

WHAT IT TAKES ... TO GIVE

by Michael Glynn SPS

You could say that Pauline Jaricot had it made. She had everything going for her. She was young, rich, beautiful. She had a wonderful home and a wonderful time. She was in love, and her family got along fine with the boy. Having a millionaire (in francs, anyway) for a father meant that there was a country house for the summer and a house in town for the *season*. Pauline was the belle of the ball during the season.

And there was that heady thing, the envy of the other girls – envy, and that sincerest form of flattery, imitation. They copied her hair styles. She was clever at designing accessories for her dresses; they copied those, too. It's something to turn the head, being a leader of fashion at seventeen.

There *was* one other thing. Pauline Jaricot was a very *good* girl, despite a hasty temper, a quick tongue, and a lot of vanity.

CHOOSING HER PATH IN LIFE

She had courage too. It took great courage to do what she did one Sunday. She came to Mass in a hideously ugly dress. It was dullish purple, and it hung like a sack. There were titters in church, half-suppressed gasps. She was mortified, naturally. She was humiliated, sick with shame. But she knew what she was doing; it was quite deliberate. She was making a break with triviality. She had only one life. She was going to make it mean something.

You don't suddenly retire from the jet set without feeling the claws – she could have written a book about that. But she didn't have time.

Others people's troubles and deprivations, that's what she wrote about. Her country was in turmoil, and its practice of religion had slipped. People were suffering in hospitals. Children were being abandoned in China. The missions were in need of all kinds of support. All this bothered her. Her sympathy extended to the poor because of their squalid homes and wretched working conditions as well as to the rich who had lost their money.

GETTING INVOLVED

But what could a teen-age girl do about the woes of the whole world? Well, she could forget about them. Or blame everyone else for them. Or make shocked noises, and leave it at that. Pauline Jaricot took responsibility instead. She could do *something*, whatever she could, to set things right. She could give herself, her time, her energy, her money – whatever it took.

The sick and suffering bothered her, so she spent part of her days working in the hospitals. She wasn't very good at it, but they knew she cared, and that

helped. She set about making the world say its prayers; she parcelled out decades of the Rosary, one to each person, so that someone was praying a little practically all the time. After a while there were three million people in her *Living Rosary* association.

The working men and the poor? She lost her personal fortune on this one. Every last penny she had – was spent in an effort to make things better for them. She went deep into debt for the working man and she died a pauper, still trying to pay it off. Maybe that was the finest thing she did. She gave an example of justice that will stand for all time.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

You can't win them all, and Pauline failed – if you call it failure – in her effort for social justice. But she had victories too. At twenty, she got together an organization to raise funds for the missions. This project boomed. In three years it got so big that she couldn't handle it alone. She herself was *big* enough, then, to hand it over, in sweet running order, to a group of men; and she slipped into the background and claimed no credit. In a few years it was forgotten that she was the one who set the machinery going, but a Pope remembered it after she died and declared her the foundress of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith.

That Society, the principal branch of papal mission aid, is today a multi-million dollar enterprise, gathering money from the Catholics of the world and putting it to work in the developing countries, relieving suffering, promoting education, assisting the young churches in their works of charity and religion, and more important still, stimulating Catholics everywhere to pray and sacrifice for the faith.

CARING AND GIVING

Pauline Jaricot was *only a girl*, a very young girl, who lived long time ago. But she set something in motion that one hundred fifty years after her death is still doing a marvellous amount of good in the world. She cared, and she gave herself. Any one, girl or boy, man or woman, can do that much. Even you.

Charity Without Frontiers, The Life-Work of Marie-Pauline Jaricot
by Fr Charles Dillon, US POF, 1972
[credit: International Fides Service]