally given as lectures to groups of sisters in the different provinces of Notre Dame. The intention is simply to make available material contained in unpublished letters and instructions. As far as possible, Julie speaks for herself in the context of her own life and work. These, essays give a glimpse of her personality, look at some of her characteristic attitudes and qualities, and examine her work, her teaching on prayer and her concept of the apostolate.

There is no attempt to make a direct application of Julie's thought to post-Vatican religious renewal. Inevitably the topic of renewal is touched upon, and the examination of Julie's thought with direct reference to Vatican II would be richly rewarding, but a systematic study would require research beyond the scope of the present work. Here we hope only to make better known the personality and ideas of an attractive saint, so that she may fire the people of our time as she did her contemporaries with her own joy in the goodness of God.

Mount Pleasant, Liverpool,
July 31, 1969

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