

# „A Year with Fr. Brisson“



*Celebrating the centenary of the death of the Servant of God*

## **THE REVEREND LOUIS BRISSON**

(1817-1908)

*Priest and founder of the institutes of the  
Oblates and Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales*

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### *First Friday Reflection (#4)*

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by

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#### **The Pentecostal Experience of Louis Brisson in 1866**

The pope had named a new, young bishop in Calvinistic Geneva: Mgr. Mermillod. It evoked violent reactions. Just like his predecessor Francis de Sales he was a young, talented and dedicated advocate of the Church. The bishop of Troyes invited him to preach the retreat for his priests. Louis Brisson attended and told admiringly about him to the Good Mother. This one advised him to talk to Mgr. Mermillod about their plan to found a congregation of priests in the spirit of Francis de Sales.

Louis Brisson consented. For the first time since the apparition of the Lord in 1844 he was prepared to talk about it with someone. He must have felt confidence with the authority of Mgr. Mermillod. The appointment took place in the consulting room of the Visitation. Rector Brisson started hesitantly but straightforwardly about his still-vague plans. After some time Mgr. Mermillod stood up spontaneously, went to the rector, embraced him and said: "My good friend, I have the same thought. Your ideas are mine ideas". Energetically he gave him all sorts of advices, recommended him to found also a third order for the laity, promised him support and told him he could always come to visit him in Geneva.

For rector Brisson this conversation was a Pentecostal experience. A door opened itself, a fresh and unprecedented feeling of hope blew in. That conversation would change his life. But not right away. Rector Brisson was not the type of person who - like the Good Mother - could ignite in fire, and then right away go to work unrelentingly. Rector Brisson needed time to digest something like that, even a Pentecostal experience. The Good Mother had understood this twenty years ago after lots of struggle and bother, and she had to wait and

see. But after 5 months she began to urge the rector to go to Geneva for a second conversation. Louis didn't feel threatened anymore because of that, but waited another half year before undertaking the voyage. In their discussions they found each other anew in their social care for the laborers. Aside from that Mgr. Mermillod dreamed already for some time about a congregation of priests in the spirit of Francis de Sales.

During that conversation that Pentecostal feeling came above again by Brisson, but now once and for all and more complete. He travelled to the Benedictine abbey of Einsiedeln right away and persuaded the almost-blind Father Perrot to write the Constitutions for his new congregation. Satisfied and fulfilled he travelled back and reported to the Good Mother, who felt an intense joy and satisfaction. It worked infectious on Brisson, who invested an unknown amount of energy in his yet-unborn congregation of priests over the next two months. When Father Perrot begged him to unveil a bit more about the secret of his new congregation, Louis Brisson wrote him a confidential account of the apparition of the Lord. It was the first time after 30 years he wrote about it to anybody. Candidly he mentioned "the aversion of my mathematical mind for the imagination of a pious sister. How I suffered from that aversion, cannot be told."

Rector Brisson went on, wrote different letters to Father Perrot, infected with his enthusiasm Mgr. Mermillod, who at that point was half way ready to become the founder of that congregation. He wrote that Louis had to go on with his work and that he would consult in Paris with Mgr. de Seguer and than would let him know about what they were going to decide. Brisson felt still supported by the authority of Mgr. Mermillod and placed himself on the second place. At the same time he wrote with energy to Mgr. de Segue: "The time has come to spread the spirit of Francis de Sales on a large scale. Lots of priests confirm that and the Benedictines of Einsiedeln felt similarly, convinced that this spirit is going to renew the priesthood."

Two events brought on the decision.

After her turn as superior the Good Mother was called to Freiburg. In punctual obedience she left Troyes, while her dream was realized. Louis Brisson accompanied her.

On the way they paid a visit to Geneva and Mgr. Mermillod. Brisson proposed that the bishop would found the congregation in Geneva, with Troyes as second establishment. The secretary said candidly that this was impossible and that the bishop at the most could cover the foundation with his name and could exert influence: "You yourself will have to fulfil this assignment, even if it takes your life".

These words hit rector Brisson like a stroke of lightning: "I am not capable of that. I feel myself having to break iron with my hands."

In this mood he took the Good Mother to Freiburg. Did she sense that? Did they talk about that? What was to be expected happened. The Good Mother fell ill. With heart and soul she was in Troyes where a new congregation of priests was being born. Wasn't she the mother thereof? She held on for three weeks. Then Louis Brisson was requested to bring her back. Brisson was delighted and relieved when she had returned. When they travelled back together they knew: it is good like this, we can start. With the Good Mother beside him, rector Brisson was prepared to become founder and establish the new congregation.

And with his level-headed, businesslike inclination he started to raise funds, travelled for that purpose to Madame de Troussel in Belgium and acquired considerable gifts from the Visitations in Reims, Paris and Nancy. He bought a house near the Rue de Terrasses and waited for God to send him men. All sort of things would happen, but the Pentecostal experience lie embedded in his heart. He would never hesitate anymore or feel himself insecure.

+ May God Be Blessed +