



Saint of the Day for December 1st
Saint Charles de Foucauld's
(September 15, 1858 – December 1, 1916)

Image: Monument Charles de Foucauld |
photo by Rabanus Flavius

Saint Charles de Foucauld's Story

Born into an aristocratic family in Strasbourg, France, Charles was orphaned at the age of 6, raised by his devout grandfather, rejected the Catholic faith as a teenager, and joined the French army. Inheriting a great deal of money from his grandfather, Charles went to Algeria with his regiment, but not without his mistress, Mimi.

When he declined to give her up, he was dismissed from the army. Still in Algeria when he left Mimi, Charles reenlisted in the army. Refused permission to make a scientific exploration of nearby Morocco, he resigned from the service. With the help of a Jewish rabbi, Charles disguised himself as a Jew and in 1883, began a one-year exploration that he recorded in a book that was well received. Inspired by the Jews and Muslims whom he met, Charles resumed the practice of his Catholic faith when he returned to France in 1886. He joined a Trappist monastery in Ardeche, France, and later transferred to one in Akbes, Syria. Leaving the monastery in 1897, Charles worked as gardener and sacristan for the Poor Clare nuns in Nazareth and later in Jerusalem. In 1901, he returned to France and was ordained a priest.

Later that year Charles journeyed to Beni-Abbes, Morocco, intending to found a monastic religious community in North Africa that offered hospitality to Christians, Muslims, Jews, or people with no religion. He lived a peaceful, hidden life but attracted no companions.

A former army comrade invited him to live among the Tuareg people in Algeria. Charles learned their language enough to write a Tuareg-French and French-Tuareg dictionary, and to translate the *Gospels* into Tuareg. In 1905, he came to Tamanrasset, where he lived the rest of his life. A two-volume collection of Charles' Tuareg poetry was published after his death.

In early 1909, he visited France and established an association of laypeople who pledged to live by the Gospels. His return to Tamanrasset was welcomed by the Tuareg. In 1915, Charles wrote to Louis Massignon: "The love of God, the love for one's neighbor...All religion is found there...How to get to that point? Not in a day since it is perfection itself: it is the goal we must always aim for, which we must unceasingly try to reach and that we will only attain in heaven."

The outbreak of World War I led to attacks on the French in Algeria. Seized in a raid by another tribe, Charles and two French soldiers coming to visit him were shot to death on December 1, 1916.

Five religious congregations, associations, and spiritual institutes—Little Brothers of Jesus, Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Little Sisters of Jesus, Little Brothers of the Gospel, and Little Sisters of the Gospel—draw inspiration from the peaceful, largely hidden, yet hospitable life that characterized Charles. He was beatified in 2005 and canonized in 2022.

Reflection - The life of Charles de Foucauld was eventually centered on God and was animated by prayer and humble service, which he hoped would draw Muslims to Christ. Those who are inspired by his example, no matter where they live, seek to live their faith humbly yet with deep religious conviction.