



## **Bl. Charles de Foucauld**

**Born:** 15 September 1858 Strasbourg, France

**Died:** 1 December 1916 (aged 58) Tamanrasset, French Algeria

**Beatified:** 13 November 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI

**Feast:** 1 December

Charles Eugène de Foucauld (15 September 1858 – 1 December 1916) was a French Catholic religious and priest living among the Tuareg in the Sahara in Algeria. He was assassinated in 1916 and is considered by the Catholic Church to be a martyr. His inspiration and writings led to the founding of the Little Brothers of Jesus among other religious congregations. He was beatified on 13 November 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI.

As an officer of the French Army in North Africa he first developed his strong feelings about the desert and solitude. Toward the end of October 1886, he went through a conversion experience at the Church of Saint Augustin in Paris under Henri Huvelin guidance.

### **Biography**

Charles de Foucauld was born in a house located 3, Place Broglie in Strasbourg, France. In 1890, de Foucauld joined the Cistercian Trappist order first in France and then at Akbès on the Syrian-Turkish border. He left in 1897 to follow an undefined religious vocation in Nazareth. He began to lead a solitary life of prayer near a convent of Poor Clares and it was suggested to him that he be ordained. In 1901, he was ordained in Viviers, France, and returned to the Sahara in French Algeria and lived a virtually eremitical life. He first settled in Béni Abbès, near the Moroccan border, building a small hermitage for "adoration and hospitality", which he soon referred to as the "Fraternity".

He moved to be with the Tuareg people, in Tamanghasset in southern Algeria. This region is the central part of the Sahara with the Ahaggar Mountains (the Hoggar) immediately to the west. Foucauld used the highest point in the region, the Assekrem, as

a place of retreat. Living close to the Tuareg and sharing their life and hardships, he made a ten-year study of their language and cultural traditions. He learned the Tuareg language and worked on a dictionary and grammar. His dictionary manuscript was published posthumously in four volumes and has become known among Berberologists for its rich and apt descriptions. He formulated the idea of founding a new religious institute, under the name of the Little Brothers of Jesus.

On 1 December 1916, de Foucauld was dragged from his fortress by a gang of armed bandits led by El Madani ag Soba, who was connected with the Senussi Bedouin. They intended to kidnap de Foucauld, but when the gang was disturbed by two guardsmen, one startled bandit (15-year-old Sermi ag Thora) shot him through the head, killing him instantly. The murder was witnessed by sacristan and servant Paul Embarek, an African Arab former slave liberated and instructed by de Foucauld.

The French authorities continued for years searching for the bandits involved. In 1943 El Madani fled French forces in Libya to the remote South Fezzan. Sermi ag Thora was apprehended and executed at Djanet in 1944.

De Foucauld was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on 13 November 2005, and is listed as a martyr in the liturgy of the Catholic Church.

## **Legacy**

Charles de Foucauld inspired and helped to organize a confraternity within France in support of his idea. This organisation, the Association of the Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, consisted of 48 lay and ordained members at the time of his death. This group, notably Louis Massignon, the world-famous scholar of Islam, and René Bazin, author of a best-selling biography, *La Vie de Charles de Foucauld Explorateur en Maroc, Ermite du Sahara* (1921), kept his memory alive and inspired the family of lay and religious fraternities that include Jesus Caritas, the Little Brothers of Jesus and the Little Sisters of Jesus, among a total of ten religious congregations and nine associations of spiritual life. Though originally French in origin, these groups have expanded to include many cultures and their languages on all continents.

The 1936 French film *The Call of Silence* depicted his life.

In 1950, the colonial Algerian government issued a postage stamp with his image. The French government did the same in 1959.

In 2013, partly inspired by the life of de Foucauld a community of consecrated brothers or monacelli (little monks) was established in Perth, Australia, called the Little Eucharistic Brothers of Divine Will.