

## **Jean Maillefer and Marie de La Salle**

Translation: Brother Julian Watson, FSC. November 2007 ANZPNG District

*Text from Maillefer's journal. BEC, collection 26, for the year 1938, pp. 308 – 312*

In the study dedicated to de La Salle's family, by Guibert in his life of the Saint, we read:

“Marie (the third child in the family) was born on 26 February 1654. In 1679, she married Jean Maillefer, a cousin of Nicolas Roland... She had a son François-Élie Maillefer, a Saint-Maur Benedictine, who wrote the life, as yet unpublished, of his uncle John Baptist. His manuscript is preserved in the Rheims library...”

One detail that the learned historian does not give, and which had undoubtedly eluded his investigations, was that Marie de La Salle, wife of Maillefer, died suddenly on 23 March 1711 and that her husband has left us a eulogy of her the autographed manuscript of which is in the Rheims municipal library. We have transcribed it below for the satisfaction of the learned and the edification of the majority of our readers. They will be able to see for themselves that the younger sister of the Founder was worthy of her elder brother.

### **Eulogy on the death of his wife.**

I have put off until now recalling the most touching unforeseen event with which it has pleased the Lord to distress me in the extremity to which I am reduced by almost continual infirmities, in which pain gives me so little rest. However, I cannot refrain from producing the last strokes of my fading pen to express how much I lost when I lost my wife, whom the Lord took from me suddenly at a time when I was not thinking about it. For me, it was like a thunderbolt which thoroughly devastated me, although I rightly recognised, through God's great mercy, that it was an act of justice which could no longer suffer the affront I was doing to it by preferring the creature to the Creator. For I can say, although to my great confusion, that I took my sole pleasure in having a wife whom I cherished beyond all imagining. But, alas! what else could I have done seeing and recognising, more and more each day, in my good wife everything that a husband could come across that was most perfect.

Until now, I had flattered myself that time could soften my sadness, but the violence of my sorrow was so great that I could only assuage its bitterness by the frequent prayers I addressed to God every day for the repose of her poor soul acknowledging before him more and more, every day, my weaknesses which wear down my poor spirit. The scourge with which God has struck me prevents me from doing anything.

I feel that in losing my good wife, onto whom I had off-loaded the whole care of my family, because of my infirmities, at the same time I feel that my heart has given up on my very self, by putting more than half of my life in the tomb. I did violence to myself to keep my sorrow to myself, as much to prevent it from prevailing over faith and religion as to keep me yielding to so proper a sorrow.

I am so frail that often tears come to my eyes and I cannot keep them back. But if I weep it is only in front of my lovely children who cannot forget the favours and the kindnesses I received from their good mother. They know how she shared with me all my worries, my tasks and my difficulties in all the annoying circumstances of so turbulent a time. As she saw that I was frail and listless, she

was my support; she calmed all my anxieties by the sweetness of her conversation; she strengthened me when I was letting myself be discouraged; encouraged me in the slightest contradictions.

O wife of my heart, why have you torn yourself away from me! O my good wife, why have you left me without saying goodbye? In what a state have you left me! O! the dreadful separation! It could only be the work of death. I shall never be able to have any consolation in it except in knowing that you are in the repose of the blessed. And this keeps on urging me to hope and pray to Heaven asking with persevering entreaty to see each other one day in the company of our dear children.

It is true that if God whose judgements, always so right, must be adored, had given me the choice of dying myself or seeing my good wife die, I would have preferred to die myself rather than to see her die as I have done. She who sought only to look after my wellbeing, who helped me so effectively, and who so charitably kept an eye on my smallest needs!

However, I should not make any complaint, especially at a time when everything is seen to be upside down, when impiety is triumphant, and when good people are oppressed. She has left what was dearest to her in the world, I admit, but I am sure she has found a better society in Heaven. Thus, everything sad is mine, and everything pleasant and happy is hers. I have lost all my happiness, she has only changed hers. And the change is infinitely favourable for her: she has only lost a man as unhappy as I am and she enjoys Jesus Christ himself; she left you, my dear children, but she is with the angels. If in this infinity of light and joy in which she now is, she can still show some care for what is happening, let me hope that at least she will not forget me, as she is well aware that I can never forget her...

O faithful and wise spouse who could take gentle care of her husband without, nevertheless, failing in her duty to anyone else! People never left her presence except filled with joy: her relatives and friends because she was easy of approach and because of the good advice she used to give; the poor because of the help she granted them with a liberal hand. Very modest and humble in all her conduct and especially in her dress, she believed that my rest was more necessary than her own. In the running of our household nothing escaped her, even the smallest details; which often made me say jokingly: "Everybody here is carried along, and me most of all".

Was anyone ever acquainted with practices, in my saintly wife, showing that in her the spirit was subject to the flesh? Was there ever anyone in the house who treated his body more harshly; more mortified in food, eating the simplest and coarsest viands, avoiding the tasty morsels, which she passed over to hand to others? With all that, she had admirable sense in doing skilfully all the tasks proper to women. If the Lord had allowed me to become destitute, she was capable, all by herself, through the skilfulness of her fingers and her industry, of bringing about the survival of all of us in the house.

In her youth, she had the most beautiful voice ever heard; she understood music and she sang without any impression of effort to the great delight of those who heard her; she played and harmonised her voice with the theorbo. And all this pleasantry did not stop her from engrossing herself in the most essential duties, I refer to the practice of Religion and the education of her children. She never let a fortnight go by without approaching the divine mysteries; in her practices of piety, neither any vice nor any ostentation was ever remarked on. As for her children, they will always remember the care with which she taught them the truths of faith and they will never forget the trouble she took to supervise their homework and make them learn their lessons each day. And so, she has given her three sons as priests to the Church: that is the fruit of the devout education of their mother, who thought only of making them good Christians. I have good grounds for hoping that her two daughters, whom she has left me, will also follow as well as their brothers the path she traced out for them more by her example than by her precepts.

Although I could add much more to what I have just said, I must limit myself, for I could be taken as one who is suspect or given to exaggeration. However, I believed that knowing her so well and loving her so much and thinking so highly of her, my dear and excellent wife, I could do no less

than consecrate this short account to her. It is only a sketch of what I would have liked to do but which the state of my health does not permit me, apart from the reason given above, to extend further. In it my children will find proof of the affection I bear for their mother and which I will retain to my grave, for was there ever a wife who better deserved the esteem and gratitude of her husband?

May you, my good wife, enjoy throughout eternity the vision of God! Rejoice in the company of the angels and saints! May the Lord pardon the faults which the weakness of our fallen nature may have surprised you into! For you acted only with simplicity and without malice in his regard. I trust that our great and good God will have already looked on you in his mercy. That is the grace I ask of him for you without ceasing, no longer having any anxiety than to see us both together in Heaven.

Requiescat in pace. Amen.