



“With the Grace of God and Constant Effort”: Drawing Inspiration from the Zeal of Two Saints

It is tempting to draw further into ourselves, when we are told to remain distant from others. It is tempting to ignore the conflict in our country that has taught us to hold people at arm’s length, even before we had to confront a virus. This is a time of isolation, of splintered human contact. Relationships are critically important if we are to have healing. Relationships help us manifest our own humanity, seeing it in others. The only feasible and restorative response to chaos is to draw up our energy, take initiative, and work harder—towards making connections. Relationships, the lifelines we share with others, link us together, lifting us out of turbulent waters.

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat and St. Rose Philippine Duchesne had their share of turmoil, internal and external, but they remained active in faith. They must have known the futility of combating a storm by minimizing the space you take up and waiting for everything to pass. This only prolongs suffering. Instead, these fierce women rose up, and took on not only their own struggles but the struggles of others. Madeleine Sophie began her mission to educate girls in the time of the French Revolution, when the idea of a Christian and classical education was being repressed. Nevertheless, she established the Society of the Sacred Heart in order to address the need for education, especially for poor young women. Rose Philippine traveled far from her home in order to serve many neglected groups of people, including girls of the Potawatomi nation, who had previously not been offered an opportunity for education. These saints’ stirring sense of purpose calls me to share in it. I am driven by God’s spirit within me as they were. With that knowledge, no problem is unconquerable, nor can I leave any problem unchallenged. In the face of suffering, I do not stand still. I move closer.

St. Madeleine Sophie was drawn to support and uplift women, and in doing so, create communities. St. Rose Philippine was called to serve prisoners, the poor, Native Americans, and children. Each woman followed where her vocation led, Sophie in France, Philippine eventually to America. They were willing to get up and get moving, no matter how far they had to go. I know I don't have to travel far to find places where I can share in communion with others. I offer the gift of acceptance to those whom I encounter, and I allow them to move me with their stories, knowing my inner journey is as important as any physical journeys I make. In my school community there are people who need a lifeline in the roiling waters of their own personal struggle, be it anxiety for health and wellbeing, anger at injustices, or loss because of individual loneliness or national disunity. I can be that lifeline, acknowledging the mutual positivity and reciprocity of such a relationship between us. If I can provide a refreshing change, maybe a moment of shared stillness for a restless heart, or an openness to listen to a burdened mind, I participate in the healing process we all need so desperately. I actively seek God, and I believe St. Madeleine Sophie and St. Rose Philippine would have claimed this as the essence of their lives. I also actively seek others. These two ideas are not opposites, in fact, Sophie and Philippine reconciled them every day of their prayerful, purposeful lives. In seeking God, I encounter others. Or perhaps, in seeking others, I am able to find God.

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat built a religious society that bound together women across nations, and St. Rose Philippine Duchesne established a pioneer network of schools on a new continent. We know these two saintly women because of the communities they created. Their accomplishments were foundational and endured, and thus are notable, but these two women would likely have felt they were achieving no special task, only adhering to their calling from God and their responsibility to contribute to the relationality of human beings. I pray for the

courage express my convictions always, as they did, in tangible ways, and to harness my awareness into action. The resolve and purpose of our beloved Sacred Heart Saints are now mine to emulate, as I continue to move forward, building dynamic, stimulating relationships, and cultivating an all-embracing soul.