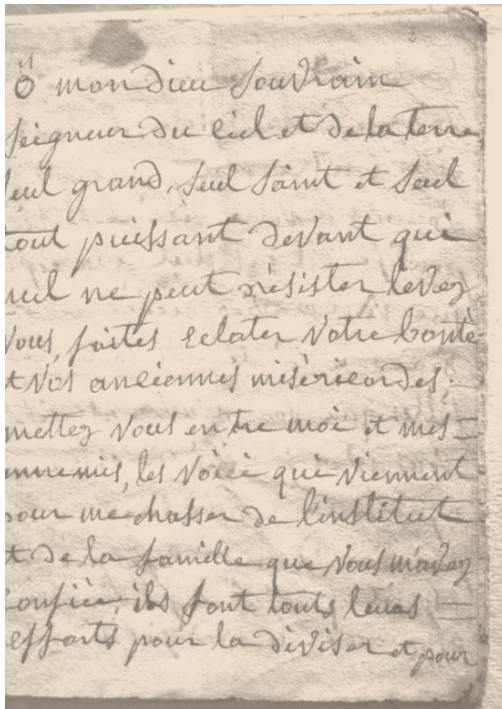


THE PRAYER OF 1821

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An introduction :
Two main aspects

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to understand the context in which the prayer was written

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THE PRAYER OF 1821

We are invited today to discover or rediscover this title given to Jeanne Antide's prayer. The text can be found in « Letters and Documents¹ »

Two main points

- **This prayer is connected to a date;** therefore, to a precise time in history, in Jeanne Antide's personal history, her Congregation's history, the history of the Church and the society of those days ... It is a prayer which is part of life and flows out of life.

- **The text of this prayer is authentic**

Reading Letters and Documents, flipping through the pages of the Prayers Books, going through the Rules of Life which marked our Congregation's journey, we find some prayers of Jeanne Antide: in Sancey, with the Daughters of Charity, her prayer to Saint Vincent de Paul, her prayer on Germany's roads, in Einsiedeln, during the Chapter of 1807... and also in the letters to the Sisters ...

However, this prayer of 1821 is precious for various reasons: it is authentic, composed and written completely by Jeanne-Antide, while she was in Italy, before leaving for France, in the summer of 1821. Jeanne-Antide chose to keep this prayer on herself, in a small bag that she always wore like «a relic», tells us Trochu², one of her biographers. This shows the importance she attributed to the words of this prayer which is kept at the Archives at the General House in Rome.

- This prayer is also present in a small booklet written in 1860, in Carouges, by Sr. Fébronie Thouret, Jeanne-Antide's niece³; the booklet was printed in order to be presented to the Pope Pious IX, so that he could know the life of her aunt. Sr. Fébronie entitled this prayer: « Particular prayer composed by Jeanne-Antide, during her persecutions »

¹ LD p. 143-144

² « Sainte Jeanne-Antide Thouret » Mgr. Francis Trochu 1933 p.415-417

³ « Notice sur la vie de sœur Jeanne-Antide Thouret, fondatrice des sœurs de la Charité de Besançon sous la protection de saint Vincent de Paul » - 1860 Carouge près Genève – Imprimerie A. Jacquemot, rue Maladière p.77-79

1- To understand the context of the prayer

a) *Let us briefly recall the events - about which you have already spoken in the previous conference*

- **In 1810:** Jeanne-Antide reached Naples.
- **At the end of 1815**, those who protected her were no longer there: Napoleon had fallen on 28th June, Mgr Lecoq had died on 3rd May, and Murat, King of Naples had been executed on 13th October, in Pizzo, Calabria. Her niece, Sr. Colombe, also died in the same year.
- **On 12th September 1818**, in a Supplication addressed to the Pope, Jeanne Antide Thouret submitted the request for the approval of her Institute, which she had begun almost 20 years earlier in Besançon. Encouraged by Mgr. Della Torre⁴, she was helped in composing her request by Mgr. Narni⁵, new Archbishop of Cosenza:

«Most Holy Father, I come also with the greatest confidence to the feet of Your Holiness to fulfil the sacred duty imposed on me of offering for examination and for approbation of your Holiness the book of our rules and constitutions which we all follow. Will Your Holiness accept it, and grant us the great grace and favour of the precious approbation»⁶.

- **In the beginning of October 1818**, with three of her Sisters, Jeanne Antide left for Rome in order to follow closely the procedure and to respond to the questions. She will remain there almost two years. She immediately got in touch with Mgr. Della Somaglia in charge for the procedure. She had recommendation letters from Mgr. Narni, Mgr Consalvi, Secretary of State, Mgr. Pacca, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, Religious and Regulars, Mgr. Di Pietro, Major Penitentiary.

She also brought a note of praise from Fr. Durand (Vicar General of Mgr. De Pressigny, appointed Archbishop of the diocese not yet residing).

- **on 12th February 1819**, came the **first answer** of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, saying that the approval's procedure could be taken forward at the condition that some modifications may be accepted⁷;
- **on 16th June 1819**, the **revision made was presented** to the Congregation;

⁴ Bernardo Della Torre, Great Vicar General of Naples and administrator of the diocese during the absence of the Cardinal. Archbishop Ruffo di Silla

⁵ Domenico Narni-Mancinelli, doctor in theology in Naples, was consecrated Bishop in 1818 for the diocese of Cosenza. He was the confessor and support of Jeanne-Antide

⁶ Draft of the supplication addressed by Jeanne Antide Thouret to the Pope Pious VII written in Naples and dated 12th September 1818, and conserved in the Archives of the General House of the Sisters of Charity in Rome – cf. Letters and Documents, p. 328-330.

⁷ About the modifications required see the book written by Mgr F. Trochu, op. cit., p. 382-384.

- **on 23rd July 1819**, the Decree containing the **pontifical approval** was the result of the unanimous decision of the members of the Congregation, in fact it says «after a new and mature examination of the Constitutions and the Rules of the daughters of Charity under the protection of St. Vincent de Paul, everyone agreed that they had to be approved, not only for the provinces beyond the mountains but universally»⁸;
- **on 24th September 1819**, an enthusiastic letter of Jeanne Antide Thouret announced the good news to the Sisters in all houses.

In Rome ... Jeanne Antide Thouret's satisfaction was complete. Yet in Besançon there were difficulties ...

- **on 6th November 1819** : the new Archbishop of Besançon, Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, who had received information against Mother Thouret, first refused to receive the “new” Rule approved by the Pope in his diocese and then forbade the Foundress to come and stay in the communities within the diocese of Besançon.

*«On my arrival in Besançon, I received the letter you wrote to me from ... I see there that our holy Father the Pope has deigned to approve the Constitutions that you presented to him; His Holiness thought he should make modification in them . . . No change should be made without its having been proposed to them (to the religious), without their having examined before God, and with the advice of their Directors, if they could hope to serve God and their neighbour just as well by contracting the new obligations proposed to them ... I do not know what changes have been made. They could improve the Institute, but even improvement is a change, and a change, a modification, often has disadvantages ... **The modifications of which you inform me cause me disquiet, and I declare to you that I will forbid your being received even for a single day, in the houses of the Sisters of Charity in the Besançon diocese. Charity, union, submissions to Superiors are numbered amongst the first goods of any Society, but especially of religious Societies; and nothing is more opposed to them than novelties. Different minds have different ways of seeing and understanding; and any novelty sets in motion that disposition to difference of opinion. Hence, divisions; and divisions are the plague of Communities. It is better, then, that you establish your new Institute elsewhere, and that here we keep what we have. If, dear Sister, you have the spirit of God, you will not risk, by proposing new regulations, troubling consciences and introducing division where peace reigns, and causing the loss to your country of the good that you yourself have procured for it** »⁹.*

- **On December 1819**, from Rome, Jeanne-Antide answered to Mgr. de Pressigny:

⁸ Decree of approval 23rd July 1819, Letters and Documents, p. 282-284 (French version)

⁹ Letter of Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, Archbishop of Besançon, 6th November 1819 - LD p. 332-333

« Monseigneur,

. . . You say no change should be made unless it has been put before the Sisters so that they can examine it before God with the advice of their Directors, to see if they can serve God and their neighbour as well by contracting the new obligations presented to them. The Holy See does not make changes and modifications which can prevent Sisters from serving God and their neighbour just as well. On the contrary, it desires Sisters to serve with all their heart and all their power ... and that is what the Holy See had in view in approving our Institute ... ».

She also added her profession of faith:

« ... I went to our Holy Father the Pope as to the representative of Jesus Christ. He is guided by His Spirit. Christ dictated to him all he has done, and it was my duty to conform myself to it, and the same duty falls on all the Sisters of our Institute ...», and a profession of obedience: «... I would present you with a copy of our Rules reprinted in Rome, according to the orders I was given»¹⁰.

Thus, she affirmed that she no longer was under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Besançon, who up to that time had been the director of the Sisters of Charity, instead she submitted to the Pope to whom she shall obey from now onward.

The Archbishop of Besançon should now be considered just a Bishop like many others¹¹.

- **In the beginning of December 1819**, Jeanne Antide Thouret sent a request to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to inform about the opposition shown by the Archbishopric of Besançon to the roman modifications¹².

- **On 14th December 1819**: came the answer of the highest authority and in the most solemn of forms: **a Brief of Pope Pious VII**, signed by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Consalvi. The tone is surprisingly firm:
«Wanting to favour ... the requests of the representative . . . as well as of the persons whom our letters favour and absolve from all excommunications, forbiddance or other ecclesiastic sentences, censures and punishments or the right to action brought forth for any other reason ... we confirm with our apostolic Authority, the decree for the approval of the

¹⁰ Letter of Jeanne Antide Thouret to Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, in LD, p. 337-338

¹¹ «To make matters clearer so that you may reflect on them more exactly, I will tell you that, as our Institute is spread in several French dioceses, the Church thinks it better that the houses of our Institute in any diocese should be under the jurisdiction of the Bishop who will have the powers given him in the Rule and the Sister Superior General and the Bishop should understand each other and should work together for the sake of good government t». Letter written by JA to Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, December 1819, in LD p. 338-339.

The letter closed in a very dignified way yet one can feel the anger underneath: «It seems you have judged me unfavourably on false reports, to the point of forbidding me to be received in the houses of our Institute situated in your diocese. I await from God, and from you, Monseigneur, the justice that is my due. In that hope I am Yours respectfully ... etc.».

¹² Letters and documents, p. 339-340.

Institute of the daughters of Charity, as well as the constitutions and the rules and all that is enclosed and expressed in the mentioned decree ... we approve again and we add to them the power of a sacrosanct fixity ...

We decree that these letters are and will continue to be unchanging, valid and efficient ... thus we take off the authority to interpret or to judge these letters by any other judge . . . »¹³.

At the same time, in Besançon, Mgr. de Pressigny appointed Mgr. de Chaffois to represent him as Superior of the Sisters living in Switzerland and in France.

The aim was to put the Foundress in the shade and to act as if she did not exist. That is how, for instance, two new councillors were elected without asking for the opinion of the Superior General ...

In April 1820, the Foundress was removed and Sr. Catherine Barrois received the title of Superior General.

Through the letters written by Jeanne-Antide to the Sisters, by the Sisters to Jeanne-Antide, by the Superior of Besançon to Jeanne-Antide, by the Archbishop to the Sisters, by the Archbishop to Jeanne-Antide, by Mgr. de Chaffois to the Sisters, by the Sisters to their parish priest, by the parish priests to the Sisters¹⁴ etc. ... we can understand the situation the Sisters found themselves in. It must have been like an earthquake shaking the Sisters on both sides of the Alps; and what suffering must have filled the heart of Jeanne Antide as she came to know the reactions and the interdiction.

In a circular letter to all the Sisters¹⁵, Jeanne-Antide announced again the approval, denounced those who deceived the Sisters as it was a sign of ingratitude and lack of submission to the Holy Father. She stated her fidelity to the new Rule, approved by the Holy See, by saying «**I am daughter of the Holy Church, you also be it with me** », pointing out that she wrote with the authorisation and the recommendation of the Pope.

b) Some points of reference to understand the importance of the events

We refer here to the work of Mr. Bordet, an historian from Franche-Comté¹⁶.

- First point of reference: the geographic extension of the Congregation

¹³ Given in Rome in St. Mary Major, on the 14th December 1819, in LD p.301-302 (French version)

¹⁴ Some sisters adhered totally to the views of the Archbishop ... others made a little confusion ... while others reaffirmed their support to the Foundress, and their obedience to the Pope, as they foresaw that the hour of the division, the schism will surely arrive, as Sr. Pauline de Bourg writes...

¹⁵ Circular of Mother Thouret, 11th April 1820 - L.D p. 341-342

¹⁶ History Associate, lecturer on contemporary history at the Faculty of Letters in Besançon. He wrote a book entitled «Jalons pour une étude de l'Ultramontanisme - Religieuses et prêtres franc-comtois à Rome au 19^{ème} Siècle » (1789-1870). A chapter in this book has the title «La transformation d'une congrégation comtoise en congrégation romaine » (Jeanne Antide Thouret in Rome, 1818-1821)

Following the arrival of Jeanne-Antide in Naples and even more some years later, it is likely that the Congregation born in the diocese of Besançon, and already present in other dioceses, could no longer keep its centre of gravity in Besançon, as Mr. Bordet says. In Letters and Documents¹⁷ we find houses established in various kingdoms: France, Savoy, Switzerland and therefore in many dioceses: Besançon, Lyon, Autun, Strasbourg, Chambéry and Fribourg. From 1810, Jeanne Antide was in Naples. Such expansion made obsolete the fact that the Superior General would be the Bishop of the diocese of Besançon.

- *Second point of reference: Jeanne Antide's personality*

The same Mr Bordet remarks: « Though self-educated and coming from the rural area of Franche Comté, she was talented with perspicacity, method, open-mindedness, exceptional logic. She exerted the leadership among her companions and was well esteemed by the roman authorities she dealt with».

- *Third point of reference: the favourable time*

In 1818-1820, after having been scorned, the Papacy wanted to put things straight and get the necessary means. It got rid of all political constraints in order to be free to act ... (This refers to the years 1801-1803 when there was the negotiation of the Concordat, and the years 1809-1814 marked by the captivity of the Pope, first at Savona and then at Fontainebleau);

As soon as Pope Pious VII was back in Rome, in his States, he began a politics aimed at strengthening the pontifical power, whose most effective means was, no doubt, the help of the Religious Congregations. In fact, his first act was the re-establishment of the Company of Jesus¹⁸ ! Then, the Holy See showed a clear will to gather the multiple small Religious Congregations born in the revolutionary period, under the papal tutelage, before proceeding to the well-thought re-launch of the great traditional Orders fallen in the revolutionary era, but renewed in the first half of XIX century (Cistercians, Benedictines, Dominicans).

It was within a large-scale operation that the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Besançon¹⁹ underwent the transformation in Roman congregation ... We dare to notice that :

- most likely the transformation of the Sisters of Charity in roman Congregation was one of the very first operations of this kind realised by the Holy See, if not the first one (1818-1820);
- it was a difficult job, painful, long, and even dramatic, which got unexpected dimensions, making this transformation reach a «national» and even «universal» extent, as faithfully reported in the

¹⁷ LD p.610 (French version)

¹⁸In 1814, Pope Pious VII re-established the Company of Jesus, suppressed 41 years earlier

¹⁹« Sainte Jeanne Antide Thouret » Mgr. Francis Trochu, p. 312-397 ; b) Letters and documents of Jeanne Antide Thouret, p. 271-382 (French version).

documents kept at the Secret Archives at the Vatican, and in particular in the reports and despatches of the Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Macchi to the Secretary of State²⁰ »

c) At the heart of the problem

- The answer given by Mgr. de Pressigny to Jeanne-Antide already mentioned earlier²¹ can go without comments.
- « **Yet beyond the personal drama experienced by Jeanne Antide Thouret, there was a conflict that involved the whole of Christianity: that between ultramontanism and gallicanism**».

Gallicanism advocated the existence of a Church of France relatively independent from the Holy See and autonomous with regard to the appointments of Bishops. Gallicanism reached its peak with the Civil Constitution of the clergy in 1790, after the fall of the Empire. Therefore, during the Restauration in 1814, the monarchy discredited this important trend of the Church of France.

It opposed the « **ultramontanism** » which was mainly French. The name « ultramontanism » came from Latin *ultra montes* which means « beyond mountains », indicating the other side of the Alps, Italy. The ultramontanism was favourable to the spiritual and jurisdictional primacy of the Pope over the political power for all that concerned religion and especially the appointments of Bishops²².

- It may be useful to say that Mgr. de Pressigny did not know Jeanne Antide because she had been absent from Besançon for ten years and had never come back ... it was a long absence even though the relationship between Naples and Besançon had been kept.
- The new Archbishop of Besançon was informed by his closest representative, Mgr. de Chaffois²³ and Mgr. de Villefrancon²⁴, who were esteemed and valid Vicar Generals, who had

²⁰ About the connection of the Congregation born in Franche-Comté and the Holy See and its consequences, it is important to have a look at the Secret Archives at the Vatican and the Nuntiature in Paris: vol. n. 2, 19-IX-1819 - 30-VI-1821; p. 30, n. 103, 19 Oct. 1820; p. 81, n. 126, 30 Dec. 1820; p. 96, n. 135, 3 Feb. 1821; p. 104, n. 139, 20 Feb. 1821.

vol. n. 3, 7-VII-1821 - 22-VIII-1822; p. 123-125, 14 Jan. 1822; p. 133, n. 227, 2 Feb. 1822.

²¹ Letter of Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, Archbishop of Besançon, 6 November 1819 - LD p. 288-289

²² Born in the XVI century during the war of religion, (between Catholics and Protestants), the ultramontanism reappeared in the XVI century when the King of France Louis XIV established alliances with non-Catholics. In the XVIII century the ultramontanism, mainly supported by the Jesuits, was confused with the struggle against the Jansenism, another religious movement which not only opposed the King's absolute power but also the power of the Holy See.

²³ Mgr. de Chaffois had met Jeanne-Antide at Cressier and at Landeron, he had entrusted to her the mission of starting a community in order to educate and evangelise the poor. He had also helped her with Mr. Bacoffe, when she had just

stepped aside when Mgr. Lecoz was Archbishop of Besançon and **«who never forgave the Foundress of the Sisters of Charity neither the rupture with the nobility nor her friendship with the Archbishop Mgr. Lecoz, who had sworn the oath, and with the Prefect Jean Debry²⁵ appointed by Napoleon ».**

“Some religious from Franche Comté, following the great tradition of the ultramontanism, dear to the Province of Franche-Comté which resisted the power of Louis XIV, and claimed its belonging to the Pope and the Church of Rome, transformed a diocesan Congregation in a Roman Congregation. ... Paradoxically they succeeded everywhere ... except there where they were born”.

Jeanne Antide had the joy of seeing the Rule of her Congregation approved by the Pope, the grace of a particular Audience with Pope Pious VII, and the support of the Nuncio. In fact on 17th August 1821, the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris paid a heartfelt tribute to Jeanne Antide and to her Institute «whose good work should not be limited to one diocese but expand to all the catholicity²⁶... » Then, Jeanne Antide decided to go to France and plead her cause directly.

She went back to Naples to take care of some matters and about mid-June 1821, she left for Rome. She was kept in Rome a bit longer due to a sickness, yet, finally, she was able to resume her journey to Modena, Turin and reached Thonon les Bains on 12th September ...

Who knows **how many times, during this journey Jeanne-Antide said the Prayer** she wrote to fix it in her mind and heart? She wrote and kept it on herself in order to read it again and to find in it each time the strength of faith and to renew her trust in God alone all along her journey.

started in Besançon; he had also kept the distance when Mgr. Lecoz had been appointed, because he had been the head of the Constitutional priests which Jeanne-Antide had avoided to meet before knowing him and finding in him a father and a protector. Mgr. de Chaffois instead refused to take any part in the service of the diocese under this Archbishop, yet he found his place at the side of Mgr. Pressigny.

²⁴ Ambroise, Paul André, first Great Vicar of Mgr. de Durfort and then of Mgr. de Pressigny to whom he shall succeed as Archbishop of Besançon

²⁵ Jean Antoine Joseph Debry or De Bry, Imperial Prefect of Doubs from 1801 to 1814

²⁶ LD p. 356

2- To pray with Jeanne-Antide

This prayer is first of all a « **supplication** »

The word "supplication" is used in the Bible of Jerusalem, in its introduction to the Psalms, to indicate the prayer of a man, a woman, or a people crying to God, presenting to Him their situation of distress and to ask for help. The prayer of 1821 is a supplication addressed to God by Jeanne Antide, for herself and for her Institute.

The prayer of 1821, as Fr. Rey-Mermet²⁷ says, shows «Jeanne Antide's heart»

«The true prayer is not in the voice but in the heart. It is not our words but our wishes which give strength to our supplications» as *Saint Augustin* said.

Therefore, let ourselves be led by the rhythm of Jeanne Antide's dialogue with God ...

We will consider five expressions related to five movements in this prayer which allow us to be part of the dialogue of Jeanne Antide with God.

"O MY GOD, ARISE": it is the first movement of the prayer (§1 and 2)
a cry, a call

"IN YOU ALONE»: it is the second movement (§3 and 4)
the prayer of the heart

"YOU HAVE HELPED ME, AND YOU WILL HELP ME": it is the third movement (§5)
past and future

" EVERYTHING WITH YOU, NOTHING WITHOUT YOU": it is the fourth movement (§6)
everything and nothing

"AMEN!" or the final liturgy

²⁷ « Nous avons entendu la voix des pauvres » Théodule Rey-Mermet - Nouvelle Cité p.537

"O MY GOD, ARISE ..." (§1 and 2)

« *My God, Lord of heaven and earth*»: the prayer begins with a solemn address to God ... it's the proclamation of a Credo which has the resonance of the Glory to God ... and the resonance of the Sanctus of the oriental liturgy.

Arise - burst – put yourself ...: it is a cry, a heart-breaking call expressed by 3 verbs in the imperative form.

Here they are: the struggle is near, the enemies are approaching, they are there ... impossible not to **call for help** before an immediate danger ...

What are the true reasons of this danger, of this earthquake?

Jeanne Antide explained the situation to God as if He did not know it:

- On the one hand, her enemies lashed out: (they come to drive me from the Institute – to divide it – to make it rebel), it looked like a war
- on the other hand she was the accused: she was the one who undertook an action considered illegitimate: the request of the approval of her Rule and of the Institute by «Your Vicar, the Holy Father»
- Yet this accusation was already justified before God: You dictated this Rule to me for the daughters you have associated to me. The initiative belonged to God; therefore, the accusations were addressed to Him.

Again in this first movement (§2)

- Jeanne-Antide explained to God the reason of such a terrible conflict: the approval of the Rule *with the modifications* ... at the same time, she wanted to reject the accusation of her enemies: she wanted to justify herself first of all before God and by doing so she called God on her side ...
the Pope *is directed by Your Spirit* ... and you know me, *you know* ...
- With a new call to help, she urged God, reminding him what He should do ... « It is for You *to cure... to prevent the division and the ruin* ... ». She presented a series of motivations referring to the honour of God and His Church, the Christians, the poor, the Sisters of her Institute of today and tomorrow.

A cry, a call for help!

"IN YOU ALONE ... " (§3 and 4)

- « Prostrated ... »: with JA, we pass from a cry of distress to a more **intimate supplication**, made up of short sentences like those of an intercession, filled with the weight of the suffering which invaded her: *deign to hear me ... hasten ... deliver me ... Take no account...*
- With her, we come to a different way of praying, which is deeper and it is expressed with an act of faith and trust ... « *It is in You alone ...* » ... preceded and followed by an act of humility: *take no account of my sins ... do not consider my unworthiness. In You alone:* it is the same yet stronger expression « God Alone » ... brimming with suffering and boundless trust ... it is her true self before God.
- With her we reach the spiritual depth which made her pass from praying to the Sovereign God, Lord of heaven and earth, to God as it is known in Christian faith: *O Eternal Father ... Jesus Crucified... Spirit which leads and directs ...* It is a typical evangelical prayer: «*You have promised that whatever is asked of You in his Holy Name will be granted ...* ». She made use of God's language : *I forgive my enemies ...* Father forgive them ...
- She really lived what is specific of Christianity: the forgiveness of enemies ... she neither denied, nor forgot the offence and the suffering they caused to her, yet she responded to evil with Goodness. This would be impossible without the help coming from above; Jeanne Antide knew it and said: *with the help of your grace ...*
- In the midst of the earthquake, which was shaking her, she had just one certitude: *the one who hopes in You will not be deceived ...* words followed by the unconditional offering of her life: *I am ready to suffer everything you shall want ...* always for the glory of God and her sanctification.

"YOU HAVE HELPED ME, YOU WILL HELP ME» (§5)

- **As if she was re-reading her life** Jeanne Antide recalled:
the origin of the Institute ... *You and me ... You have deigned to make use of me ...*
the contradictions of the past: *You and me ... You have helped me....*
- Jeanne Antide recalled the past **to go ahead**: «*You will help me ... You will not withdraw yourself ... You will be my strength...*

- While crying for help in the opening of the prayer, she got to a very different conclusion: ***I have nothing to fear from my enemies***. One would expect her say “I will be victorious”, yet the most unexpected expression came from her: ***You shall be victorious*** ... She was sure that God was at her side, He was with her. She was sure that her Institute ***is the cause, the work of God***. There lied the secret of her assurance.
- Her enemies have become the enemies of God’s plan ... then, Jeanne-Antide advocated God’s cause: it was in the ***interest of your glory to hinder them*** ... and she made a list of all the consequences.

She recalled “yesterday”, yet she was already looking at “tomorrow”!

"EVERYTHING WITH YOU, NOTHING WITHOUT YOU" (§6)

- ***Oh my merciful Jesus...: a new intercession addressed to Jesus who has every power over the hearts...***

In the beginning of the prayer, Jeanne-Antide asked God to intervene, to **stand between her and her enemies** ... then, she embraced the path of **forgiveness** ... and at the end of the prayer, she asked Jesus **to convert them**.

- ***Make me know your will ... I will accomplish it*** : it was a personal engagement without flaw and without taking back: doing God’s will is characteristic of Jeanne Antide’s life
- ***I can do everything with you, I am nothing without you***: an act of faith ... worthy of the big mystics, to mention only St. John of the Cross²⁸:
« To reach satisfaction in all, desire its possession in nothing. To come to the knowledge of all, desire the knowledge of nothing. To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing. To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing ».
John of the Cross
- The closure is a commitment which is the fruit of her journey of life, of her inner attitude at that time **«I entrust everything** », which led her to a peaceful contemplation of God’s mercy and goodness ...

The earthquake, which shook all her being, led her to surrender completely to God: ***perfectly and for ever***.

« In your hands, Lord, I entrust my spirit»! That is the Word of Jesus at the end of his mission and suffering on earth; this word marked the motivation of her whole life ... it expressed an accomplishment which could not be improvised but gushed out of a heart and a

²⁸ Saint John of the Cross - "La Montée du Carmel", Book I - chapter XIII

life inhabited by a Unique desire: may your Will be done, Father! Amen! **Amen: may it be so!**

THE PRAYER IS ACCOMPLISHED!

The prayer which had begun by a liturgical invocation has also a liturgical closure

- It starts with an invocation in Latin: *Domine, exaudi ... Lord listen to my call and may my cry come up to you!*
- A solemn invocation typical of oriental liturgies follows: *Holy God, Strong God, Immortal God.*
- Then, again in Latin, the Gospel, the Word which is our faith: *Verbum caro factum est!*
- followed by a confession of faith: *Christus nobiscum stat*²⁹! *Christ stand at our side!* It makes us think of the Baby Jesus before which Jeanne Antide in Naples used to pray ... and which we still have ... a Baby Jesus standing ...
- then the prayer closes with an intercession to the Holy Family: *Jesus, Mary and Joseph...* an invocation learnt within her family, at Sancey's parish, and repeated constantly when serving and when in exile, an invocation which came from Jeanne Antide's heart, in Naples as well as in Thonon !

It is the Mystery of the Incarnation, the contemplation of this Mystery which closes the prayer.

In conclusion....

Jeanne Antide's prayer gushed from her life and connected her to the Word, and in turn the Word present in it sent her back to life. It is an *apostolic prayer*; a prayer which at the time of trial enabled her to look further and wider for the poor, the Church and the Congregation.

If her greatest joys came from the Church, it was also from the church that her greatest sufferings came. These were caused by people who, like her, during the French Revolution had fought for their faith, had been exiled and persecuted ... and after the Revolution had worked for the renewal of faith ... Mgr. de Pressigny, Mgr. de Chaffois were valuable people, esteemed, good towards the poor, with great zeal for faith ... However, Jeanne Antide discovered that those who had previously supported her now had become her «enemies» ... that some of the Sisters, who were with her from the very beginning, as well as other Sisters who had not known her, did not, or could not react and believed what they were told

²⁹ Origin of this prayer : in 528 when in the city of Antioche there were terrible earthquakes, it was revealed that Bishop Ephrem who had his word printed on doors, windows and walls of the que house would safe, That is what the Bishop did. When the earthquake ended, the place where the words had been painted were sur lesquels étaient fixées ces paroles were miraculously spared. In the Middle ages the custom of writing words on the houses'walls spread a lot.

...

Jeanne Antide experienced first misunderstandings, humiliations, accusations of having betrayed her Congregation, she suffered knowing that the Sisters slowly stopped considering her as their Superior, she was left alone and ignored, then she was forbidden to come back, threatened of sending the police and finally removed from her office.

Yet, was Jeanne-Antide prayer finally answered?

- The first answer is found in the letter Jeanne-Antide wrote on 16th September to Sr. Geneviève Boucon, after arriving in Thonon on 12th September 1821, when she came to know the interdiction of staying in the houses within the diocese of Besançon. She wrote:
« Abandon yourself into His fatherly hands, and you will find joy. That is what God give me the grace of finding at present. He knows I need it, because the circumstances you know of are no smoother. ... As I am innocent, God gives me the grace of experiencing the greatest calm³⁰. »

Inner calm and the gift of peace are the immediate result of such total surrender to God.

- The procedures which lasted two years, in Paris and somewhere else, did not help to clarify the situation as she wished ... everything was done in vain ... Her enemies kept their position, refusing even to listen to her. From a human point of view it was a failure which led Jeanne Antide to make official her rejection and the division of the Institute when returning to Naples.

«We have made, according to the advice of the Holy See, all the overtures which seemed to us to give hope of reunion of spirits, but that was not achieved. We leave to the mercy of God the care of this business which we put into his hands long ago. May His Holy Will be done and all turn to His glory. That is the wish of my heart³¹».

- It was after her death that Jeanne Antide's prayer was answered.

- o The Foundress' death announced to all the Sisters in Italy, Savoy, and Besançon touched all deeply.
- o The unceasing search for the Union between the two branches³² was desired and wanted although it still had to face many trials ... and it was always delayed due to historical events ...
- o Finally the Union was realized on the occasion of the beatification and then the canonisation of the Foundress ... for the first time some Sisters from Besançon attended the General Chapter of the Congregation, and the Superior General in Rome visited the Sisters in Besançon...

³⁰ LD p.357

³¹ Letter to Mr. Adinolfi, 12th January 1824 – LD p. 392-393

³² The book of Mother Antoine de Padoue Duffet is an important reference: "L'histoire de l'Union" Piemme 1987

- The sap of the Word and of Jeanne Antide's suffering is still circulating in her Congregation's big tree, its branches host more and more Sisters of many different cultures.
- That sap is also for us today: «*You are the strong God and it is on you alone that I rely. ... In You Alone, ... I place all my trust ... I can do all with you.... Jesus, Mary, Joseph, come always to my aid. Amen !*»
- It is for all the Sisters who will come after us ... for the poor and for the Church!

Jeanne Antide handed everything to God's paternal Goodness in which she trusted totally and for ever ... like all Christians of all times.