

Individual Report for Marie Leonie (Elodie) Paradis Blessed

Name:	Marie Leonie (Elodie) Paradis Blessed			Sex:	F
Birth Date:	May 12, 1840	Place:	L'Acadie, St-Jean Cnty., Quebec, Canada		
Bap. Date:		Place:			
Death Date:	Mar 5, 1912	Place:	Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Cnty., Quebec, Canada		
Burial Date:		Place:			
Cause of Death:					
Father:	Joseph Paradis (After 1804-)				
Mother:	Emilie Gregoire (Cir 1817-)				

General:

(1840-1912) She entered the Congregation of the Holy Cross in 1854 and afterwards taught locally and in New York as well as at Notre Dame Indiana. In 1874 she was sent to Saint Joseph's College at Memramcook, N.B. where she founded the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, dedicated to doing laundry, kitchen, and other household tasks for priests in rectories and colleges. When she was beatified in 1984, during Pope John-Paul II's visit to Canada, most Canadian Catholics applauded, but Catholic feminists objected, saying she was not a good example for modern women.

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 PARADIS, ÉLODIE (baptized Alodie-Virginie), named Mother Marie-Léonie, Marianite Sister of Holy Cross and founder of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family; b. 12 May 1840 in L'Acadie, Lower Canada, the only daughter among the six children of Joseph Paradis and Émilie Grégoire; d. 3 May 1912 in Sherbrooke, Que.

In the mid 1840s Élodie Paradis's father moved to the concession of La Tortue, near the village of Saint-Philippe-de-Laprairie, in order to support his family. There he rented a disused mill in which he sawed lumber, ground grain, and carded wool. When Élodie was nine years old, her mother sent her to a boarding-school run by the Congregation of Notre-Dame in La Prairie. That year her father went off to California to look for gold and the family lived temporarily in Napierville, where Élodie continued her studies for a few months. She returned to the school in La Prairie in 1850. Having heard from her youthful neighbour Camille Lefebvre\* that there was a community of nuns within the Holy Cross family, Élodie presented herself at the noviciate of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross in Saint-Laurent, near Montréal, Québec, on 21 Feb. 1854. She was not yet 14. When her father came back from California, he tried to bring her home, without success. Under the name of Sister Marie-de-Sainte-Léonie she was accepted as a novice. In 1856 she taught at Sainte-Scholastique (Mirabel) and on 22 Aug. 1857 she made her vows. She would then be a teacher, monitor, and secretary to the mother superior at Varennes, Saint-Laurent, and Saint-Martin (Laval). In 1862 she was sent to New York, where the Marianites operated an orphanage, a workroom, and a school for poor children in the parish of St Vincent de Paul. Eight years later she joined the American branch of the order and went to Indiana to teach French and needlework to the nuns who were slated to become teachers.

After a short stay in Michigan, in 1874 Sister Marie-Léonie was chosen to direct a group of novices and postulants at the College of Saint Joseph in Memramcook, N.B. This college, which had been founded in 1864 by her compatriot Camille Lefebvre, needed recruits for "housekeeping tasks and maintenance of the culinary department." There Élodie Paradis could heed what she considered her calling at that moment: to be an auxiliary and assistant to the Holy Cross Fathers in the mission of educating young Acadians. Several factors strengthened her resolve: the precarious situation of the college in the absence of support personnel essential to its smooth operation; the Acadians' low level of education; and the lack of institutions for young women eager to enter the religious life. Fourteen Acadian girls taken into the workroom that she directed began wearing their own unique habit on 26 Aug. 1877. In 1880 the general chapter of the Holy Cross Fathers accepted the idea of a new foundation for the needs of the colleges, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family. Alfred-Valère Roy\*, who succeeded Lefebvre, thought the actions taken by his predecessor and Sister Marie-Léonie helped "to save the Acadian nationality, threatened and doomed to anglicanization" as much by Irish Roman Catholics as by Protestants.

Appointed superior of the new community, Mother Marie-Léonie tried on many occasions to persuade Bishop John Sweeny\* of Saint John, N.B., to give his approval to her religious family, but in vain. In 1895 she met Bishop Paul Larocque\* of Sherbrooke, who was looking for domestic staff for his seminary. He agreed to receive the mother house and the noviciate of the Little Sisters into his diocese and to give them his approval. On 5 Oct. 1895, after 21 years in Acadia, Mother Marie-Léonie returned to Québec, Québec. She and her community moved to 10 Rue Peel in Sherbrooke, and on 26 Jan. 1896 Larocque granted canonical approval, official church recognition. Mother Marie-Léonie then applied herself to the tasks of giving her institution a rule of life and helping the nuns develop a spirit of

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cheerful simplicity and sisterly generosity. Their generosity was even extended to other countries and was symbolized by their adoption of a little girl from Kabylia. "She was all heart," Bishop Larocque would say of Mother Marie-Léonie. After providing for the education of the sisters who were illiterate, she pursued their human and spiritual formation in her correspondence with them after they left Sherbrooke for other provinces and the United States.

Mother Marie-Léonie died on 3 May 1912, just before her 72nd birthday. In the course of her life she had overseen 38 establishments in Québec, Québec, New Brunswick, Ontario, and the United States, most of them in colleges and a few in episcopal households. At the time of her death, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family had some 635 members. Élodie Paradis was beatified in Montréal, Québec on 11 Sept. 1984, during Pope John Paul II's visit. The church thereby recognized an "avant-garde woman" who had met the needs of her time by founding the first institute to help priests in their educational work. Without this assistance, some colleges would have been unable to survive, since they did not have the means to hire lay personnel.

Source: Submitted by Denise Robillard

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Pope's Visit - Beatification of Sister Marie-Léonie; homily in Jarry Park - Montreal, 11 Sept. 1984

INTRODUCTION

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, I am happy to be with you today in Montreal and I thank the Lord for this opportunity. I come among you as a pilgrim of faith and as bishop of Rome, as someone who has received the mission once confided to Peter to strengthen his brethren in the faith. To each and everyone of you I say: "Grace and peace in abundance, through the true knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 P 1,2).

May you have "more and more grace and peace through knowing God and Jesus our Lord".

In seeing you all gathered here I think of the founders of Ville-Marie. They planted a seed here at the foot of Mont-Royal and near the shores of the St. Lawrence, a seed which has become a great tree. It is with joy that I join with you in celebrating the faith which has so profoundly marked your history, the faith that it is up to you to maintain and to intensify following the example of sister Marie-Leonie whom we are going to beatify.

In the course of my journeys around the world I discover the joys and the concerns of all the Churches. To all of the faithful of Canada I bring their greetings.

I bring you great tidings from the young and dynamic Churches of Asia and Africa.

I bring you the echo of the valiant faith of your brothers and sisters in Latin America who are exposed to the violence of underdevelopment and arms.

The brothers of the-Church of Rome and of Italy greet you.

I also bring to you greetings from your brothers and sisters in the faith living in Poland.

May these indications of the tenacious faith of your Christian sisters and brothers throughout the world stimulate you and strengthen you in your own faith.

HOMILY

"For the place on which you stand is holy ground" (Ex 3,5).

These were the words spoken to Moses from the burning bush. He was looking after the flock and had come to Horeb, the mountain of God. The hush was blazing but was not being burnt up. And so Moses wondered: "What is the meaning of this fire that does not destroy the bush and yet burns and gives light?"

The answer came from the midst of the wonderful sight, a more than human answer: "Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground!" (Ex 3,5).

Why is this place holy? Because it is the place of the presence of God, the place of the revelation of God, of the

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theophany. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3,6).

Moses covered his face, afraid to look at the fire where the living God was revealing himself.

Dear brothers and sisters of Quebec and Canada, what of your meeting with the living God? Sometimes today's world seems to conceal him, seems to make you forget him. This apparent spiritual desert stands in sharp contrast with a period, not far removed in time, when the presence of God was highly visible here in social life and in the existence of many and varied religious institutions. And you hear repeated around you: "Where is your God?" (Ps 42,4).

For the human heart, however, there is no way to become accustomed to the absence of God. Like Moses' compatriots, it suffers when removed from his presence. But he is never far from each one of us (Ac 17,27). He is mysteriously present, like the fire that cannot be grasped, like the gentle breeze that cannot be seen (cf. 1K 19, 12-13). He beckons to us. He calls us by name to charge us with a mission.

To replace God is an impossible task. Nothing can fill the emptiness of his absence, neither abundant material wealth - which does not satisfy the heart - nor easy and permissive lifestyles which do not quench our thirst for happiness - nor the exclusive search for success or power for their own sake - nor even technology which makes it possible to change the world but brings no real answer to the mystery of our destiny. All this may prove to be attractive for a time, but it leaves an aftertaste of illusion and a void in the heart (if we have moved away from the burning bush).

It is at this point that we may see appearing, by a kind of reversal, hunger for things spiritual, attraction for the absolute, thirst for the living God (Ps 42, 3). Paradoxically, the time "of the absence of God" may become the time of the rediscovery of God, as in the approach to Mount Horeb.

Yes, God continues to beckon to us, through our own personal history and that of the world we live in, as he called Moses through the sufferings of his people. Is there anyone of us who, at one time or another, has not known experiences of light and peace! "God has entered my life!" This might be a sudden experience or the result of a slow maturing process. His mysterious presence can be felt on occasions of all kinds: the wondrous birth of a child, the beginning of authentic love, the meeting with death in the case of loved ones, the confrontation with failure or with the mystery of evil, compassion felt for the sufferings of others, the grace of having escaped an accident or of recovering from a sickness, the creation of a work of art, the silent contemplation of nature, the meeting with a person in whom God dwells, participation in a praying community... All these are sparks which light up the road to God, events which open the door to him. But revelation itself comes from God, from the heart of the burning bush. It is his Word, read and meditated upon in prayer, it is the sacred history of the people of God, which make it possible for us to decipher these signs, to recognize the name and the face of the living God, to discover that he transcends all experience and all creatures. As one of your poets has said, Our God is "like the deepest spring of the deepest waters" (Anne Hébert, *Présence*, 1944).

God reveals himself to Moses in order to give him a mission. He must lead Israel out of Egypt, out of its bondage under the Pharaohs.

Moses experiences the presence of God. He knows who the God of his fathers is, but as he is charged with this mission, he poses a question: "But if they ask me what his name is, what am I to tell them?" (cf. Ex 3,13). This matter of the name is of fundamental importance. Moses' question relates to the essence of God, to what constitutes his absolutely unique reality.

And the answer came, "I am who I am" (Ex 3,14). The essence of God is to be, to exist. All that exists the whole cosmos has its origin in him. Everything exists because God gives existence.

Once Saint Catherine of Siena - following saint Thomas Aquinas - inspired by the same wisdom drawn from the theophany of which Moses had been the witness, said to God: "You are the one who is; I am the one who is not".

Between the "I am" of God and the "I am" of a human being - as indeed of all creatures - the relationship is the same: God is the one who is; the creature, the human being is the one who is not ...It is called into existence from

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nothingness. It is from God that we receive life, movement and being (cf. Ac 17,28).

Today in this great city of Montreal, we want to praise THE ONE WHO IS. We want to praise him along with all creation, we who exist only because he exists.

We exist and we pass away, whereas he alone does not pass away. He alone is Existence itself.

And that is why we say with the Psalm in today's liturgy: "The Lord is great, loud must be his praise ... give the Lord the glory of his name .. worship the Lord ..." (Ps 95 (96), 4-9) as Moses did when he "covered his face, afraid to look at God" (Ex 3,6).

Prostrate yourselves, men and women of today!

You know the mysteries of creation far better than Moses did! Do they no longer speak to you of God?

Prostrate yourselves. Read again and read thoroughly the witness of creation!

God is above every creature; he is absolute transcendence. Where the evidence of creation ends, there begins the Word of God, the Word: "In the beginning he was with God ... Through him all things came to be, no one thing had its being but through him ..." (Jn 1, 1-3).

"In him was life, And the life was the light of men ..."

But listen to what follows: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ... To all who accepted him he gave the power to become children of God: to those who believe in his name, those ... who are born of God" (Jn 1, 1-14).

Yes, God who is above all creatures, who is absolute transcendence, God has become a creature, a man. The Word was made flesh. In him, human beings, born of human beings, are born of God. They become sons through divine filiation, sons in the Son.

On this day, in this great city of Montreal, we wish to pay tribute to God made man.

"A holy day has risen for us
... the light has shone on the earth
... Glory be to you, O Christ, proclaimed among the people; glory be to you, O Christ, greeted in this world by faith" (cf. 1 Tm 3, 16), Alleluia!

We give thanks for all those who have welcomed this light here, on Canadian soil.

We give thanks especially for those who have become, through Christ, the light of the Church and of the whole of mankind.

The Church has officially recognized the holiness of some of them; several came from abroad, especially from France, but it is here that they completed their lives and attained their measure of holiness. They are familiar to you. I am referring to the holy Jesuit Martyrs, founders of the Church in Canada; Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys; and the blessed: Bishop François de Montmorency-Laval, Mother Marie de l'Incarnation, the young Iroquois woman Kateri Tekakwitha, Mother Marguerite d'Youville, Father André Grasset, Mother Marie-Rose Durocher, and Brother André Bessette.

I personally had the joy of celebrating in Rome the beatification of five of these and the canonization of one. But I know that other cases are under consideration and I hope the decision will be positive. I am thinking particularly of Mother Catherine de Saint Augustin, the heroic quality of whose virtues was recently recognized.

Beyond those who have been officially canonized or beatified, there are surely many whose faith has grown into an admirable, constant and often discrete love of God and of neighbour. If the few traces they left behind prevent the Church from examining their lives in detail, they are most certainly known to God; they answered his call, as Moses

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did. They increased his glory and his kingdom on this Canadian soil.

In the face of all these men and women, we must repeat the words of the great Irenaeus, in the second century: "the glory of God is the human person fully alive", the person who lives the fullness of life, the life that comes from God in Jesus Christ.

Today, to this living record of the saints and the blessed which has been in this land for centuries, a new name is being added, that of Sister Marie-Léonie Paradis.

This woman is one of you, humble among the humble, and today she takes her place among those whom God has lifted up to glory. I am happy that for the first time, this beatification is taking place in Canada, her homeland.

Born of simple, poor and virtuous parents, she soon grasped the beauty of religious life and committed herself to it through her vows with the Marist Order of the Holy Cross. She never once questioned that gift to God, not even during the difficult periods of community life in New York and in Indiana. When she was appointed to serve in a college in Memramcook in Acadia, the richness of her religious life drew young women to her who also wanted to dedicate their life, to God. With them and thanks to the understanding of Bishop Larocque of Sherbrooke, she founded the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family which is still thriving and is still very much appreciated.

Never doubting her call, she often asked: "Lord, show me your ways", so that she would know the concrete form of her service in the Church. She found and proposed to her spiritual daughters a special kind of commitment: the service of educational institutions, seminaries and priests' homes. She never shied away from the various forms of manual work which is the lot of so many people today and which held a special place in the Holy Family and in the life of Jesus of Nazareth himself. It is there that she saw the will of God for her life. It was in carrying out these tasks that she found God. In the sacrifices which were required and which she offered in love, she experienced a profound joy and peace. She knew that she was one with Christ's fundamental attitude: he had "come not to be served, but to serve". She was filled with the greatness of the eucharist and with the greatness of the priesthood at the service of the eucharist. That is one of the secrets of her spiritual motivation.

Yes, God looked upon the holiness of his humble servant, Marie-Leonie, who had been inspired by Mary's openness and receptivity. And henceforth, from age to age, her Congregation and the Church will call her blessed (cf. Lk 1, 4-8).

This new beatification of a Canadian nun reminds us how much religious communities in every sector of ecclesial and social life have contributed to Canada. They have done this through contemplative prayer, education, assistance to the poor, work in hospitals and apostolic involvement of all kinds. It is a great gift. And if, today, the concrete forms of service can be different and evolve according to need, the religious vocation as such remains a marvelous gift of God. It is a witness without parallel, a prophetic charism essential to the Church, not only because of the immeasurable services for which the Sisters are responsible, but because first of all it signifies the gratuity of love in a spousal gift to Christ, in a total consecration to his redemptive work (cf. my letter *Redemptionis donum*). I would ask this of all the Christians gathered here: Are the Canadian people still able to appreciate this gift? Do they help religious women to find and to strengthen their vocation? And you, dear Sisters, do you appreciate the greatness of the call of God and the fundamentally evangelical lifestyle which corresponds to that gift?

Women religious, turned towards the Burning Bush, have a particular experience of the living God. But I address myself in this Mass to all the Christian people of Montreal, Quebec and Canada. Brothers and sisters: seek the Lord; seek his will; listen to the One who calls each of you by name in order to entrust a mission to you, so that you can bear his light within the Church and society.

You are the Christian laity, baptized and confirmed. And you wish to live as sons and daughters of God. In the Body of the Church there are many charisms, many forms of activity for developing your talents in the service of others. God sends you to serve your brothers and sisters who are suffering, in distress, in search of him. By your prayers and deeds each day may the love of God, the justice of God and hope find their place in the earthly city, in all your places of work, leisure and research. Having had the experience of God yourselves, contribute to building a fraternal world which is open to God. I address this message to all people; but since I am beatifying a woman today, I address it especially to women. Like all the baptized, you are called to holiness in order to sanctify the world according to your vocation in the plan of God, who created humanity as "man and woman". Together with men, bring into the heart of

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your families, bring into the heart of this society, the human and Christian capacities with which God has endowed your femininity and which you will be able to develop according to your rights and duties to the very degree that you are united with Christ, the source of holiness.

The Lord counts on you so that human relations may be permeated with the love that God desires. The ways of accomplishing this service may differ from that chosen by Blessed Sister Marie-Léonie. But - in the most evangelical sense which transcends the opinions of this world - it is always a question of service, which is indispensable for humanity and the Church.

The saints and the blessed and all those guided by the spirit of God, can make their own the words of the letter to the Ephesians which we have heard: "Blessed be God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" (Ep 1:3).

Yes, the names of the saints confirm in a special way the truth of our existence in Jesus Christ. The truth and the call to holiness that is, union with God through Christ.

Let us again listen to this letter to the Ephesians:

- God "before the world was made, chose us, he chose us in Christ",
 - out of love he determined that we "should become his adopted sons through Jesus Christ",
 - in him, "through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins", and this, through "the richness of his grace",
 - he has united everything "under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth",
 - in him, we too have been made heirs,
 - in him, we have been stamped "with the seal of the Holy Spirit ...the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom [sp] for those whom God has taken for his own, to make his glory praised" (Ep 1, 4-14).
- "For the place on which you stand is holy ground!"

In the period in which we live, what we see on earth makes sin more obvious to us than holiness. There are many reasons why, in the different countries and continents, we should see more often the unfortunate results of sin than the light of holiness. Despite a growing tendency no longer to call a sin a sin, the human family lives in fear of what is finally the product of human intelligence and will at odds with the will of the Creator and the Redeemer. All of us here are aware of the perils that threaten our planet and we recognize man's hand in those threats.

And yet ...

Yet this earth, the place where we live, is holy ground.

It has been marked by the presence of the living God, whose fullness is in Christ. And that Presence remains on earth and produces the fruits of holiness.

That Presence is Reality.

It is grace.

"The light shines in the dark, but the darkness cannot overcome it" (Jn 1,5).

AMEN

Source: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops - Conférence des évêques catholiques du Canada