

Blessed Rosalie Rendu 1786 – 1856

On Friday 9th September we celebrate the birth of Blessed Rosalie Rendu, friend and mentor to Frederic Ozanam and his companions who founded the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Sr Rosalie, a Daughter of Charity, was a truly remarkable woman. Her connection in the early times of the Society began through the wife of Emmanuel Bailly, the first President of the Council General established in Paris, 1833.

Living in Mouffetard District one of the most impoverished areas of Paris, Rosalie was able to put her passion for faith and service into action. The district was well known not only for its material poverty but also its spiritual poverty. Disease, unhealthy slums, and destitution were the daily lot for people who were just surviving.

During her time in the District Rosalie was a nurse, a justice of the peace, a catechist for the street children, and even a peacemaker between revolutionaries. She opened a free clinic, a pharmacy, a school, an orphanage, a childcare centre, a home for the elderly and a youth club for young workers. Rosalie was an advisor to many, including Blessed Frederic Ozanam. With one hand she received from the rich, with the other she gave to the poor. She became known as the “good mother of all”. Sr Rosalie influenced and assisted Frederic Ozanam and his companions to work with the marginalised. Because Rosalie’s good work had made her a recognised household name, the new group gained an instant respect which they would not have had otherwise. The good works of the Society so began.



For Rosalie charity was more than just a “hand out” but truly understood it was a “hand up, expressed in this way, *“There are many ways of providing Charity. The assistance of money or the assistance in kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and long-lasting benefit; study their abilities, their level of instruction and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties”*.

Sr Rosalie Rendu died on 7th February 1856. Her grave occupies a special place in the cemetery of Montparnasse in Paris. It has two inscriptions beneath the details of her life. The first in Latin says: “She went through life, doing good”. The second is, “To dear Mother Rosalie, from her grateful friends, the poor and the rich”.

Blessed Rosalie Rendu was beatified in 2003 by Pope John Paul II. She continues to inspire us to work together as one Society to help bring equality and compassion to those deeply disadvantaged.

“God has already touched your heart, or you would not be giving up your precious free day to serve the poor. And, because you see Christ in his poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as His servant.

Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet, if our childhood had been one of constant want, perhaps, we too, would have given away to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter.

But be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them.”

Blessed Rosalie Rendu, 1833