

12. Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn meets Jean-Philibert Lefranc

This story was recorded for us by young Sr Ambrose (later to become the second superior general). She managed to engage Mother St Joseph (54 years old at the time and incapacitated with a broken leg) in conversation about the beginnings of the congregation. Here we are introduced to Jean-Philibert Lefranc, a distant relative of the parish priest of Coutouvre, Fr Guillermet. Jean-Philibert Lefranc met Jeanne-Marie when they were both about 19 years old. He was to remain a very significant figure throughout her life.

...Monsieur Lefranc, a young seminarian who had come to Coutouvre to spend his holidays with the parish priest, offered to teach her how to meditate. She accepted his offer with pleasure. Every morning she went before daybreak to the presbytery with three companions....

Some time later he told her that she would gain much by making known her spiritual state. As she had no idea of his meaning she told him she did not know what he was talking about. When he had explained, she answered that she would never do this to anyone but himself. It was difficult to arrange, seeing he was not yet a priest. They agreed that, not wishing to be seen, she would come to the presbytery at a time when the parish priest would be in his room. And so it was done.

Simplicity, candour in expressing her feelings... the sweetness she experienced in her first self-expression... fidelity in carrying out advice received... She continued to receive counsel from time to time during the holidays.

Recollections of Mother St Joseph
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In meeting Jean-Philibert Lefranc, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn
– long before beginning her religious life –
developed deeper ways of praying and came to appreciate
the significance of discernment and spiritual direction
for spiritual growth.

