

Preston, Sunday 25th May 2025

5th Sunday after Easter – St Madeleine Sophie Barat

“Pétite, et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum¹. »

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

The Gospel of this 5th Sunday after Easter presents us with this sentence that we hear quite often, but out of its context. Jesus said something else just before: “Hitherto you have not asked any thing in My name: Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full².” Before hand, we were not able to ask, but now, being redeemed by the Blood of Jesus-Christ, we are made his children, able to speak to Him and to ask whatever we need for our spiritual wellbeing and salvation.

“This their joy, whereof He saith that it shall be full, is to be understood not of fleshly but of spiritual joy and when that joy is so great that it can be increased no more, then shall it without doubt be full. Whatsoever therefore we ask for the fulfilling of this joy, (that is, if we thereby mean grace, if we ask for that life which is the really blessed one,) that is a thing which it is meet to ask in Christ's Name. If we ask anything else than this, we ask nothing, although we do actually ask something, because all things are nothing in comparison with this³.”

St Augustine just gave us a few lights upon how we should understand Jesus' words. Anything that is good for our salvation is to be asked. It would be foolish to even think that we can obtain anything by our own means. St James' epistle, which is presented to us just before,

“warned against false piety, which makes everything consist of sentimental affections or external rites, without self-denial, without effort, without labour. True religion, on the other hand, is active and can be recognised by good works. The Apostle lists some of them, such as prudence in speech, charitable works, etc., and then he mentions a virtue of a general nature which is like the condition of all the others: not to participate in the evil spirit of the world but to live, on the contrary, in the spirit of the Gospel.

How opposite is the figure of the Saint we are also honouring today, thanks to our Sister Adorers, and whom we celebrated yesterday the centenary of her canonisation by Pius XI. St Madeleine-Sophie Barat gave herself to Jesus from her early age, desiring to become a Carmelite sister, but hearing God's providential call, answered by founding a religious institute dedicated to the education of youth, and especially the girls. She strongly participated into the revival of Catholicism in France and in the world, after the terrible revolution which tried to rip off the Faith from the soul of the good people. Her work was so successful that from a few of the first sisters in 1800 at their first ceremony of vows, they were more than 3500 at her death in 1865.

¹ Jn., 16, 24.

² *Ibid.*

³ St Augustine, 102th Homily on St John, in *Roman Breviary*, 5th Sunday after Easter, Lesson 8 at Matins.

In this brief mention of the story of her vocation, we can see the good disposition of heart that, following her example, one must have to well understand God's desire, and how to answer it.

Sometimes we are in need of a trigger to move on. The first time the priest who became her director met St Madeleine-Sophie and presented her his project of a religious family, her shyness made her answering: "I'll think about it". But Father Varin answered back in a decisive and sharp way: "There is nothing more to think about. When God's will is known, only one thing matters: obedience". All along her life she had to carry this burden of obedience. Very soon after the foundation, Father Varin appointed her, the youngest of the three first nuns, as the superior. She begged him not to, cried and prayed the Lord to avoid such a chalice, but Father Varin remained inflexible: "God's desire is that you be in charge as a superior". She accepted as a burden "in reparation for her sins", becoming an example for the practice of humility. According to her say, Humility is a great way God gave us to repair the damages of the sin in our souls. It is the needle which perfectly mends the tears of our imperfect actions. Her practice was to accept anything received from her neighbour, while not giving anything to carry, except her charity and her good words of encouragement, such as these:

"[Christ] does not ask that we become perfect all at once, but that we work towards this each day, in the measure that grace operates in us and the radiance of the Holy Ghost enlightens us⁴."

"Learn to appreciate this divine Light and walk only in its radiance. It will cost you, without any doubt, to watch over your natural impulses and not allow them to dominate or take action. But the practice of watching how you act, which you must consent to without limit and in complete inner freedom, will make this habit easy and reassuring⁵."

Full of confidence, let's follow her unique example of accomplishment and faithfulness to God's desire. Sure she tried and succeeded in fulfilling God's word that we heard in today's gospel: "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." She humbly asked to be with Him forever, although she knew that this path would not be easy at all, but now, her joy is full and without end.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁴ St Madeleine-Sophie Barat to Eliane Cuënot, La Ferrandière, 29th December 1851.

⁵ St Madeleine-Sophie Barat to Marie de Tinseau, Paris, 18th September 1858.