News



A banner depicting Canada-born Blessed Marie-Léonie Paradis, founder of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, is displayed outside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 17, ahead of her canonization Oct. 20. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Called "the mother of all necessities," Mother Marie-Léonie Paradis conformed perfectly to the charism of her community, "to identify with Christ the servant," according to a museum dedicated to the life of the French-Canadian sister.

Mother Marie-Léonie Paradis was canonized by Pope Francis on Oct. 20, 2024, in St. Peter's Square. The canonization Mass was offered for 14 new saints and included 11 martyrs who were killed in Syria for refusing to renounce their faith.

Paradis was born in Quebec on May 12, 1840, in L'Acadie to a family of six children. Her parents struggled to earn a living in a rural area and went through the loss of two of her siblings. She was educated by the Sisters of Notre Dame in Laprairie and entered the Marianites of Holy Cross in Saint-Laurent, the day before she turned 14, in 1854. She worked both in Canada and the United States.



The canonization ceremony of Mother Marie-Léonie Paradis on Oct. 20, 2024, in St. Peter's Square, Rome (Courtesy of Rachel Lemieux)

Thirty-two members of her congregation, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family (Les Petites Soeurs de la Sainte-Famille) attended the canonization. Paradis founded the

congregation in 1880 in New Brunswick at the request of the bishop of Montreal. Their motherhouse was later transferred to Sherbrooke, Quebec, in 1895. Currently, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family congregation is present in Honduras, Guatemala and Canada.

On Oct, 17, the sisters left for a week-long organized trip with Spiritours to commemorate this historical moment of their foundress. The sisters began their pilgrimage with a special celebration in their lounge as they chanted the "Salve Regina" to honour Paradis.



The congregation of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family gather under Paradis' painting on the day of her canonization. (Courtesy of Rachel Lemieux)

Sr. Rachel Lemieux, member of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, is responsible for a museum in Sherbrooke dedicated to Paradis' life called Centre Marie-Léonie Paradis. The museum contains her mortal remains.

Lemieux also worked in collaboration with the postulator Valentina Culurgioni for the advancement of the cause of Paradis. She attended the canonization ceremony to lead a prayer in front of the crowd and recalls the day with great emotion.

"The ceremony took place with great solemnity, and the moment that touched me the most was when the church, through the voice of Pope Francis, proclaimed the name of St. Marie-Léonie Paradis," Lemieux told Global Sisters Report "My heart swelled with emotion and I had tears in my eyes. That moment was short-lived, however, as the names of the other saints in this celebration followed."

Pope Francis emphasized Jesus' way of service to others by the new saints during his homily.

"This is the beauty and truth of the church. Such a grandiose event to exalt humility, love, forgetting oneself for the sake of others, service; that is the glory of God," Sr. Marie Paule Carrier, a member of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, told GSR. "Living with love, faith and hope, as our dear Mother Marie-Léonie did. She continues to help us, and we feel that she is close to us to respond to our needs because the saints never die, they are here to help us."



Mother Marie-Léonie Paradis’ body is displayed at an oratory at St. Michael's Basilica-Cathedral, in Sherbrooke, Canada. (Courtesy photo)

Paradis' service focused on her ministry to priests. When she founded her community, it was to support priests in their apostolic tasks by prayer and action.

"Priests need, it seems to me, auxiliaries in their task of apostolate and no one seems to be aware of it. … This thought haunts me relentlessly and strangely upsets me," Paradis wrote.

"From an early age, her mother fostered her piety and she was drawn to God in the Eucharist. It was then that she understood the importance of the priest and the need for his ministry," Lemieux told GSR.

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More than 2,000 women have joined the congregation and "their apostolate flourished in more than 200 institutions of education and evangelization in Canada, the United States, Italy, Brazil, Haiti, Chile, 11 of which are located in Honduras and Guatemala in Central America," according to Centre Marie-Léonie Paradis.

"For me, this vocation of giving one's life for priests is an ideal. Priests need people to help them, especially spiritually. It's a beautiful vocation that I admire, and I'm happy to be part of it. May St. Marie-Léonie inspire other young people to follow her in this love of the priesthood," Sr. Réjeanne Poulin, a member of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, who attended the event, told GSR.

Paradis died of cancer on May 3rd, 1912, in Sherbrooke and continues to be venerated by pilgrims at St. Michael's Basilica-Cathedral.

"[It was] an extraordinary celebration of the church which recognizes the holiness of Mother Léonie, and proposes it to the whole world," Carrier said. "To know her is to love her and to love God, from whom she has known what love is and exemplified it during all of her life."