

Blessed Barbe Acarie
(Marie of the Incarnation)

Born 1 February 1566, Paris, France
Died 18 April 1618, Pontoise, France

Barbe's mother arranged her to marry Pierre Acarie, a prominent businessman from a powerful family. They had six children and Barbe lived the life of a society matron, so beautiful and charming that she was dubbed "la belle Acarie."

Pierre disapproved of her romance novels and brought home some pious books instead. Barbe opened one to be polite and the words of Saint Augustine, "He is indeed a miser for whom God is not enough", captured her attention and moved her deeply. Soon Pierre went from worrying that Barbe was too frivolous to complaining that she spent too much time at the Church.

He had her denounced from the pulpit and temporarily barred from the sacraments. In 1590 Pierre was caught up in a failed rebellion against the king and went into exile, leaving his financial affairs in chaos and Barbe and her children homeless. She held off their creditors and with no help from Pierre managed to return their family to solvency. She even convinced the king to allow Pierre to return to Paris.

All this time, Barbe was growing spiritually. After reading the autobiography of Teresa of Avila, she had a dream in which Teresa asked her to introduce the Discalced Carmelite Order into France. Barbe considered the idea ridiculous, but when Teresa visited again, she could not ignore her wishes. This was a delicate mission: Barbe had to win permission from the French king, who was not enthusiastic about importing nuns from Spain. Her Carmels (convents) proved so successful that they expanded to England and northern Europe. After Pierre's death in 1613, Barbe entered the Carmel at Amiens. She died on Easter, and her feast day is 18 April. She is a patron of pregnant women and difficult births.

The Genius of Barbe Acarie:

Combining mystical experiences with the management skills of a born homemaker, Barbe nurtured a demanding husband and family while reaching out to society at large.

Reflection:

*"Charm is a deceptive and beauty fleeing;
The woman who fear the LORD is to be praised."*

Proverbs 31.30

Gallick, Sarah; The Big Book of Women Saints, p. 109