

Mother Saint-Bernard (Virginie Fournier), NDPS (1848 – 1918)

Born on the South Shore of Quebec, Virginie is the third of a family of nine children. When she is three years old, her eyes are affected by a serious insolation and she will bear the effects of this her whole life. She attends a school run by the Sisters of Jésus-Marie, from which she graduates. She completes her studies with a year of specialisation in Botany. When she is nineteen, she is admitted to the noviciate of the Sisters of Jésus-Marie. But a few days before entering the community, the conditions of her eyes worsen and Virginie is found unfit for religious life.



In 1869, following several economic difficulties, the Fourniers are forced to sell their land and move to Stanfold (Princeville), in the Eastern Townships, and then to Fall River, Massachusetts (U.S.A.), in 1872. Virginie devotes herself to her family and parish, but her desire to enter religious life does not fade away. In 1878 and in 1880 she makes two more attempts to enter religious life, but both fail always because of her illness.

In July 1892, she receives a letter from Mother Saint-Norbert of the Sisters of Jésus-Marie, inviting her to participate in Father Brousseau's works. Driven by Divine Providence, Virginie accepts to take part in this project and finally embraces religious life, after 25 years. She consecrates herself to God on August 28, 1892, thus becoming the foundress of the Sisters of Notre-Dame du Perpétuel-Secours, and takes the name of Mother Saint-Bernard. Under her leadership, the congregation slowly takes off and its mission develops. On May 4, 1895, she is elected Superior General. At the same time she also serves as mistress of novices, treasurer, secretary and teacher.

In 1898, she is relieved of her office as Superior General and dedicates herself to serving the elderly, the poor, helping in the kitchen and in the laundry room; she cares for the sick, teaches children and, because of her knowledge of medicinal plants, becomes pharmacist. By serving in so many different ways and taking up humble tasks, she offers to her sisters an example of simplicity, humility, compassion and unconditional love for the poorest. Worn out by illness and numerous trials, Mother Saint-Bernard dies on April 30, 1918.

QUOTATION: *"May His will be done: this is my daily motto in every circumstance."*