

# Little Sisters of Jesus: Our Life and Spirituality

## Little Sister Magdeleine

The Little Sisters of Jesus were founded in 1939 by a French woman, Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus, who had read the life and writings of Brother Charles. Like him, she wanted to be a disciple of Jesus by witnessing to God's great love for all people by "proclaiming the Gospel with her whole life."

She began in Algeria where Brother Charles had lived, sharing the life of the semi-nomad of Touggourt. She understood Nazareth not as a particular place, but as the ordinariness of peoples' lives, where Jesus would dwell today. We now number about 1,400 from 60 countries, living in small groups throughout the world.



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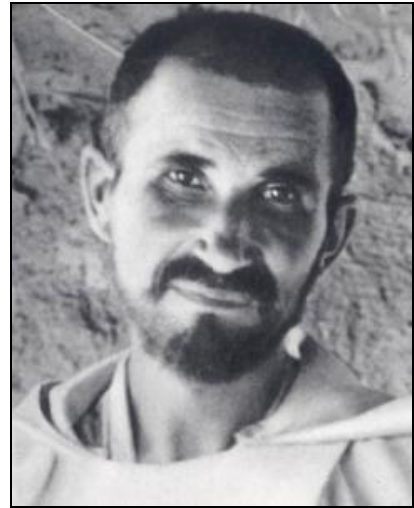
# 1. Following Brother Charles of Jesus

Having lost his faith during an unsettled youth, Charles rediscovered God at the age of 28. It was his contact with the faith of the Muslim people during an expedition to Morocco that was the start of his journey back to God.

**Br Charles at Beni-Abbes**In 1901 he wrote:

*"As soon as I believed there was a God I understood that my only choice was to live for him alone. My religious vocation dates from the same hour as my faith."*

Charles de Foucauld also known as Brother Charles of Jesus Charles outside his hermitage in Beni-Abbes, Algeria



Brother Charles understood his call to be that of following Jesus of Nazareth. This was to shape his vision of a life of prayer and adoration, of poverty and manual work, of availability to God and to those around him. He felt called not so much to preach the Gospel through his words, but through the way he lived.

He spent the remainder of his life discovering what 'Nazareth' meant for him. His journey led him to become a Trappist monk, then to live in Nazareth itself and finally to go back to Algeria. He first lived near the Moroccan border in the small oasis of Beni-Abbes and then in Tamanrasset among the Toareg people, where he was killed in 1916.

## 2. Contemplatives at the heart of the world

**Br Charles and Jesus**

**One Model: Jesus**

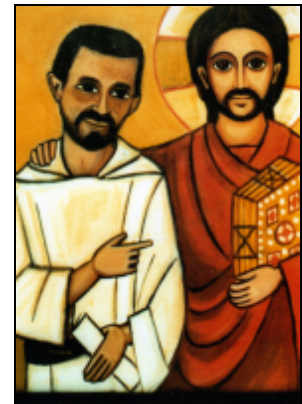
"You have only one Model: Jesus. Do not look for another. Like Jesus during his life on earth, make yourself all things to all people.

**Be human**

Be an Arab in the midst of Arabs, a nomad among nomads, a worker among workers, but above all, be human.

**Be a friend**

Go deeply among people by sharing their life, by friendship and love. Give yourself to them completely like Jesus who came to serve and not to be served. You too become one with them. And before being religious be human and Christian in all the strength and beauty of these terms." - Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus.



### 3. Bethlehem: the way of Spiritual Childhood

*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father'!*

The Spirit will fashion in the Little Sisters a new heart that:

- lovingly opens up each day to listen to the Father and
- humbly responds as a sister to each person they meet.

**According to Little Sister Magdeleine, Spiritual childhood is:**

- the fundamental attitude of a disciple;
- the result of mature faith;
- It means self-surrender to the will of God;
- the joyful confidence of a small child.

This childlike spirit

- disturbs human logic and
- stands in opposition to temptations of pride and domination that are at the root of evil and oppression in our world.

### 4. The way of Nazareth

*Can any good come out of Nazareth?*

Jesus was sent by the Father to proclaim good news to the world.

- He chose to do so by taking on a poor person's condition;
- He made ordinary daily life a meeting place with the Father.

**The Little Sisters have a specific mission**

in the Church and the world: to witness by their lives to the deep meaning of Bethlehem and Nazareth.

- Focussed on Jesus and
- lived in solidarity with the less privileged,
- their lives become an offering for the salvation of the world.

## 5. Nomadism, a foundational intuition

*Reflection by the Little sisters living among nomadic peoples on how to remain faithful to this foundational intuition.*



**Ngovayang, Cameroon**

*From the very beginning of the foundation we have been encouraged to live among nomadic people as well as among the least accessible, forgotten or despised minorities... (Cf. constitutions, art. 8 and 99)*

*This question continues to challenge us today. How to keep and update this so important orientation of our charism in the present situation of the Community ?*

*When we spoke about this key intuition*

*of Little sister Magdeleine we were struck by the profound link between the two poles of our charism: contemplative life and nomad spirit. We also wanted to answer the question : Who are the nomads of today ?*

*Many little sisters living among nomads wrote back. Here are a few excerpts from their letters:*

'Little Sister Magdeleine met and lived with the nomads of the Sahara. She also befriended gypsies whom she met on the fringes of society, rejected and living in poverty. Since her childhood, her heart had been drawn to them like the heart of God. From 1939 to 1945 the whole Community was turned towards the nomads of the Sahara and following Brother Charles, towards Islam. Her first love was always present in Little sister Magdeleine's heart and often she reminded us of it. When we hear this call again today, we must remember that in the opening our communities up to the whole world, little sister Madgeleine gave priority to marginalized and despised populations.



## Algeria El Abiodh

We perhaps have to revise the words we use: nomads and nomadism. Kathryn Spink wrote : 'In a sense a nomadic life in a tent encapsulated all little sister Magdeleine's intuitions and dreams. It was a life of extreme simplicity, lived among some of the most forsaken people, in a relationship of reciprocity, in which if anything the little sisters were to find themselves even more vulnerable than the most marginalized. It was a life devoid of barriers with only the thin woven strips of camel and goat hair to separate the little sisters and the Sacramental Body of Jesus, from their Muslim friends and from the great contemplative silence, of desert and sky. It was a life of total dependence on and surrender to the will of God.' ( Kathryn Spink. Little sister Magdeleine of Jesus, The Call of the Desert, 1993, p. 126.) and I would add, dependence upon others, dependence on the neighbours. The essential is not to be mobile but

to be close, being concretely close, close to those who are far, to be interdependent.'

'Nomadism is often an expression of our identity and a way of living: It is what comes naturally or built up through events and sometimes through the history of generations. A nomad is a person who has received his being from his family. It is a heritage which he lives and transmits to his children from generation to generation. The whole family is involved, and moves together with their caravan. They move their home from one place to another: to see the family again, for work or a pilgrimage. Often a nomad has a place where he (she) was born, where his parents are buried, where they stop from time to time, where they like to come back.to..'

'Someone who for one reason or another is obliged to settle, remains a nomad in his way of being and talking. He keeps his culture. He remains different from another sedentary person who is not a nomad.'

'These minority groups are often ignored and forgotten in the Church and in society. They are not recognized for who they are and their history is forgotten. Most of the time, they are mentioned when their presence is disturbing or because there are robberies. Often, they are not displaced people, but rather they have been driven away or marginalized because of their mentality. Often they are unable to adjust to a stricter, sedentary and individualistic vision of life. Their values are different.'

'For those who travel with the circus, the artists and the managers (often former artists), nomadism is not a problem. In this they are not like immigrants who are looking for work. Nomads are a people, a people who feel at home wherever they are, who can live in a place for a few days as if they had always lived there, and for whom the grounds on which they find themselves is theirs, as truly belonging to them. For nomads, by choice or by birth, their house is always with them. While travelling and on the road, their journey is their 'home' and it where they are truly themselves. God is on the road with them, not at the end of the road.'

They live as a community where they can share their talents with others. They do not expect a more normal life, they are not grieving because they are on the road like displaced people or refugees. They do not regret it, they celebrate it. I see 'nomads' as people, persons, for whom nomadism is in their very bodies, their flesh and blood, and in their minds. It is in their hearts and even in their nervous system, in their breath.... It is inside and outside.'



### Vargas Circus USA

'It seems to me that there is a very clear difference between displaced people and nomads by choice and birth. Today quite a few people, entire populations, are displaced because of war, lack of work, political or religious persecutions or famine. This is not a new situation, but now it is a world wide phenomena, on a that planetary level. Our community is surely called to respond to this urgent situation. The approach will be

entirely new because migrants are also very different from forgotten and inaccessible nomad minorities.'

'The intuition which drew our community from the very beginning towards nomadic people involved being drawn to groups who were on the move. At the same time it meant reaching out to minority peoples, those not easy to reach or who were forgotten or even despised. This concern for people who are marginalized and voiceless, whether they are nomad or sedentary remains at the heart of the vocation of our Community, and even more today when cultural and economic globalization wants to engulf every country and society.'

### Among the Roms

'If I look at the experiences we made in Crotone [Italy] we found ourselves with a group of people who had escaped from war, people who had had their houses burnt or occupied and who were not able to return to their country. In Crotone these people was ethnically Rom. We went to them, not as refugees, but because they were Rom. And I believe that, from what we could realize by living together, that their Rom identity prevailed upon the fact of being refugees, even if some of them have asked and obtained political asylum. We must not forget this minority people who with its long history of



persecution, often reduced to slavery and compelled through all kinds of methods to be assimilated into the local population. Still today they are despised and marginalized and yet they continue to exist as a people, keeping a very strong sense of their identity.'

'When we live for a long time with people on the move: gypsies, fairground workers, circus people or in a tent, we are fashioned by the people whose lives we share.'

'To 'live with' is not the same as 'to be one of them'. To live in close proximity with very little privacy is very demanding. One's home and doors are always open requiring great availability and accepting to be constantly disturbed. It means accepting a great interdependence and not to be master of events. It means welcoming the present moment with flexibility. It involves using poor means, non-power, patience, taking the time needed.'

'To live with nomads has fashioned in me a way of living. Perhaps this openness to the other is connected with a life surrendered to the other, the other as different, a life upset by the other, upset by ANOTHER, the Lord'

'Our lives mingled with theirs, their lives mingled with ours. Very often, we were handed over into their hands. All this FASHIONED me. I can no longer live what I lived with my nomad neighbours because my body does not follow anymore but I can keep on living something which I received living among them and that is trying always to be welcoming to the other, to be welcoming to what happens each day.'

'To live with' presupposes being sent by the Community and hearing a special call from the Lord. We said 'yes' to becoming nomad little sisters who have chosen to consecrate their lives as a priority to marginalized people, to live among them in community. (Constitutions. Art.99).'



#### **Saint Dizier, France**

'We live our life among marginalized people in community. The community comes first and this is our strength. It allows us to adjust and decide the direction we want to take. Community life however is demanding. It asks a lot and also brings a lot. We are aware that today it is often not the whole community but rather one little sister of that community who is able and ready to become involved with those on the fringes. The 'to live with' seems to me to have changed into a 'come and go'. The little sister who is alone must find a balance between the milieu towards which she is sent and what her community is living.'

‘The whole community of the Little sisters lives the nomad spirit of the foundation, but there is a great difference between ‘living the nomad spirit’, which is a spirituality and can be lived everywhere - and living with nomads, which is a presence among a certain group of people.’

‘Sharing life is the charism of our community, a gift of God to the Church. It seems to me that our community has not been founded so we could live the spirit of nomadism, but to reach nomad people so they could recognize with us the love of God in their lives, despite rejection and misunderstanding.’

‘Where can we learn this nomadic spirit ? Shall we learn with them this wisdom that the nomadic people have acquired through centuries of living on the margins of society? Nomadic people have influenced us from the beginning of our foundation. How can we keep this influence alive ? I think it is only possible to perceive this special note if you have experienced it, even if only for a few days. Surely it is not only a perfume from the past?’

‘One of the basic intuitions of Little sister Magdeleine is to have perceived how the presence of the Church was absent from this little handful of people: people without a fixed parish, people who were seemingly forgotten, a minority group outside the daily concerns of others. It is my experience that for the families of the circus, we have become their ‘Church’ because they do not have any other.’

‘My wish is that nomad people remain a priority, in the breath (spirit) of the foundation. But I am confident that the future does not belong to me and that the spirit of Little sister Magdeleine will continue to guide us. May those who request to go and live among nomadic people be encouraged and supported to do so. May they be encouraged to carry on this life, living side by side with our nomad brothers and sisters of all countries.’

‘It is obvious and normal that the world has changed and that we have to adapt in order to bring new life.’

‘We, the little sisters of the first generations, European like Little sister Magdeleine herself, have followed her closely with enthusiasm and with passion. We have lived in a certain way among nomadic people as we saw best in our particular circumstances. Is it not the time now for these same intuitions of Little sister Magdeleine to become international? And it is precisely this that is happening. Challenged by these same intuitions, the little sisters from Africa, Asia, Orient, North and South America will now make new choices and reinvent ‘styles’, that are in harmony with their culture, their sensitivity, their Gospel vision of the world.’



#### **Vargas Circus USA erecting the big-top**

*Through this sharing, we hope to reawaken the desire to reach out concretely to these people who have been entrusted to us since our beginnings.*



## 6. True Friendship and Profound Affection

I want you to believe that true friendship and profound affection can exist between people

### With the Travelling Community

- who do not follow the same religion,
- nor come from the same race
- or social background.

Your love must grow.

*It must become sensitive and respectful, recognizing that every person bears the print of the Lord's own countenance.*

- Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus



## 7. Sharing the life of those who are on the fringes and without power

We want to belong to the world of the poor to the world of the less privileged, those who find themselves on the fringes of society.

**We try and share the same living and working conditions as our friends:**

### At a fruit sorting depot

- in housing projects,
- inner-city neighbourhoods or
- rural areas,
- working in factories or
- doing any low paid manual work.

### Our life-long call

is a non-professional one:

- to be a presence
- of friendship and of prayer.

*"Your vocation is to be a leaven in the dough, plunged into the midst of the world. Do not let yourself be cut off from it. Be careful not to set up a barrier between the rest of the world and yourself." -Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus*

## 8. Eucharist: Jesus hands over his life in offering

Through the Eucharist, the Little Sisters will let their lives be moulded into the likeness of Christ who

- offers himself to the Father and
- gives himself over to us as food.

### Daily life, transformed

Their daily life in its concrete realities will thus be transformed. The more their lives are moulded by the Eucharist,

- sacrament of love
- sign of unity the more their lot will be bound to that of every person.



### Cries for love and justice

They will unite themselves with Jesus in his intercession for the whole world, raising to him the prayers and cries for love and justice, *since he is living forever to intercede for all.*

## 9. Prayer of Offering

For the Little Sisters prayer and life are one and they recite this prayer of offering each day. It is a challenge giving meaning to all they live.

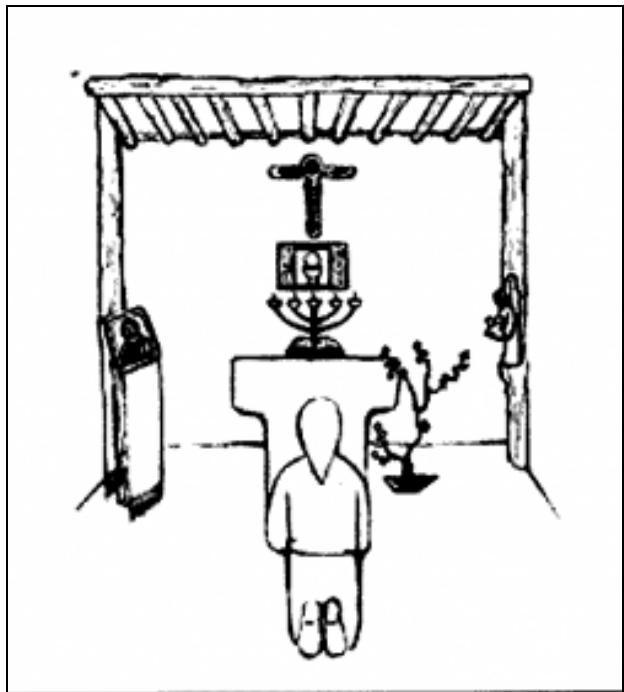
Father in Heaven,

Accept the offering of my life in union with Jesus gift of himself for the world and to the glory of your name.

- May the poor and oppressed experience true liberation in the justice and charity of Christ
- May all Christians be gathered together in the unity of faith
- May our special ties with our Muslim brothers and sisters through genuine respect, dialogue and friendship bear witness together to the greatness of God
- May all believers through recognition of each others quest for truth bring peace and stability to our world

So that people of all backgrounds, nations and races become one family.

I make this prayer through the love of Jesus, my beloved brother and Lord. Amen



## 10. With a universal love

"You ask me if I am ready to go somewhere else, other than Beni-Abbes, in order to spread the Gospel. I am ready to go to the ends of the world and live till the day of Judgment." - Charles de Foucaud

"Do not be afraid. Travel light. Go throughout the world. Go very far, without looking back. Bury yourself like the grain of wheat among people of every country, choosing first of all those who are the least considered."

## 11. The tiny newborn baby, Jesus

**"That is how our God first appeared**

God wants to be contemplated and adored in this state

- \* not only by the lowly
- \* but also by the great.

He accepted the adoration of both shepherds and wise men, and he even led them by a star into the presence of this little baby without grandeur or majesty.



**This Bethlehem crib is so beautiful and so great**

- \* It contains the whole Christ, who is both God and human.
- \* It contains the workshop of Nazareth,
- \* the Passion and the Cross,
- \* and all the glory of the Resurrection
- \* and of heaven."

**"In face of the hatred and anger of the world**

*we must bring the gentleness and the smile of the Infant Jesus of Bethlehem.*

**In face of the pride of the world**

*we must bring the littleness and powerlessness of the tiny new born baby of the crib."*

*- Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus*

## 12. With the eyes of faith the Little sisters will find Jesus

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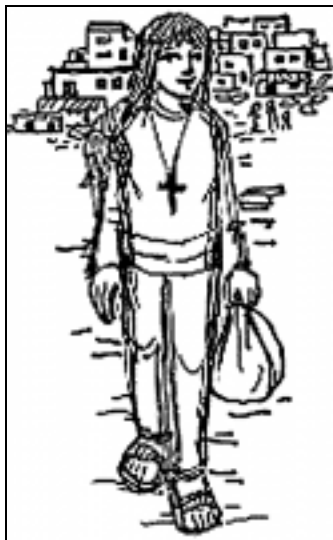
- in the Scriptures,
- the Eucharist,
- the Church,
- in every person created in the image of God.

*They will see him especially in those marked by poverty and suffering.*

*- Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus*



## 13. Love Jesus to the point of folly



**"You will love Jesus with a measureless love,  
a love to the point of folly.**

This kind of love has an urgent need:

- to be like the Beloved;
- to resemble him;
- you will strive to walk in his footsteps;
- to follow him along his earthly journey.

**You will strive to live with your eyes and heart  
fixed on Jesus**

with an inner attitude that will lead, little by little, to great intimacy with him. And he will continue to become more and more

- the centre of your life and
- the passion of your heart.

### **Jesus, the one and only Model**

We forget to look at Jesus, the one and only Model:

- who became flesh so we could follow him
- and imitate him
- to the point of doing the same things he did

- in the folly of love.

## **May you put every one of his words into action**

*otherwise your enthusiasm, however well-intentioned, will be hollow and empty."*

*- Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus*

## **14. A passion for Unity**

### **Jesus gave his life:**

*to gather into unity all the scattered children of God.*

Handing over their lives to the Spirit of love means that the Little Sisters will make loving all people as their brothers and sisters the work of their whole life.

They will work to foster a more respectful, more all-inclusive love that alone is capable of uniting all people as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It will be their firm conviction that living together as a community is, of itself, a mission and a sign of the kingdom of God.

### **Serious miscarriages of justice**

I became aware of so many layers of misunderstanding

- between social classes,
- of hatred between nations,
- of disdain between races and as a consequence, of serious miscarriages of justice and of the love of Christ.

All that made me suffer cruelly. For so long I have had such a thirst for unity."

*- Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus*

## **15. All our vocation can be summed up in the word Unity**

### **Unity in love**

If I were told to define the mission of our community in a single word I would not hesitate for a single moment to cry: 'unity'. All our vocation can be summed up in the word 'unity'. It is not enough to speak of brotherly and sisterly love. We must speak of unity in love.

### **The heart of the Gospel**

I am more and more aware that unity in love is the heart of the Gospel. It is the purest spirit of Christ, his last message before dying:

*May they be one as we are one, me in them and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity.*

## ***16. Our Lady of the whole world***



*You will love to contemplate Mary and Jesus together so close to each other at Bethlehem and Nazareth and at the cross. As you ponder on their mutual love, your prayer will be that you may love Mary with the love that Jesus loves her and love Jesus with her love.*

*From the cross Jesus gave her to us all as our Mother.*

*From her we learn to bring to others the One who is the ultimate reason for our whole life.*

*Our Lady of the whole world, give your Infant Jesus to all people.*

\*Document is found here:

<http://www.jesusc Caritas.info/jcd/en/life-and-spirituality/little-sisters-jesus-our-life-and-spirituality>

