



Madeleine Sophie is Choice Patron Saint

Over the years, Family Life Society programmes have adopted patron saints closely associated with the objectives of their programmes, to draw spiritual inspiration from these saints.

Choice has too. Under the spiritual guidance of our priest and religious, we have adopted **Saint Madeleine-Sophie Barat** as our patron saint.

Canonized on 25 May 1925, St Madeleine Sophie devoted her life to helping and educating the poor, especially the youth and children, during the French revolution.

True to the Choice motto, she was once asked, "Why did God make you?" Her reply, "To know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him."

Below is a brief synopsis of St Madeleine Sophie Barat's life:

The Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart was born on 12 December 1779 at Joigny in Burgundy, France, in the wine producing country. Her father was a wine cooper and they led a simple, hard, but happy life.

Madeleine Sophie was the youngest of three children and her elder brother, Louis, who was a seminarian, was her first tutor.

He gave her a very sound classical education, including mathematics, which was then not considered suitable for girls.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the education of many children was neglected and Madeleine Sophie was urged to teach these poor children in schools which she founded.



A natural choice: St Madeleine Sophie's answer to "Why did God make you?" was "To know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him."

More and more women came to help her in the work, so they formed the Society of the Sacred Heart - to show the world "the sacred fire of our Lord's love for men."

In December 1802, 23-year-old Madeleine Sophie was asked this question by Father Varin, to whom had been bequeathed by the saintly Léonor de Tournély the plan of founding a society of women wholly devoted to the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to prayer and sacrifice, and destined to do for girls what the restored Society of Jesus would do for boys, "Why did God make you?"

When she answered, "To know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him," he then asked what it meant to serve God. She answered that it meant to do His will.

In 1806 she was chosen as superior-general, a position she held till her death 63 years later.

She was a very gentle loving person, outstanding for her humility.

St Madeleine Sophie Barat's feast day is on 25 May 1925.

Of War and SARS

a personal reflection by kelvin tan

During the season of Lent, one reflects on the coming of our Lord's death and resurrection.

For 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was tempted by the Devil in the desert.

During the 40 days of Lent, we too make a special effort to reflect and deepen our spiritual life through prayer and fasting.

This year, Lent struck a more sombre note on us. On 20 March, 16 days into Lent, the US coalition forces declared war on Iraq.

The initial reaction (at least from the commercial world) was surprising, as some markets actually took the news to be positive. The stock markets rallied and oil prices fell.

Despite the potential loss of lives and destruction of cities, it seemed that many felt that since the war was inevitable, the world might as well get it over and done with!

As weeks went by, people began to realise that the Iraq war would not be as short and sharp as many initially perceived.

News of lives lost by the coalition forces, Iraqi civilians, and even journalists covering the war,

greeted us everyday, in the newspapers, on TV and the Internet.

Thanks to modern technology, we can even witness the toll of war in real-time.

It was a double whammy when at home, we were suddenly hit with a mystery virus that has led to widespread fear and impacted our daily lives

Indeed, for all the wrong reasons, we have become all too familiar with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

After the first reports of deaths in Singapore, the threat of this disease became a shocking reality.

Schools were closed; travel in and out of the country was strongly discouraged; shopping malls and cinema halls became hauntingly empty; and every time someone coughed in public, worried and suspicious glares immediately perceived.

Even the Catholic Church has issued directives discouraging hand-holding during Mass, the emptying of Holy Water from the founts and the suspension of one-on-one confessions within the confines of the confessional.

The Choice April weekend was also cancelled as a precautionary measure against SARS infection.

As an individual, I cannot but feel somewhat helpless in these troubled times. I wonder, should I wallow in desolation or can I do something about it?

A recent email message I received during Lent gave me food for thought. It read:

Fasting & Feasting

Lent is more than a time of fasting, it can also be a joyous season of feasting. Lent is a time to fast from certain things, and to feast on others.

Fast from judging others
Feast on the Christ dwelling in them

Fast from emphasis on differences
Feast on the unity of life

Fast from apparent darkness
Feast on the reality of light

Fast from complaining
Feast on appreciation

Fast from negatives
Feast on affirmatives

Fast from unrelenting pleasures
Feast on unceasing prayer

Fast from personal anxiety

Of War and SARS (continued from previous page)

Fast from idle gossip
Feast on purposeful silence

Fast from thoughts of illness
Feast on the healing power of God

Fast from words that pollute
Feast on words that purify

Fast from discontent
Feast on gratitude

Fast from anger
Feast on patience

Fast from pessimism
Feast on optimism

Fast from worry
Feast on Divine Providence

Fast from hostility
Feast on peace

Fast from bitterness
Feast on forgiveness

Fast from self-concern
Feast on compassion for others

Fast from problems which overwhelm
Feast on prayer that overcomes

Personally I find it a bit difficult to “Feast on affirmatives” when the body count from war and SARS grows each day. However, reflecting on the Passion of Our Lord during Holy Week, I thought about how Jesus must have felt - to be abandoned,

persecuted and finally crucified. I cannot even try to imagine the turmoil and the dilemma Our Lord must have gone through during the week leading up to his death. In the end, Jesus accepted his Father’s will in perfect obedience, and made the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind.

Reflecting on this, I realised that maybe I should be more Christ-like in the face of adversities and try to change some of my ways. I *can* make a positive difference.

It could be as simple as vowing to be more socially responsible in my behavior, such as wearing a face mask the next time I get the flu, or maybe foregoing some indulgence and contributing to an Iraqi relief fund.

It may seem trivial but as the old Chinese adage goes, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with your first step”.

Even when Lent ends, I can continue to “feast on unceasing prayer”.

And instead of merely praying, abstaining and fasting because it is a “Catholic tradition”, I can turn to God our loving Father with trust and confidence.

As I skip a meal or say a prayer, I can think not just of myself but of my brothers and sisters – those who are

victims of war, those who have been stricken with SARS and those who brave the dangers of their medical profession to combat a deadly and highly contagious disease.

Feast on optimism? Yes, I can certainly do that.

For even in the darkest hour when Our Lord hung on the cross to die, death was not the end. He conquered Death with his Glorious Resurrection.

Because of our faith, we believe and have Hope. We need never despair.

Note from the Editor:
We welcome any Choicer who would like to contribute articles to the Choice newsletter. Please send your contributions to choice@cheerful.com.

Fast from worry

Feast on Divine Providence

Fast from problems which overwhelm

Feast on prayer that overcomes

Friar Talk

from the desk of martin low, ofm



The Family... many forms

Today, some children visit prisons to see loved ones and family more often than they have school field trips.

Although each one of us will have our different ways of expressing love and care for our family, the definition of the word “family” remains very fluid in our society today.

The definition of a family unit as having two parents and children living in the same home may be something that has become rather idyllic for many people.

Although all of us yearn for an ideal family that we believe is truly valuable and worthy of being preserved, we must realise how life can take unhappy and unexpected turns that put an ideal family setting beyond our reach.

In our society today, marriage in itself is a commitment many young couples find difficult to up-

hold. What more if one spouse ends up in prison. Four out of 10 male prisoners lose their spouses while serving their jail term.

As a priest serving in the prison ministry, I often come across children from families where the “ideal image” of family life is simply beyond their reach.

One young man said, “I would love to have enjoyed the support of my father during my teenage years while I was growing up.

“However, my father spent 20 years in jail and upon his release, he simply disappeared. My older brother and I are subject to a term that we never thought would apply to us – ‘children from a broken home’.

“I thank God for a mother who believes that coming from a broken home is not a hopeless condition, if you make good use of the broken pieces.”

Another boy, Michael, is only 5, but has already experienced Christmas without Mom and Dad, twice. Both his parents are currently serving time in prison. Michael is living with his grandmother, but it is not quite the same as having his own parents care for him.

With the advent of a rising trend in divorces, children from broken marriages often end up living with siblings from different parent – resulting in the term, blended families.

In addition, modern women who cannot conceive now resort to surrogate motherhood, which reminds us of the story of Sarah and Hagar in the Bible.

Even in the book of Genesis, this resulted in years of confusion, jealousy, and pain for Abraham and his family.

These examples do not begin to reveal how broadly the term ‘family’ is being stretched these days.

Who would have imagined the number of children who were raised by grandparents in the ‘50s and ‘60s, are now being raised by maids - because their parents cannot or will not do the job?

Who would have imagined that children would be removed from their homes to protect them from their own parents because of parental abuse?

Who would have imagined that singles and homosexual couples would be allowed and even encouraged to adopt children?

While all these unconventional family units are emerging, let us ask ourselves what is attitude the church has towards such families, and how is the church reaching out to people from these families?

Ask any divorced woman whether her friends in church treat her differently after the divorce.

Continued on next page

Friar Talk (continued from previous page)

Does the fact that her spouse was the unfaithful partner matter to her friends?

Ask any teenage girl pregnant out of wedlock whether her fellow parishioners offer any support, or simply conclude that she is a sinner?

In the Bible, the account of the birth and early life of Moses was, in part, about the strains that life can place upon a family and about how important strong family ties are.

I find it interesting that it was the courage and creativity of the women involved that eventually saved baby Moses, who otherwise would have died as part of Pharaoh's edict.

I have seen countless women go to extraordinary measures to protect their children from dangerous circumstances, as the mother of Moses did for him. It was a classic example of family life at its best, people working to shelter and protect a child.

Similarly, lessons can be learnt from Pharaoh's daughter. She was a perfect stranger to Moses and his family, yet she was willing to provide a home and a safe haven for the baby – not because Moses was her flesh and blood, but simply because she had found him a place in her heart.

Although the underlying theme from this story is about family life, it is however as far removed from the "ideal family" many of us are akin too.

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However, we cannot assume that everyone must conform to the same idyllic image of family life that mirrors our own.

In reality, our image of a perfect family may be out of the reach for many people, oftentimes, through no fault of theirs.

During the month of May, let us light three tea-light candles on each Sunday of May. Let us be more aware of the different family units around us and pray for those who yearn to live as a happy family – regardless of their circumstances.

Let us also make an effort to lend support to anyone in need of family support and always radiate positive energy to those around us:



- **1st candle:**
We light the candle for all parents who have loved and laughed and especially the mothers who have laboured. We also pray for those children who weep and rage for their "vanished" parents - in the faith that God is present in every child's suffering and in every child's joy.



- **2nd Candle:**
We light the candle for all parents alive today, who still love and laugh and labour for their children. We also pray for those parents who watch their children die of starvation or become victims of violence. We light this candle in the hope of a world where all parents may raise their children in peace and with dignity and delight.



- **3rd Candle:**
We light this candle because Jesus was born of a woman and was nurtured in her love. We light this candle because God is Love and we are made in the image of love. Parenthood is a gift that focuses on this image of love.

Akan Datang upcoming events

APRIL

24 April 2003: Talk by Fr. Connor on "Sanctification of ordinary work"

Father Connor from Opus Dei will be giving a talk on Thursday, 24 April 2003, 8 pm at 24 Greenbank Park (off Upper Bukit Timah Road). The topic: "Sanctification of ordinary work." All are welcome.

29 April to 4 May 2003: Choice Asian Conference

This is the bi-annual Choice conference for all the Choice committee members from these Asian countries, Japan; Taiwan; Hong Kong; Philippines; Korea; Malaysia; Indonesia & Singapore, to come together and share their views and experience on the Choice programme in their

respective countries. The 2003 Choice Asian Conference will be held in Jakarta. Due to concerns about SARS, Singapore will not be attending this event. Please pray for the safety of the participants and for a successful conference.

April Choice Weekend has been cancelled in view of SARS.

MAY

May Choice Weekend will be from 30 May to 1 June 2003

If you know of any friends who may be interested to attend the weekend, please contact Terence & Stephanie Ho at 9695 6599 / 6219 0291 or email Choice@cheerful.com

Choice Committee 2003/4

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It's time to move on a note from the communications committee

Greetings fellow Choicers!

While newer Choicers may not yet have heard of *Moving On*, those of you whose Choice Weekend experience goes back further are probably familiar the Choice newsletter.

The objective of this newsletter is to allow all Choice participants to remain in touch with the Choice programme, the Community and its activities.

Through the years, dedicated Choicers have contributed articles and worked tirelessly to ensure that the newsletter remained a vital communication lifeline between individual Choicers and

the Choice Community at large.

In an effort to make this lifeline more relevant and interesting, the new Communication Committee would like to update the format and content of the newsletter.

For starters, we will be changing the name of the newsletter.

Although there are fond memories associated with the existing name, *Moving On* does quite reflect the main purpose of the newsletter.

Following the Choice Weekend, the idea is not so much to "move on", but to continue that journey started at the Weekend, to build deeper, more trusting and loving relationships with our family, friends and the rest of the world.

Therefore, this edition will be the swan song of *Moving On* and we invite you now to suggest a new name for our newsletter.

Remember, this newsletter is really for all of you and hence, your ideas and input makes all the difference.

Send your suggestions to KA_Choice@hotmail.com.

The closing date is 31 May 2003 and if chosen, the winning name bags a mystery prize. Meanwhile, God bless as you strive to Know, Love and Serve Him.

Happy Easter!

Kelvin & Angela, Gerry