



The Virtue of Simplicity in the Life and Teachings of St. Julie Billiart  
FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR AND SAINT FOR OUR TIMES

# Simplicity

by Peggy Cummins, SNDdeN

In the writings of our foundress, St. Julie Billiart we read the word simplicity over and over again as she refers to prayer and relationships—with self and others. Simplicity is a wonderful virtue that spans across the years, and I believe is essential in our some-times complex, un-settled, over-rational lives. I offer you her words and teachings that come from her deep prayer and life of courage. She is known as “the saint for all times” so I encourage you to read the story of her life on our web site ([www.SNDdeN.org](http://www.SNDdeN.org)) or contact a Sister of Notre Dame for a copy of the newest book, *St. Julie Billiart, Woman of Courage*.

Julie urged her sisters to **be simple in their relationship with God**. She cautioned them about involvement in too many devotions that were very popular in her day. “Come on, go straight, quite straight to the good God like a little child, with simplicity of heart.” It reminds me of the concept of “second innocence” when one finds herself more at home with mystery, wonder and a childlike faith and trust in God. Prayer, for Julie was simple, not a complicated intellectual task. She meditated on the Gospels and saw the goal of prayer as “putting on Christ.” Julie uses the symbol of the sunflower to illustrate her thoughts on simplicity: “I can tell you, my dear daughters, that simplicity is like the beautiful flower, called a sunflower, which follows all the movements of the sun and ever turns

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towards it. Even so, the mind and heart of a religious who possesses this virtue (simplicity) are always turned towards God alone from whom she receives the light which beautifies and guides her, and the warmth which vivifies her.”

A simple person is single hearted and focuses on God like a laser beam or a magnet. An elderly Sister explaining the simplicity of her prayer once said to me, “I look at God and God looks at me.” Prayer for Julie was simple, not a complicated intellectual task. Julie writes, “But as for you, my dear friend, you know well what I ask of the good God for you. May God alone possess your undivided heart, without reserve and forever.” Julie cautioned her sisters to be careful about trying to arrange everything, even spiritual matters to

their own liking. The essence or heart of simplicity is the belief that God is in all things—the universe is permeated with God. Carl Rahner, a Jesuit theologian, believed that Christians are called to be mystics in this new millennium. Julie told her sisters that “one of the ways to simplicity is to live in the presence of God... be attentive to the presence of God... God will console, enlighten and guide.”

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Even in misunderstanding and suffering St. Julie saw a vision of Jesus on the cross and heard the words, “Look at me and follow.” She encourages us, “When a soul is deeply rooted in simplicity nothing can trouble her, neither changes of place nor of season, neither suffering nor annoyance... she remembers steadfastly that her God sees and hears her, sustains and blesses her.”

Julie also speaks of **simplicity in relationships**. We all know how complicated relationships can be! Julie

had a wonderful friendship with our co-foundress, Françoise, Blin de Bourdon. Her words challenge us in a time when we all are affected by the problem of individualism in our society. She writes, “A simple soul is able to get along with everybody. She can set herself aside so as to deal sympathetically with even the least agreeable character.” Although we know today that a healthy self-knowledge is essential to growth, Julie reminds us to “avoid continual thoughts about self.” When speaking of the apostolate she says, “Let us practice great simplicity of heart with the good God, total detachment from ourselves, only looking at the good we can do—then complete abandonment as to the results.” We would say today that Julie inspires us to live unselfishly, humbly, and with strong confidence in God.

### **JOY is the fruit of simplicity.**

Julie is known as the “smiling saint.” ...“Let us pray for the gift of simplicity in our lives, as we read her message to us: “You know that only simplicity finds the good God; it is a way so little appreciated by many souls, even in religion. Apply yourself well to the task of seeking it, my good daughter, until the good God grants you the grace of finding it. You will find paradise on earth I guarantee it! That is going to tempt you, isn’t it, to embark upon it with all your heart? Oh, yes, yes!” Ah qu’il est bon le bon dieu! How good is the good God!