

Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin
(1800-1851)

The Hope of the Poor

Catechetical Activity

Ages 6-8

Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin (The Hope of the Poor, 1800-1851)

Materials Needed: Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin's biography (short version), copies of the workshop (1 per child), pencils, pencil crayons

Gathering:

1. Have the children gather around and sit quietly for a moment.
2. Ask the children to think of a time when they have donated to, or helped raise money for those who are less fortunate. Give an example of your own to prompt their thinking.
3. Provide the group with a moment to share their examples with one another.

Listening:

1. Read aloud the biography of Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin (pages 3-5) to the group. You may find it beneficial to paraphrase some parts of the biography.
2. Ask the children if they can recall all of the different people that Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin helped and welcomed into her home. Allow the children a moment to work with a partner to think of as many as possible (ex. the elderly, orphaned children, prisoners, immigrants, unemployed, physically and mentally disabled, etc).
3. Provide each group with an opportunity to share an example or two with the others.

Doing:

1. Using the "Refuge of the Poor" activity sheet on page 6, ask the children to draw pictures, symbols, and words in and surrounding the house to represent all of the people that were welcome in Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin's home.
2. Encourage the children to be creative and to add colour to their handout.
3. Allow time for the children to share their drawings with a partner.

Going:

1. Read the prayer on page 7 aloud to the children.

Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin (1800-1851)

The Hope of the Poor

Feast Day: September 24

Her Life

Émilie Tavernier was born in Montreal on February 19, 1800 in an area of Montreal known as the Land of Providence. When she was four years old, Émilie lost her mother and went to live with her paternal Aunt Marie-Anne. Her father died when she was 15. At 20, she was in Quebec, where she spent several months helping a sick relative.

In 1823, Émilie married Jean-Baptiste Gamelin. He was a fruit broker and, as well as sharing his hopes and his love for the poor, Émilie helped in the work. They had three children, but death took two of them shortly after birth and, before long, her husband and the third child had also died.

Alone at 27, Émilie turned to works of charity and welcomed the poor and needy people. She opened her house and other residences to them, and gave refuge to many. Elderly women, orphaned children, prisoners, newly arrived immigrants, the unemployed, the hearing impaired, the non-seeing, young people or young couples in difficulty, and physically and intellectually handicapped people - all knew her welcome. Throughout Montreal, people began to refer to her house as the "Refuge of the Poor".

Émilie took an active part in drives and bazars that were held to help the poor get through the Montreal winter. During the troubles of 1837-1838, she was the only person authorized to visit the *patriotes* who were incarcerated at Pied-du-Courant. She prayed with them and brought food, tobacco and letters that people had given to her to deliver to them. Known as the "Angel of the Political Prisoners", she enlisted relatives and friends to help her in the work, and together, in 1841, they formed Providence Shelter. For 15 years, Émilie's acts of charity continued, under the watchful eye of Montreal Bishop Jean-Jacques Lartigue and his successor, Bishop Ignace Bourget. Msgr. Bourget sought to have social services like Émilie's available in every parish in the diocese.

By now Émilie had taken private vows and because she wanted to be fully part of the new community, she joined the first religious. She professed first vows on March 29, 1844. The Bishop asked her, the founder, to be the superior of the community. The community

had its trials: financial challenges and epidemics, and the malice of one of its members who complained bitterly to the Bishop about the founder.

Mother Gamelin died at only 51, of cholera, on September 23, 1851. Her last will was the exhortations her daughters in religion heard from her dying lips: humility, simplicity, charity, above all, charity. Pope (now Saint) John Paul II beatified her on October 2001.

Seven years after its founding, the community of the Sisters of Providence had 50 members. In the first 75 years of the community's existence, over 6000 young women committed themselves to follow Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin. At the time of her beatification, Sisters of Providence could be found in Canada, the United States, Chile, Argentina, Haiti, Cameroon, Egypt, the Philippines, and El Salvador.

Her Spirituality

The spirituality of Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin was characterized by her compassion and concern for the poor. From earliest childhood, her mother had inculcated a habit of helping the poor by confiding in Émilie the job of giving alms to the people who came to the door looking for help. When she was living with her elder brother François, she continued the ministry of compassion. She had a table at the house that was always ready to welcome beggars who came. She called it "The King's Table".

Without counting the cost, she responded to cries for help; in the needy she discovered the voice, the face, and the will of the Lord. Her faith was lived through the events of everyday life and she relied on Providence to help her find the means to respond.

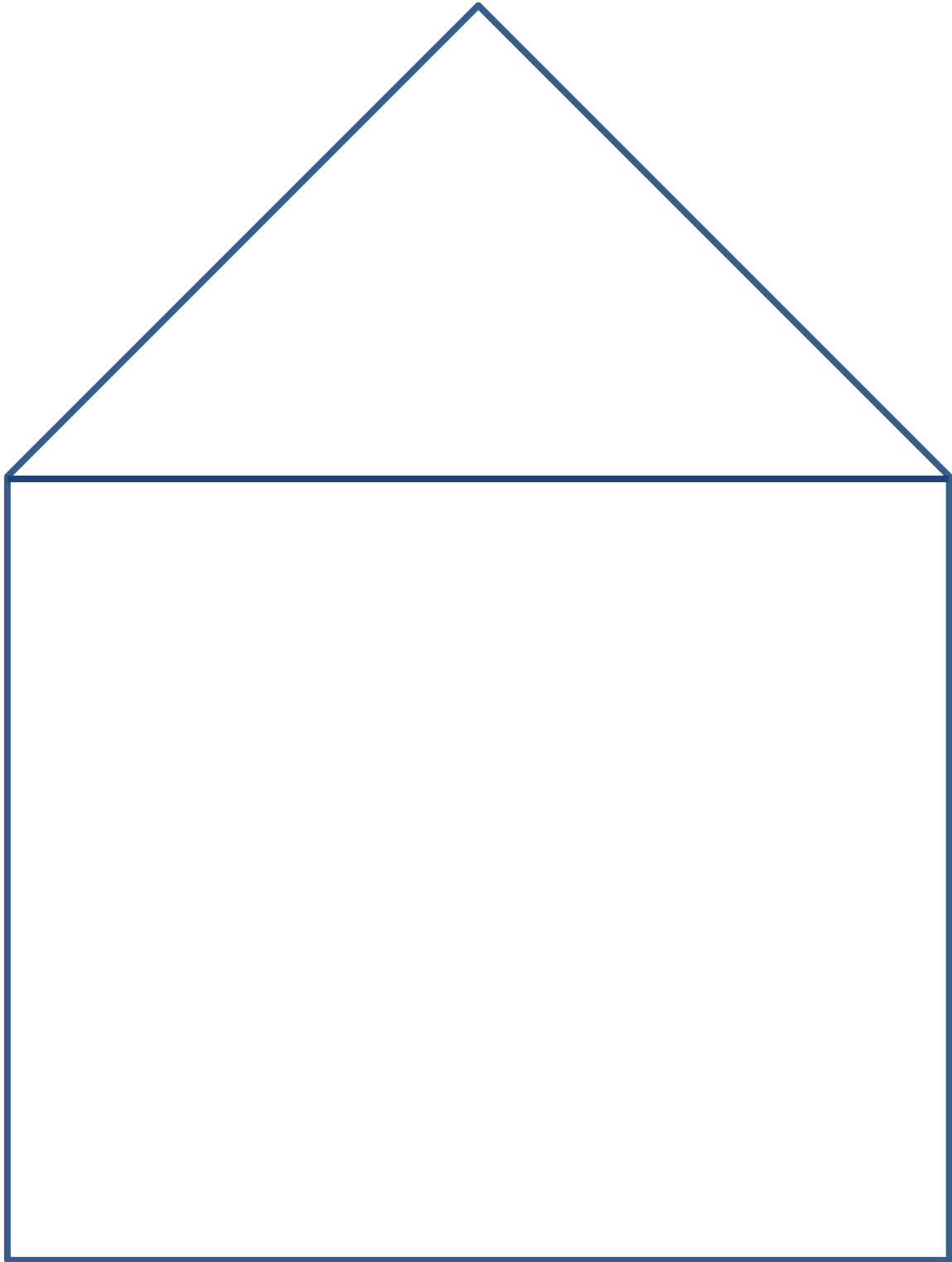
Mother Gamelin served the most destitute people in spite of fragile health, often in difficult circumstances, and with few material resources. Her acts of love for the outcast were more than humanitarian gestures; within her Christian service was a desire to bring Christ to those who suffered even as she tried to ease their physical or moral pain.

Strength was one of her preeminent virtues. Her spirit of mortification expressed itself not only in the practices of her era, but also and perhaps above all in the patience with which she bore the demands which those in authority imposed her. For example, she was asked to stop wearing a locket containing clippings from the hair of her children. Though she was used to running her own house and living an independent life, she found the

strength and the humility to force herself to accept the complexities that characterized the religious life of her time.

Even in the midst of this psychological, interior distress, she did not give in to impatience and accepted others' harsh judgments of her. Bishop Bourget recognized that he had "made her experience some tough situations in order to purify her virtue." He made it "a duty for himself to "reveal, after her death, the solid virtues that were hidden in her beautiful soul."

"Refuge of the Poor"



Prayer

Merciful God, we thank you for the bountiful blessings in our lives.

We pray today for those who are in need, and for those who are hurting.

Help us to be compassionate to the less fortunate. And guide us as we lend a helping hand to those experiencing difficult times.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Image: Courtesy of Émilie-Gamelin Centre – Museum of the Sisters of Providence (Montreal)