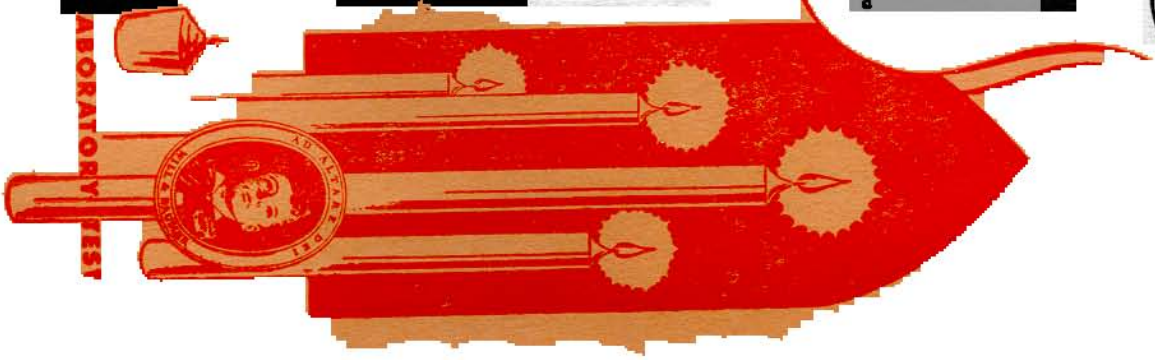


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The CORD

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The Liturgy of the Holy Mass: II

Father Daniel A. Hurley, O.F.M.

Since all Religions not legitimately prevented ought to be present for daily Mass,¹ it is fitting that we continue to meditate upon the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in order that this spiritual exercise may become more beneficial to our spiritual lives. This daily union of ourselves with the priest in offering up the Holy Sacrifice really means the uniting of ourselves with Christ Himself in the renewal of the holocaust of Himself to His Father. "Now the sacrifice of the New Law signifies that supreme worship by which the supreme offerer himself, who is Christ, and in union with him all the members of the Mystical Body, pay God the honor and reverence that are due him."²

The "Mass of the Faithful", the sacrificial part of the Mass, begins with an exchange of greetings between the priest and the congregation. The priest kisses the altar, a symbol of Christ the Cornerstone,³ and turns toward the people and says, "The Lord be with you." This prayerful greeting is returned by the people through the Mass-server who replies, "And with thy spirit." The priest symbolically greets Christ when he kisses the altar and then turns and wishes Christ's blessing upon the people; the people wish the same blessing to the priest. This mutual exchange of greetings expresses the love and respect of one for the other, fellow members of the Mystical Body of Christ. This reciprocal greeting is made several times during the Mass, and is especially appropriate at the beginning of this act of sacrifice, a liturgical act of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. When the priest turns again to face the altar, he says aloud, "Let us pray," thus inviting all present to join with him in the prayers that follow, the offertory prayers.

The first of these prayers is the so-called Offertory chant, which the priest recites while standing in the middle of the altar with his hands folded before his breast. Many authorities of the liturgy think that this chant is the antiphon that preceded a psalm that the choir used to sing at this point of the Mass. These authorities say that in the early days of the Church, the bread and wine for the sacrifice,

¹Cf. Canon 595, No. 1, n. 1.

²Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*.

³Cf. Matt. 21, 42.

as well as other gifts for the priest's support, were brought to the altar by the people in solemn procession. During this procession of the people bringing their gifts to the altar, the choir sang a psalm with an antiphon. Such a practice as the offertory procession has not been in use for many centuries, but there is still a reminder of this procession in the antiphon which is retained in the Mass as the Offertory chant.

The offertory chant, like the Introit and the Gradual, is proper to the Mass of the day and continues the theme of the Mass as introduced by the Introit. This chant repeats the thought of the Mass of the day, or at least refers to the spirit of the season. In our conference on the earlier part of the Mass, we saw that the thought of the Mass of the day is expressed by the changeable parts of the Mass. To illustrate the expression of the theme of the day's Mass we referred to the Mass of the Sunday after Easter, or Low Sunday. Turning again to the Mass of this Sunday, we discover that the Offertory chant is:

"An angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and said to the women, 'He whom you seek is risen as He said,' alleluia."⁴

The joy of the Easter season, which we found expressed so often in the earlier parts of the day's Mass, is emphasized again by the angel's announcement about the Risen Christ.

After the Offertory chant the priest uncovers the chalice which, at the beginning of the Mass, he had placed on the altar. Having removed the veil from the chalice, the priest puts the chalice aside to his right for the moment, and takes the paten which was resting on top of the chalice and which contains the host, or altar bread. Taking the paten in both hands, he raises it to the level of his eyes, and in this way he makes the offering of the bread to God. He accompanies his action with the recital of the prayer for the offering of the bread, the *Suscipe*. Holding aloft the paten containing the offering of bread, the celebrant raises his eyes to heaven as he begins offering of bread, the celebrant raises his eyes toward the paten. His the prayer, and then he lowers his eyes again toward the paten. His action of raising up the bread and elevating his eyes signifies that he offers "this spotless host" which he holds in his hands to God Himself. Yet, his awareness of his unworthiness to make an offering to God causes the priest, "Thy unworthy servant," to lower his eyes almost immediately. The words of the prayer clearly indicate the meaning of the actions of the priest as he offers this bread to God:

"Accept, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this spotless host
Which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and
true God, to atone for my numberless sins, offenses and negligences;
on behalf of all here present and likewise for all faithful Christians
4Cf. Mat. 28.

living and dead, that it may profit me and them as a means of salvation
unto life everlasting. Amen."

Both the actions and the words of the priest, as he offers the bread, remind us of the actions and the words of our divine Savior at the last Supper: "These things Jesus spoke, and raising his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, the hour has come . . . Holy Father, keep in thy name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are.'"⁵ As Jesus addressed His sacrificial prayer in the Upper Room to His "Holy Father", so the priest in the Mass follows His example. Our consideration of the Collect, in the previous conference, showed us that the Church generally addresses her prayers directly to God through the intercession of His divine Son. So, in the prayer of the offering of the bread, the Church, through the priest, prayerfully offers this gift to the "almighty and eternal God" under the loving title of "holy Father." This form of address reminds us also of the special affection our Seraphic Father had for the Lord's Prayer. In assigning this prayer to the Office for the Brothers of his Order, St. Francis had in mind the injunction of his divine Master: "In this manner shall you pray, 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'"⁶

The "spotless host" offered to God must be of the purest bread, without blemish or impurity, to be a worthy offering to the All-Holy One in heaven. Ever conscious of his own littleness and frailty, the priest offers this gift to God to make atonement first of all for himself, because he is guilty of "sins, offenses and negligences," all of which make him an "unworthy servant." He knows that he is in need of atonement because he is so far removed from the holiness of the Great High-Priest, Who is "holy, innocent, undefiled and set apart from sinners."⁷ Yet, if his offering is deemed acceptable by the "living and true God", his action may profit him "as a means of salvation unto life everlasting."⁸

The priest offers the gift also for "all here present," and so, as we assist at Mass, we should realize that the offering is being made not just by the priest and for the priest, but by us in union with him and for ourselves as well. The words "for all here present" in the offertory prayer should encourage us who assist at Mass to be well aware of what is taking place and to join ourselves to the actions and words of the priest. "Nor should Christians forget to offer themselves, their cares, their sorrows, their distress and their necessities in union with their divine Savior on the Cross."⁸ If we are to offer ourselves to God in the

⁵John 17, 1, 11.

⁶Mat. 6, 9.

⁷Heb. 7, 26.

⁸Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*.

Mass, how much we should strive to remove all trace of blemish or unworthiness from our souls.

As a loving Mother, the Church does not forget any of her children when she offers the gifts at the altar through the hands of her sacred minister. The inclusion of "all faithful Christians living and dead" is an expression of the catholicity of the Church and the Communion of Saints. "It is true that public prayers, prayers, that is, offered by Mother Church, because of the dignity of the Spouse of Christ, excel any other kind of prayer . . . (yet) all prayer is immensely helpful to the Mystical Body. In that Body, thanks to the Communion of Saints, no good can be done, no virtue practiced . . . without its contributing something also to the salvation of all."⁹ Uniting ourselves with the priest in offering ourselves along with the "spotless host" which is to become the Body and Blood of the divine Victim, we place ourselves in a position that will "profit (us) . . . unto life everlasting". We beseech our heavenly Father to accept the offering of ourselves with His Son in order that this joint offering may be the means of our receiving the application of the merits of this sacrifice, which is the renewal of the infinitely meritorious Sacrifice of the Cross.

As the priest ends the prayer of the offering of the Host, he makes the Sign of the Cross with the paten over the altar and places the host on the corporal, the white linen square which covers the middle surface of the altar. This action reminds us that "the cross and the altar are holy places, where, though in a different manner, one and the same sacrifice were once or is now offered. The very same body that hung upon the cross was once deemed worthy to bear the atoning sacrifice for the world, so now is the altar."¹⁰

Bread is one of the elements used in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; the other element is wine. As the bread that is to become the Body of Christ must be made from pure wheat flour, so the wine that is to be changed into the Blood of Christ must be made from grapes. This wine must be fully fermented and nothing must be added to it to lessen its purity and genuineness. Having made the offering of the bread to God, the priest now prepares the wine for the sacrifice. He pours the wine into the chalice and then adds a few drops of water to it. This action is in imitation of the example of Christ at the Last Supper. At that time our divine Savior had celebrated the traditional Feast of the Passover with His Apostles, observing the customary ritual of the Passover meal. It was at the conclusion of this meal that

⁹Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*.

¹⁰Gthr. Nichols, *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1949, p. 555.

Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist. In traditional style our Savior prepared the cup of wine for the Passover meal by mixing a few drops of water with the wine. In prescribing this traditional ritual to be observed during the Mass, the Church has given the action a symbolic meaning. This symbolism is expressed in the prayer the priest says as he makes the Sign of the Cross over the cunct of water and pours a few drops into the chalice of wine.

"O God, who has established the nature of man in wondrous dignity and even more wondrously has renewed it, grant that through the mystery of this water and wine, we may be made partakers of His divinity, who has dignified to become partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the union of the Holy Ghost, God world without end. Amen."

In the symbolism expressed by this prayer, the Church would have us understand that the wine is a symbol of Christ and the water is a symbol of man; the wine represents the divine nature of Christ and the water represents His human nature. In this prayer the priest prays that we human beings may have a share in the divine life through the merits of Jesus Christ "who though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men."¹¹ It is through Christ our Savior and the infinite value of His redemptive sacrifice that we have been "bought with a great price";¹² so that we are able to have a share in the divine life. We are made to understand that God has "predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons."¹³

In this prayer reference is made to the two mysteries of our Faith that are the source of grace by which we are raised to the supernatural life, namely, the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Mystery of the Redemption. In the former we believe that God became man; in the latter we believe that the God-Man offered Himself as a ransom for our sins. Jesus Christ dignified human nature by assuming it to Himself; He died on the Cross that all men might be raised to a participation of the life of God through grace. The union of the human and divine natures in the Person of the Son of God culminated in the passion and death of Christ Incarnate and the Redemption of the whole of mankind. Calling to mind the fact that our divine Savior united in His Person the human nature with the divine, the priest prays that we who have been created men may be elevated through the work of Christ to

¹¹Phil. 2, 7.

¹²1 Cor. 6, 20.

¹³Ephes. 1, 4.

become "partakers of divinity". Although God created us less than the angels, He "has not spared even his own Son, but has delivered Him up for us all,"¹⁴ and has given "the power of becoming sons of God to those who believe in his name."¹⁵

The priest then stands before the middle of the altar and elevates the chalice containing the wine and as he does so he raises his eyes toward heaven. While performing this action, he recites the following prayer:

"We offer unto Thee, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, humbly begging Thy mercy, that it may rise before Thy divine majesty with a pleasing fragrance for our salvation, and for that of the whole world. Amen."

Lifting up the chalice and directing his eyes to heaven, the celebrant indicates by his action that he is making an offering to God, an offering which he designates in his prayer as the "chalice of salvation". Here the second of the elements of the Mass is offered to God. The chalice contains the wine that is to become the Blood of Christ, the price of our Redemption. It is called the "chalice of salvation" in anticipation of the changing of the wine it contains into the Precious Blood that "washed us from our sins."¹⁶

As one "taken from among men . . . (and) appointed for men in the things pertaining to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices,"¹⁷ the priest speaks in "behalf of the people, so also for himself"¹⁸ when he uses the words "we offer" in the prayer of the offering of the wine. The union of the faithful with Christ has just been symbolized in the mixing of the water with the wine; so now the faithful unite themselves with the divine High Priest, as He is personified by the priest standing at the altar. "That the people offer the sacrifice with the priest himself . . . is based on the fact that the people unite their hearts . . . with the prayers or intention of the priest, even of the High Priest himself, so that in the one and the same offering of the victim and according to a visible sacerdotal rite, that they may be presented to God the Father."¹⁹

We know that this intention of the priest in making this offering is explicitly stated in the prayer, "that it may arise before Thy divine majesty with a pleasing fragrance." When Noe offered a holocaust (burnt-offering) to God after he and his family had been saved from destruction by the deluge, his offering was found acceptable by God:

¹⁴Rom. 8, 32.

¹⁵John 1, 12.

¹⁶Apoc. 1, 5.

¹⁷Heb. 5, 1.

¹⁸Heb. 5, 3.

¹⁹Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*.

"The Lord smelled a sweet savor . . ." and promised never to destroy the earth by water.²⁰ We pray that our offering may rise up to God and be found acceptable and pleasing to Him "for our salvation and that of the whole world." May this offering of these gifts to God be the means of satisfying divine justice and obtaining redemption for ourselves and for all mankind. If we sincerely unite our hearts and minds with the sentiments and words of this prayer of offering, we shall be included in the offering made by the priest in behalf of the whole Mystical Body. Such an offering will surely rise up and be found pleasing before the throne of the divine majesty.

When the prayer of offering is finished, the priest makes the Sign of the Cross with the chalice over the altar and then places the chalice on the corporal behind the host. This action repeats the symbolism expressed when the host was placed on the corporal. The elements that will become the sacrificial victim that was slain on the Cross now rest on the altar where the same sacrifice will soon be renewed.

The thought of uniting ourselves with the elements which are to become the Victim of the Sacrifice has been running through our mind as we prepared and offered the bread and wine that will soon become the "Lamb that was slain."²¹ Now the priest formally expresses this thought in the prayer which he says as he bows over the altar:

"In a humble spirit and a contrite heart, may we be accepted by Thee, O Lord, and may our sacrifice be so offered in Thy sight this day as to please Thee, O Lord God."

The offering that we make of the bread and wine, we are making in union with all the members of the Mystical Body together with Christ our Head. Conscious of this union, we are filled with a sense of unworthiness to be in such company, so we bow down in humility before the altar of God. As we unite ourselves with the great High Priest of the Sacrifice, so we wish to join ourselves with the Victim of the Sacrifice and offer ourselves with Him to God. We express this desire by using a prayer that was said centuries before by the young men in the fiery furnace. Because these young men had refused to offer false worship to idols, the king sentenced them to be thrown into a furnace of fire. Although God protected them so that the flames did not hurt them, the young men sang the praises of God and expressed their willingness to offer their lives for their faith and for the honor of God: "In a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted . . . so let our sacrifice be made in thy sight this day, that it may please thee."²²

²⁰Cf. Gen. 8, 21.

²¹Apoc. 5, 12.

²²Dan. 3, 39-40.

Such an offering was pleasing to God and the three young men were saved from death. Let us join with this prayer of the priest in the Mass and present ourselves "as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God."²² Before turning away from the elements just offered to God, the priest makes the Sign of the Cross with his hand over the bread and wine, invoking the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. This is the only place in the Mass where the Holy Spirit is invoked by name:

"Come, Thou Sanctifier, almighty and eternal God, and bless this sacrifice prepared for the glory of Thy holy name."

The priest's actions together with the words of this prayer indicate that he solemnly calls upon the Holy Spirit to bless these offerings that have been prepared for the forthcoming sacrifice. The priest raises his head, directing his eyes upward, and then, extending his arms, he raises them toward heaven, then draws them to his breast. These are actions signifying earnest supplication to God the Holy Spirit. With his right hand he makes the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine. The blessing that he makes over the elements of sacrifice indicate the blessing, or consecration, that he begs from the Holy Spirit. Pope Benedict XV teaches us that the symbolism expressed in this prayer and action is that, as the Body of our Lord was formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary at the Incarnation by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, we pray that the same Body may be formed anew upon the altar of God by the same Holy Spirit.²⁴

Now the celebrant goes to the Epistle side of the altar and washes his hands. At one time the washing of the hands at this part of the Mass had a practical significance. After the priest had handled the gifts which had been brought to the altar in the offertory procession, and in a Solemn Mass after he had handled the incense, his hands were soiled. Before continuing with the sacred action, he very appropriately washed his hands, that they might be clean when he handled the Body and Blood of Christ. Now, however, rather than a practical, the *Lavabo* has a symbolic purpose: it signifies the purity of heart, or rather purifying of the heart, before sacrificing the Holy Victim to His eternal Father. The priest washes merely the tips of his fingers as he begins to recite the psalm: "I will wash my hands in innocence, as I go around your altar, O Lord."²⁵ We are reminded of the words of our divine Savior Himself when He washed the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper before He instituted the Holy Eucharist. His words to St. Peter revealed

²²Rom. 12, 1.

²⁴c. *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Paterson, N. J., St. Anthony Guild Press, 1940.
²⁵Ps. 25, 6.

that his action was only symbolic, that is to say that the washing of only the feet signified the cleansing of the whole body. "He who has bathed needs only to wash, and he is clean all over."²⁶ The washing of the tips of his fingers symbolizes the spiritual cleansing that is proper for the priest in order that he may worthily offer the Holy Sacrifice. Aware of the sinfulness surrounding him in the world, and his own part in that sinfulness, the priest desires to cleanse himself from his faults that he may not be counted among the wicked ("Gather not my soul with those of sinners");²⁷ but that free from guilt, he may worthily approach the altar ("I walk in integrity . . . in the assemblies I will bless the Lord").²⁸

Returning to the middle of the altar, the celebrant bows over the altar and recites the following prayer:

"Accept, most holy Trinity, this offering which we are making to Thee in remembrance of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord; and in honor of blessed Mary, ever Virgin, blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles, Peter and Paul, and of these, and of all the saints; that it may add to their honor and our salvation; and may they deign to intercede in heaven for us who cherish their memory here on earth. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

In this prayer to the Holy Trinity, the priest begs the Triune God, to Whom the offering is made, that He be pleased to accept these gifts in view of what they are to become, "a propitiation for our sins."²⁹ The previous prayers of the offertory were addressed to God the Father and to God the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of God the Son. This one is addressed to the Holy Trinity.

This prayer states the purpose of the sacrifice as "a remembrance of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord." These three acts of our divine Savior, taken together, effected our redemption; so the Mass is a memorial of the sacrifice of redemption. Besides being a redemptive act, the sacrifice is an act of worship and of praise to the God-Man, Jesus Christ; it is an act offered in honor of all those who attained glory through Him, the saints. Here again the doctrine of the Communion of Saints is brought to our minds. As the saints were asked to pray for us at the beginning of the Mass (in the *Confiteor*), so now before the act of sacrifice begins, the intercession of some saints in particular (as mentioned in the *Confiteor*) and all the

²⁶John 13, 10

²⁷Ps. 25, 9.

²⁸Ibid., 11-12.

²⁹1 John 2, 2.

saints in general is sought for us as we present this offering to the Holy Trinity "that it may add to their honor and our salvation."

Finishing this prayer, the priest kisses the altar and turns to the people and says in an audible voice the *Orate, Fratres*, an invitation to the faithful to pray with him.

"Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may become acceptable to God the Father almighty."

To this invitation to pray the people reply through the Mass-server:

"May the Lord accept the sacrifice at thy hands unto the praise and glory of His name, for our advantage and that of all His holy Church."

In this exchange of prayers, the celebrant reminds us that the sacrifice is an offering in which the faithful do and ought to have a part. The priest calls it "my sacrifice and yours"; we should all unite with him to plead with God the Father to accept this sacrifice offered to Him by the whole Mystical Body. When the faithful respond with the prayer, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at thy hands . . .", they indicate that while all offer the sacrifice, the priest is the principal minister, "the minister of Christ, inferior to Christ, but superior to the people."³⁰

We have devoted our attention during this conference to that part of the Mass known as the Offertory. We have considered the actions and prayers that deal with the preparation and offering of bread and wine to God, the bread and wine that are to become the Body and Blood of Christ, the sacred Victim of the Sacrifice of the Mass. This part of the Mass comes to a close with the prayer that is known as the Secret, so-called because it is said silently. The Secret prayer resembles the Collect, which we considered previously in the Mass of the Catechumens. It resembles the Collect in two ways—in its form and in its content. As for its form, the Secret, like the Collect, is addressed in the name of the whole Church to God Himself, through the intercession of His divine Son, in union with the Holy Spirit. In content, the Secret, like the Collect, presents a petition in keeping with the thought of the feast. There is another similarity: as the Collect summarizes the prayers preceding it, so the Secret summarizes the prayers of offering that precede it. However the Secret differs from the Collect. While the Secret, like the Collect, contains a petition that has reference to the feast, unlike the Collect, the petition also includes a plea that God will accept and bless the offerings that have been made to Him, as well as an appeal that God will grant the benefits or

³⁰Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*.

rewards of the offering to the members of the Mystical Body who made the offering. The Secret for Low Sunday illustrates the characteristics of this prayer:

"We ask Thee, O Lord, to receive the gifts of Thy rejoicing Church, and even as Thou hast given her cause for such great joy, so also grant her the fruit of perpetual gladness. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who livest and reignest in union with the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen."

(To be continued)

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THREE THOUGHTFUL LYRICISTS

Sweet are the words that flow
From the ancient lyre of Plato.
In these pregnant talks one may discern
The first-born spark of many a clever turn.
For many to Plato's have wandered;
And opened, and looked, and pondered;
Then gone home, to tell
Things only drunk from the Grecian well.

Another there was, at the Grove, his pupil;
Aristotle of Macedon, who, without scruple,
Took his fill of that rich, resounding lyre.
Thus he fed, till from his sire
He strayed, for the younger one saw
The earth before him, while the law
Of his master was yet confined
To that world of ideal form refined.

Centuries later, in the faithful age,
There strolled the sandaled sage
Of the cloister, blest Scotus, grey friar
Of Oxford, who went to the Lyceum and lyre,
And beheld that ancient page.
But now with head and heart burning,
In all Assisi's holy learning,
Scotus spoke subtly of Galilean fire.

Edward O'Brien, Jr.

Crosses Over Nagasaki: VIII

Father Gerard Huber, O.F.M.

Further Developments

On December 11, 1596, Hideyoshi visited Fushimi to inspect the damage caused by the earthquake and to see to the rebuilding of the castle. After going over the plans for reconstruction, he summoned the governor of Osaka, Masuda Uemon, and the commander of Kyoto, Ishida Mitsunari and ordered them to put to death all Christian missionaries who lived in the districts of Osaka and Kyoto. News of this command spread like wildfire through the entire region. Not only priests and religious brothers, but also the laity, irrespective of position, sex, or age, rose joyfully to meet the challenge. The entire region of Osaka and Kyoto was seized by an overwhelming movement of religious fervor. Those who were already firm in their belief became still more firm; the lukewarm were aroused from their lethargy; and many who had totally abandoned the faith returned, repentant and eager to die in testimony of their Divine Master. All Christians were seized by this holy fire, and it seemed as if their only fear was to be overlooked for martyrdom. Takayama Ukon, the former commander-in-chief of the Japanese army, to whom Hideyoshi really owed his success in gaining power, thought that now surely the time had come to prove his fidelity to God by giving his blood and life. He hurried to Kyoto and appeared before the governor, Maeda Geni Hoin, firmly declaring himself a Christian. At the same time the two sons of the governor, who had been baptized by Father Peter Baptist, also presented themselves as candidates for martyrdom. It was a painful ordeal for the governor, but still further sorrow lay ahead of him. The daimyo Hosogawa Tadaoki found his young wife, Gratia, together with her maids, preparing themselves for martyrdom; and similar scenes were being enacted daily in almost all the great castles of that territory. In fact, in the entire region from Kyoto to Osaka, no one seemed able to think or speak of anything but the impending persecution. The Christians encouraged one another, while the pagans wondered at their joyful readiness to die for a mere religious belief. If such an attitude seemed madness to the pagans, they nevertheless felt deep admiration for their Christian countrymen and spoke openly against the injustice of the Taikosama. There were several violent incidents between the bonzes and their fellow Buddhists who blamed them for having

CROSSES OVER NAGASAKI: VIII

instigated the persecution through their continuous campaign of public and private slander against the Christians.

As soon as he learned of the imminent persecution, Father Organino wrote to the vice-provincial of the Jesuits in Nagasaki. This letter gives a clear picture of the state of mind of the Japanese Christians when the persecution broke out:

"The letter I send you at this time will give joy to you as well as to the Most Reverend Bishop and all missionaries. Last night I received two letters from Fushimi. They were from Mario Suwano and her niece. Both informed me that the Kampaku has given orders to the Commandant Ishida to execute all missionaries. Our servant Paul from Amakusa came running to bring us the same glad tidings. His face shone with happiness and he shouted: "The Lord has loved us first and has shed His blood for us! Now for us, too, the happy day has come when we can shed our blood for Christ!" When we heard him speak like that, our hearts nearly burst with joy. But the matter was nonetheless deeply serious. First we prepared ourselves spiritually, then took our religious garbs out of the trunks so that as faithful servants of God and loyal members of the Society of Jesus we spend whatever time remains to us in the most intensive spiritual activity. The consolations already granted by the Lord cannot be described in words. That we have obtained this grace is undoubtedly due to the prayers and the offerings of the Holy Sacrifice which the General of our Society has ordered for the intention of the Japanese mission. The Christians without exception are ready to follow us and to give their lives for Christ. This readiness is a source of unspeakable joy for us. It is being said that the only fear of the admirable Takayama Ukon is that he might not be deemed worthy of martyrdom. There are many heroic people here in Japan. The two sons of Governor Maeda, particularly Constantine, the younger, do not leave our side for a moment. Many Christians among the noble classes keep assuring us either by word or by letter that they will help us. Most remarkable is the zeal of the newly baptized. Such extraordinary fervor is certainly an effect of the holy Sacrament of Confirmation which our bishop administered here a short time ago. Lastly, I have to report that the faithful acolytes, James and John, have been staying with us constantly for several days."

In much the same vein Father Peter Baptist wrote several letters. Here, for example, is his letter to Father Augustine Rodriguez:

"I have received your letter, my dear confere, in which you informed me that you are still in good health, that in the strength of Christ you admonish the faithful to zeal and ^{steadfastness}, and that you yourself rest content in the love of God. This gave me great

consolation. Pray for us that we, too, may obtain God's help. We are always guarded now by soldiers inside as well as outside the house. Nevertheless, we are not thereby deprived of joy and consolation in the Lord. To be allowed to suffer for God is an inexpressibly great honor. According to information obtained from Brother Cosmas, the death sentence will soon be passed. The names of the condemned have been placed on an official list, and tomorrow we shall hear our sentence. We know it will be death by crucifixion. We no longer sleep at night, but spend all our time in preparation for the coming ordeal. As far as possible, we hear the confessions of the Christians who can come to us.

"Having reason to believe that this may be our last day here, we celebrated Holy Mass an hour before sunrise. The Brothers went to confession and received Holy Communion together with more than fifty Christians. Many more Christians besides these attended Mass, weeping with joy and gratitude for the graces of God. Brother Gonzales gave a short address and encouraged them to accept everything that might befall them for love of Christ. If we had a hundred lives, he said, we should wish to sacrifice them all for Christ, who sacrificed His life for us on the cross. We are all sinners, and even if we give our life, this sacrifice will not be sufficient to balance the debt of our infidelities to God. This was the general theme of his sermon. After Mass many Japanese officials came and searched the house, inquiring how many of us there were so as to make no mistake in arresting us. Then came the representative of Commander Ishida with many soldiers. I cannot describe what feelings of joy and gratitude to God filled our hearts at that moment. But only our five Japanese catechists, Leo, Paul, Bonaventure, Thomas, and Gabriel were arrested. On their way to prison they preached to the pagans continuously. They wrote us a letter as soon as they reached the prison, assuring us again that they are ready to give their lives as Christians and that they long ardently for the happiness of heaven, which, indeed, is the goal of human life. They are willing to endure everything for God but they ask us to pray for them that they may have the strength to persevere. We wrote back immediately to the effect that if it was their wish to suffer for God, then God would certainly help them, and that it was our only grief that they were separated from us. We fear that on account of our sins we have perhaps not deserved the grace of martyrdom. But we are still guarded like criminals, and our desire to die for God has not diminished. Since many soldiers and pagans surround our mission, the Christians cannot visit the church now, nor can we freely send letters.

"Brethren, pray for us, as we pray for you. Love God with joyful hearts and believe that He will give you the strength to suffer torments

and disgrace for His sake. May He, who is our only consolation in suffering, bless you. We rejoice that we are allowed to suffer humiliations for the name of Jesus Christ. May God grant you His Holy Spirit."

Father Francis Blanco wrote the following letter to a confrere in Manila:

"We have received from God the special grace to meet martyrdom. Day and night we await that moment. It is wonderful to see with how much courage our Christians are facing death. We, who observe their courage, are filled with joy. From other regions outside of Kyoto and Osaka, Christians keep coming to us and confess frankly: 'We wish to die with you.' Their only desire is to be arrested. I have not been in Japan very long and do not know the language well. I regret this very much, because I cannot converse with the Christians as freely as I would like. My dear confreres, what feelings arise in your hearts when you hear that people who have accepted the faith only a short time ago are thus looking forward to a painful and humiliating death for love of Christ, and consider this earthly life less than a handful of dust and ashes? As for myself, I can only blush for shame."

Meanwhile, the courageous Ishida was making a last desperate attempt to dissuade Hideyoshi from carrying out the edict of persecution. He urged especially that the lives of the foreign missionaries be spared. But Hideyoshi remained obdurate. It was too much for his pride to revoke a decision already made public. Ishida persisted, however, and finally succeeded in winning pardon for the Jesuits on the plea that Bishop Martinez had come to the Taikosama in the name of the viceroy of India and had brought him many costly gifts. Ishida, taking advantage of this concession, tried to press for clemency for the Franciscans, too, saying that it would be accounted an injustice if Hideyoshi pardoned the Jesuits and condemned the Franciscans. Furthermore, to pardon the Jesuits would hardly redound to their honor, since they were just as eager for martyrdom as the friars were. It would be better to annul the death sentence for the Franciscans and simply banish them from the country. This would be punishment enough, and then the Jesuits would not lose face. Ishida argued in vain. Hideyoshi's only reply was to command that the death sentence be executed as quickly as possible.

Ishida, however, managed to delay action for several days, thus enabling Father Peter Baptist to celebrate Christmas with his confreres. Father Peter describes this last Christmas in the following letter:

"Honor and glory to our beloved Lord! With indescribable spiritual joy we celebrated the Feast of the Birth of the Only-Begotten Son of God. For some time now we have been devoting ourselves to

prayer, to celebrating Holy Mass, and to adoring the Blessed Sacrament. Many Christians come to assist at Mass, but have to stand at the door of the church since they are forbidden to enter. The extremely cold weather makes this very difficult for them. Nevertheless, it was their explicit wish that we celebrate the Christmas Mass at dawn. We decorated the altar with branches of evergreen shrubs, and sang as many Christmas hymns as we knew. Complying with the wish of Captain Landecho of the *San Felipe*, Father Jerome and Brother John Pobre went to Nagasaki to report about our present situation. Until a final decision is reached, we must remain here. If it should turn out that only those Christians who have already been arrested are to be condemned to death and we are to be set free, we shall do everything we can to help those Christians even if our efforts cause us to be arrested a second time. The rumor now is that we are not to be sentenced to death, but only to banishment. I pray that God may do with us whatever will be to His greater glory.

The poor who found a haven in our hospital are no longer allowed to go out. If they have to remain under house arrest for any length of time, their food supply will give out. We always share with them whatever is donated to us. I regret very much that we do not have sufficient rice for them, even though the Christians, God reward them, support us as far as they can.

"Since I cannot write to all our conferees personally, let this letter be considered as addressed to all. And as we pray for all of you, so I ask that you pray for all of us."

Some members of the crew of the *San Felipe* who were imprisoned in Osaka received permission to celebrate Christmas in the Franciscan church there. An official led them to the mission the night before the feast and conducted them through the guard. The church door was closed again behind them, and they were strictly guarded. "The happy Father Martin de Aguirre and his catechists," wrote one of the crew, "who were persevering in their imprisonment with contentment and humility, received us with tears of gladness, and we spent the evening in conversation with them. They told us about their arrest and about their sentence to be crucified in Nagasaki because they had converted so many to Christianity. During the night we went to confession, assisted at Midnight Mass and fulfilled our duties with deep gladness of heart." After the noon meal on Christmas Day, the men were brought back to their wretched quarters in a stable where they were to remain for twenty-two more days. Except for a few oversalted sardines, a little rice, and salty radishes, they had nothing to eat. Their thin clothing was no

protection against the sub-zero weather, and they suffered much both from hunger and cold.

When the decree of amnesty for the Jesuits was published, the Japanese Christians and the Franciscans as well began to hope that they would be only mildly punished, perhaps by banishment, and that Christianity in general would be left undisturbed. But this last hope was soon destroyed. On December 31, Hideyoshi again summoned the reluctant Ishida and ordered him to remove all the Franciscans in Osaka to Kyoto where they were to be placed in the same prison with the other Franciscans. After having their noses and ears cut off, they were taken to Nagasaki to be crucified. When the friars were informed of this, they knelt in front of the altar and thanked God for the grace of being allowed to suffer in testimony of Christ, their Divine Master.

The Twenty-Four Elect

In the evening of December 31, a group of soldiers suddenly appeared before the Franciscan mission, surrounded it on all sides, and entered by force. The little community had just gathered before the altar for night prayer, together with a few Tertiaries who were serving in the mission household. The soldiers fell upon the helpless group and bound their hands to their backs with ropes and straw. Then they led the captives to jail. On leaving their beloved church, Saint Mary of the Angels, Father Peter Baptist intoned the hymn *O gloriosa Domina*, and all the others joined him, singing to the end with joyful gratitude and readiness for sacrifice.

On the same evening the Franciscans and the Christians who had been arrested in Osaka arrived in Kyoto and were imprisoned together with Father Peter Baptist and his companions. To this group were joined the three Japanese Jesuit lay brothers, Paul Miki, John Suwano, and James Kizaeon. When Ishida made his routine inspection of the prison he saw the valiant men calmly awaiting whatever was in store for them. His heart was filled with sorrow and admiration, but he was unable to assist them. He had indeed done his very best to save the condemned men, but Hideyoshi's passion had carried him far beyond the reach of decency and reason. Ishida found himself the unwilling instrument of the Taikosama's blind pride and hatred.

Strange signs appeared on the night of the arrest. In the sky a large bright cross was seen as far as Nagasaki; an earthquake, lasting almost three hours, terrified the people in Kyoto; and in the Franciscan church in Kyoto drops of bloody sweat were seen on the statue of St. Francis. These signs were so well confirmed by witnesses that they were accepted by Benedict XIV when he prepared the official documents for the beatification of the Protomartyrs.

When Father Organtino learned of the imprisonment of the three Japanese lay brothers, he wrote at once to Ishida and called attention to the fact that the three men did not belong to the Franciscan Order but to the Society of Jesus, the members of which were to be excluded from punishment according to the official declaration of the Taikosama. Ishida responded in a carefully-worded letter, expressing sincere regret for the arrest of the three Japanese Jesuits. The governor of Osaka, however, had interpreted Hideyoshi's decree of clemency to apply only to the foreign priests of the Society of Jesus. Father Rodriguez was now living in full liberty in Osaka, while the names of the three Japanese lay brothers had already been reported to Hideyoshi. If now again, Ishida argued, he would petition the Taikosama to release the Japanese Jesuits, then he could fear another outburst of rage and the very probable revocation of the decree in favor of the foreign Jesuits. Such an ill-timed petition could even lead to a general persecution of Christianity, which, in view of the Taikosama's immoderation, could mean complete destruction. Thus, in order to avoid the greater evil, he deemed it better to accept the lesser one. At this, the matter rested.

Meanwhile, what was happening to the prisoners? Father Jerome of Jesus describes in his report the events that took place between the arrest and the execution of the martyrs:

"When the persecution broke out, we were altogether eleven Franciscans in Japan. I happened to be on my way from Nagasaki to Osaka, when my confreres in Miyako, Osaka, and Nagasaki were apprehended. Thus I escaped arrest. On my arrival at the outskirts of Osaka, I was informed that the friars in Miyako had been seized. I therefore considered it better to hurry on to the city rather than return to Nagasaki. Clearly, I was in a dangerous situation. Nevertheless, I placed all my trust in God's help and entered Osaka. There I succeeded in making contact with my dear confrere Father Martin Aguirre and asked him what I should do. His answer was that I should withdraw to the home of a Japanese Christian whose name he gave me, and wear no article of religious dress until things quieted down. He was certain the persecution would end in nothing more than banishment. I obeyed. In the house mentioned I found Brother John Pobre together with the captain of the *San Felipe*, Matthias de Landecho, Father John Guervara, Father Augustine, and three Spanish gentlemen. They urged me in the strongest terms to return to Nagasaki where I would be able to meet the Portuguese governor of Macao. He had excellent connections with Hideyoshi, they told me, and hoped that through his intervention their release could be effected, and the death sentence for the condemned missionaries suspended. Uncertain as to whose directions I

should follow and knowing that Father Commissary (Father Peter Baptist) and his companions would soon be brought from Miyako to Osaka, I waited until I succeeded in having a letter brought to him. I asked him to tell me whether he really wished that I should endeavor to have him released, according to the advice I had been given, or whether I should join him and share his present sufferings and future glory. He answered me as follows:

"Dear Father Jerome, we are irrevocably condemned to death by crucifixion. Our ears and noses will be cut off. I beg you most urgently to save your life for the sake of the Christians we have to leave behind, and for the preservation of the Order in Japan. Keep yourself hidden. I oblige you to do this in virtue of the authority of our superiors in Manila. Beg God to grant us the grace to suffer for love of Him. Receive my greetings as well as those of our confreres and the Japanese Tertiaries. All are full of joy in the hope of being allowed to give their lives for Jesus Christ. As soon as we leave the prison in Osaka, you will be able to send me another letter. Dear Father Jerome, once more I petition you and command you with all my love to be content with the decree of the Taikosama. Conduct yourself in such a way that you will be able to remain in Japan. This is the task that Heaven requires of you."

"He then had Father Francis Blanco write to me, informing me that I was thereby appointed commissary of the entire Japanese mission, in the event that Father Augustine could not assume the office. I accepted. As I had been commanded, I remained hidden in Osaka and recommended to God the difficult situation in which I found myself. However, I was no longer welcome in the Christian household where I had first found refuge. A second and also a third household refused me. In deep sadness I abandoned myself to uncertainty. I wore only a poor garment to protect my body and the cold was already intense. Having wandered aimlessly to the harbor of the city, I suddenly felt a hand seize my arm and heard a voice asking: 'Where are you going, Father Jerome?' 'Wherever it pleases God,' I replied. 'Follow me,' said the voice. Two persons walked in front of me. I followed them without knowing where they were going. They led me to a pagan whom they urged to hide me well. Then they left. With a pounding heart I fell asleep, and in my dream I saw a number of crosses to which my confreres were bound. Suddenly a group of executioners started to move toward me. But then our Seraphic Father Francis appeared and said: 'No, not this one. I still have need of him.' Thereupon he disappeared. On awakening in the morning I came to know that the death sentence had been published, and an additional order had been given to arrest

without delay anyone who dared oppose or hinder the execution of the sentence. At the same time I received a letter from Father Commissary which read as follows:

"My dear Father Jerome, I understand the sorrow you suffer on being left alone and forsaken. We all admire your holy desire to die with us; but the perfection of virtue does not consist in serving God according to our own will, but in willingly accepting everything He requires of us, especially in regard to the salvation of the souls He has purchased by His Precious Blood. If at the moment when the storm broke it was of primary importance that we should not flee but stand firm in order to strengthen the Christians, so now it is of primary importance that the faithful should not be left without a shepherd. If things had not happened so quickly, I would have provided; but I lacked both time and foresight. God has repaired my lack of foresight by preventing your capture. Yet you will not be deprived of the crown you desire. It is said that all the Christians in Japan will have to die, including those who will accept the faith later on. The Christians in Miyako will certainly be executed. Their sentence has been written on the very same tablets as ours. Endeavor to strengthen those people and remind them that the Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep. If the wearing of our habit should prove a hindrance in this task, take it off, with the blessing of God. But if our dear Christians should be arrested and condemned, remember that the father has to lead the children reborn in the blood of Christ through him, and then wear the habit as the sign of our Order to which we have pledged ourselves, and as a sign of the dignity of our holy faith."

"After reading this letter, I made my way to Miyako, God knows under what perils. On my arrival I found everything quiet. Christian men and women were living in full liberty, as if the persecution had been aimed not to destroy Christianity but only to tear Japan away from the Order of St. Francis. Seeing the situation, I decided, after mature deliberation, to go to Nagasaki."

With a heavy heart Father Jerome yielded to the command of his superior, hid himself in the country and escaped death. Years later it was seen that this was in the plan of God, for it was Father Jerome who founded the second Franciscan mission in Japan in 1599, which flourished wonderfully.

(To be continued)

Transl. by Sr. M. Frances, S.M.I.C.
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You Have Wounded My Heart

*The Life of St. Charles of Sezze, Franciscan Lay Brother**

Raphael Brown, Tertiary

PART I IN THE WORLD 1. PARENTS WHO FEAR GOD

About fifty miles southeast of Rome on the way to Naples, not far from the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead of World War Two and St. Maria Goretti's home, the small town of Sezze perches on the side of a barren foothill, overlooking the flat Pontine Marshes and, beyond, the sparkling Tyrrhenian Sea and Ponziante Islands. Known as *Sezia* in classical Roman Times, it has already survived several millennia of history as a minor satellite of the Eternal City.

According to local tradition, the good news of Christ's Gospel was first preached there by St. Luke, who became the town's patron saint. About a thousand years later a holy Benedictine monk, St. Lidanus, founded near Sezze a large monastery and a basilica dedicated to St. Cecilia, and by persistent "prayer and work" began to transform the unhealthy marshes into a fruitful farmland. The remains of that venerated abbot were duly placed under the main altar of the town's cathedral.

During most of the Middle Ages, Sezze formed a part of the States of the Church, and several religious communities flourished in it. In fact, all three branches of the Order of St. Francis established friaries there.

Among the model old Catholic families at the beginning of the seventeenth century was that of a sturdy lower middle-class farmer and carpenter named Ruggero Marchionni or Melchiori (both names appear in contemporary documents). Without being rich, he owned a few fields that gave him a fair living, as well as a house facing the parish church of San Lorenzo. He married twice; his first wife left him a son and a daughter, while the second, Antonia Maccione, gave him two girls and five boys including Charles.

The Saint recorded in his autobiography this beautiful profile of his worthy father: "by his goodness he resembled the holy Tobias, of whom Scripture says that he observed the laws of God and was inclined

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toward divine worship and good deeds. By taking his life as a model, I learned to live my religion, for very often when he was at home unoccupied, he was to be seen reciting his rosary with his beads in his hand. He used to receive the Sacraments of the Church regularly, especially on feast days.

"He was a man of integrity. He had truth in his heart and on his lips. He treated everyone without deception or duplicity. To avoid conflicts and to keep one's soul calm and at peace, he used to give me this short and very useful advice: 'Have eyes not to see, ears not to hear, and a voice not to speak.' He often reminded me: 'Don't do to others what you would not want them to do to you.'

"I learned the virtue of patience from him and how to practice it. He was almost never troubled by unpleasant events. In adverse circumstances he would say: 'God will take care of us.'

"I also learned charity from him, for he always used to do all he could to help the poor. Among other graces which he had received from God was that of resetting broken bones. And crippled people were constantly in our home. He would help them all out of love for the Lord.

"He wanted us to love God above all things. Before undertaking any action, he would make the Sign of the Cross and invoke the name of God. He wanted all of us to be holy and perfect. He would always teach us the ways of God, so that we would know how to live as good Christians."

Charles was equally blessed in having a devout, even a remarkably holy mother, who educated her children more for Heaven than for this world. She was much given to prayer and devotions. She used to receive the Sacraments frequently and to visit the churches of the town. She shared her husband's charitable compassion for the poor and unfortunate. Often with other good women she begged for funds for the poor from prosperous families. She was especially devoted to St. Francis of Assisi—in fact she customarily recited the daily Office of the Franciscan lay brothers, that same lengthy Office of Our Fathers and Hail Marys that her son Charles was to recite as a friar for thirty-five years.

The Saint fully realized that God had blessed him with model parents. He wrote: "it pleased Our Lord that I should be born into this world from such virtuous persons, and therein He began His mercies toward me. For as Jesus had it recorded in the Gospel—in the parable of the good tree that produces good fruit—it is a special grace from Him to have parents who fear God, because of the good education that follows therefrom."

2. LITTLE BROTHER JOHN

It is surely of some significance that St. Charles of Sezze was born on October 19, the Feast of the great Franciscan master of prayer, St. Peter of Alcantara. Yet Charles was apparently not even aware of this interesting fact, for in his autobiography he gives his birthday as October 22, 1613. St. Peter of Alcantara (1499-1562) was canonized only a year before Charles died.

Our Saint was baptized on October 22 and received the names Giovan Carlo (John Charles).

Like other saints, as a mere babe in arms he is said to have sucked his mother's milk only once on certain days. It is also reported that while wrapped in swaddling clothes the only time he was ever heard to cry was one day when some evil woman came close to his crib, intending to hurt him. But thanks to his guardian angel's protection, he was not harmed.

Soon after little Charles was able to walk, his parents, because of their fervent devotion to St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Anthony of Padua, dressed him in a miniature grey serge Franciscan habit, complete with cord and capuche. And as he quietly stood there before her, saying nothing, his mother Antonia would exclaim affectionately: "Look at Little Brother John—now he is a novice keeping silence!" In fact he was familiarly called "Little Brother John" at home until he was three or four years old.

When he reached that age, his mother's mother, an unusually charitable and respected elderly lady named Valenza dei Pilorci, grew so fond of Charles that she insisted on his coming to live in her home.

She was quite active in helping the poor. No one who knocked on her door and asked for help was ever dismissed empty handed. Moreover, such was her tact that she would send young Charles in the evening to the homes of some needy persons who were ashamed to beg openly. The unforgettable lessons in practical Christian love of the poor which he learned from her are perfectly summed up in the beautiful Italian word which he uses to describe the alms that he distributed for her: *la benedizione* (the blessing).

"And because she loved me even more tenderly than a mother," he wrote, "she took very great care in bringing me up and in teaching me religion and how to flee sin."

4. NEAR DAMNATION AND DEATH

Both of Charles devout parents hoped that he would become a priest. His father wanted him to save many souls, while his mother's

humble wish was that the Masses which he would offer would help to liberate her from Purgatory.

Therefore when the boy was about seven, he was sent off to the village school. But as soon as he learned to read, he spent most of his time devouring cheap novels about the heroic deeds of knights in armor. In fact he wasted so much time on romantic war fiction that one of his Jesuit teachers gave him a severe scolding, which, however, did not deter him much, he later admitted.

In school, too, he fell in with some boys who had a bad influence on him. And so, despite the good education he was receiving and despite his own natural inclination toward religion, Charles began to take what he later called—no doubt with some of the usual exaggeration of the saints—"long steps . . . along evil paths," adding, "God alone knows the falls I made."

This adolescent crisis reached a striking climax in his first mystical experience. He saw in a vision what he took to be an image of the Savior looking down on him with intense anger and scorn and telling him sternly that he need not go to confession any more, because he was damned!

Instead of immediately discussing this strange vision with a priest, the immature boy made the serious mistake of keeping it to himself for a long time—and of believing in it. For many painful days he was quite convinced that because of his grave sins his name had been forever erased from the Book of Eternal Life by an irate God.

Finally Charles talked the matter over with his mother, who persuaded him that the vision was really nothing but an illusion and trick of the Devil designed to make him despair and sin still more.

Soon afterward Charles fell so seriously ill with an unspecified sickness that the doctors gave up all hope of his recovery, and his grief-stricken parents expected to lose him within a few days.

Once they tried to distract the dying boy by putting some coins on his bed. But on noticing that he paid no attention, they asked him what he would like to have.

"A cross," answered Charles.

His father ran to his carpenter's shop and soon brought back a plain home-made cross about a foot long.

The boy grasped it eagerly and embraced and kissed it devoutly several times, as though it was the one thing in all the world that he loved most.

Then, as Charles wrote, "Our Lord, showing Himself in His mercy, by the power of His Cross restored my health, for the sickness soon went away."

4. A STRANGE ACCIDENT

After recovering his health, Charles went back to school, eager to succeed in the studies that would lead him to the goal of the priesthood which his parents had set before him.

But their plan was not God's: this boy was not destined to be a priest, but a lay brother. How then did Providence turn him aside from the road of the priesthood? By an extremely painful experience—physically and psychologically—that Charles himself called "a strange accident," and narrated as follows: "while I was striving to learn with greater care, it so happened that, because of some fault which I committed, the school teachers gave me a severe thrashing. I was beaten with rods so much that for some time I was as though beside myself or stupid or out of my mind."

After this tragic accident, Charles left his grandmother's house and went back to live with his troubled parents. Her two jealous sons, fearing for their inheritance, were not sorry to see him go. Because he was deeply depressed, his father and mother decided to take him out of school, although it meant abandoning their hopes that he would be a priest. But nothing they could do succeeded in driving away the boy's melancholy.

Finally they hit upon the excellent idea of letting him go out into the country every day with his two younger brothers who (according to Charles) "out of fear of the strict discipline, did not want to go to school." This was indeed a perfect and providential solution, for soon, bit by bit, joy returned to his wounded heart.

The Saint attributed this recovery of his mental health partly to the companionship of his brothers, "which was very pleasant, as we were all quite young," and partly to the delight which he began to feel in the beauties of nature.

It was springtime, and he enjoyed gazing at the truly lovely view over the distant mountains and nearby verdant foothills and plain stretching away to the deep blue sea.

He especially remembered the intense religious inspiration he derived from watching the great, placid Italian oxen, because they reminded him so vividly of all that he had heard about the Nativity of the Christ Child in the stable at Bethlehem. "I feel great affection for them," he wrote, "and I took great pleasure in looking at them."

5. ANGELS FROM PARADISE

When he was only a schoolboy of seven, Charles often expressed the desire to become a Franciscan friar, although at that time he did

not even know that some of them were priests while others were lay brothers.

The small town of Sezze had a friary of the Conventual Franciscans and another of the Capuchins. But the community that attracted Charles was the small friary of Santa Maria delle Grazie, perched on a hill about a mile from the town, as he put it, in "a very inspiring and isolated place, very suitable for men dedicated to penance and prayer." As a matter of fact this was no ordinary friary but a *ritiro* of the Roman Reformed Franciscan Province, a special residence for fervent friars who wished to live a strict life of mortification and contemplation.

When young Charles was walking over the hills and heard the bell of Santa Maria delle Grazie ringing, he felt a mystic thrill and response in his soul that drew him to make increasingly frequent visits to that chapel.

Gazing shyly at the friars, he thought of them as "angels who had come from paradise." Sometimes it seemed to him that a mysterious sweet odor emanated from them, which filled his soul with a reverent awe and renewed inspiration. Most of all he liked to listen to their chanting of the Divine Office and watch their solemn outdoor processions on feast days. He enjoyed hearing them utter the names "Jesus! Mary!" whenever the procession stopped or started.

From the friars he obtained an interesting life of St. Salvator of Horta (1520-1567), a holy Spanish lay brother who had been beatified about twenty years earlier (he was canonized by Pius XI in 1938). Walking up and down the solitary country lane to the friary, Charles "very often" read about the severe penances and countless miraculous cures performed by St. Salvator, who used to spend most of each night praying in church.

He also noticed in the friary chapel a striking image of another holy Spanish lay brother, St. Paschal Baylon (1540-1592), who had been beatified only about ten years before (and canonized in 1690), whose ardent devotion to the Blessed Sacrament earned him the honor of being appointed (in 1897) Patron of all Eucharistic Congresses and Societies.

Charles tells us that "while reading about the life of the one and looking at the picture of the other a great desire to imitate them in their holy deeds was enkindled within me. Many times I said to myself: 'If I become a friar, I want to do what those Blessed ones did: stay in church at night and perform very severe penances!'"

"Both of them were famous for their sanctity and miracles," yet "both were lay brothers who did not celebrate Mass. . . . Having acquired

this knowledge of the difference there is between lay brothers and clerics, Our Lord planted in my heart the idea of becoming a lay brother, with a great desire to be poor and to beg, for love of Him. . . .

"We can consider all these things together as effects of divine grace directed toward that goal for which Our Lord God had created me."

The final reason that strengthened Charles' resolution to be a lay brother rather than a priest was given to him by a boy of his own age, Pietro de Vecchi, who had become his best friend. Pietro was planning to join the Capuchins.

One day he told Charles about a vision which St. Francis is reported to have had when he was wondering whether, as founder of an Order, he should become a priest. While praying, the Poverello saw an angel, holding a vase of crystal-clear water, who said to him: "O Francis, you must be as pure as this water if you wish to celebrate Mass." The humble Saint of Assisi therefore decided that he was not worthy to be a priest.

6. IN THE HILLS AND FIELDS

Charles was about fifteen years old when he made up his mind to become a Franciscan lay brother. But his first disappointment occurred when he learned that the Constitutions of the Order at that time required that candidates for the brotherhood be at least twenty. So he had to face the prospect of waiting five long years. How should he spend them?

He knew exactly what he wanted to do during those years: work his father's fields with the oxen that he liked so much. But when he outlined this plan to his parents, they opposed it on two grounds: they feared that the physical labor would be too strenuous for him, and that he might lose his vocation by becoming attached to the material things of this world. However, Charles succeeded in overcoming their opposition by persuading them—as the Holy Spirit had in fact convinced him—that the Lord was calling him to this wholesome solitary life in the hills and fields precisely in order to detach him from the world and its temptations.

That is exactly what happened. Spending long days alone outdoors, ploughing the fields with his beloved oxen or watching the flocks of sheep, Charles enjoyed his new way of life so much that he felt like a millionaire who had everything he desired. Moreover, he noted that divine grace gradually began to effect a profound change in his soul which he called "a reform."

His devout friend Pietro had already induced him to join the Marian Sodality of the Jesuit Fathers in Sezze, in which the boys learned under expert guidance how to practise specific Christian virtues and mortifications, while receiving the Sacraments regularly.

Now Charles also had the good fortune of finding an excellent spiritual director among the Jesuit priests. This confessor confirmed him in his determination to be a Franciscan lay brother.

Another channel of grace was some excellent books on the spiritual life and on the Saints which Charles used to take with him into the country and read under the shade of a tree.

His greatest trial at this time was provided by his animal friends: the sheep and oxen, by sometimes disobeying his orders, gave him quite a few opportunities to fight an innate tendency of his passionate temperament to give way to outbursts of impatience and even of blasphemy. He admitted in his autobiography that he slipped into that serious sin more than once—and immediately repented having thus offended God.

It is worth nothing that in his opinion animals occasionally behave in such a way that they appear to be instigated by the devil to tempt their masters to commit this sin.

7. NEW FERVOR

Charles wrote in his autobiography that when he was seventeen years old, in order that he should leave himself and sin and follow Christ, the Lord communicated to him a much greater fervor of spirit that inflamed his heart with a burning desire to do great things in God's service.

Out on the hills at night, far away from any house, he gave expression to this new fervor by delivering spontaneous sermons to sinners and by reciting his favorite prayers aloud. Or he would weep over his sins. As he did so, he felt his vocation to the religious life become still more unshakable in his heart.

Now too he intensified his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and he longed to offer her some special sacrifice that would prove his love for her. One feast day in the country, with some young shepherds he was reading a book about some of the miracles which she had obtained for her devoted followers. All the boys spontaneously decided henceforth to fast on bread and water every Saturday in her honor, so as to bring upon themselves her blessings. Charles faithfully kept this resolution until he joined the Franciscan Order several years later.

"But I did not stop there," he wrote, "for soon I took the vow of

chastity, promising the Blessed Virgin that I would, with her help, live in chastity all my life."

No sooner had he taken that vow than he experienced the first of a forty-year series of violent temptations to impurity.

"I found myself in a stormy sea of impure and indecent temptations, and the waves of evil thoughts and vivid imaginings were so fierce and violent that they almost seemed to overwhelm me."

In each successive trial of this kind, Charles fought back bravely and stubbornly. He always turned to the Blessed Mother for help. And when he was alone, he scourged his body with a cord which his devout father gave him for that purpose. To keep his mind pure and concentrated on Heaven, he would sing the praises of the Lord, using worldly melodies and words, but directing them to God.

Nevertheless he was dismayed to find the devil trying to instigate him to sin with a certain woman whom he saw and helped every day—despite the fact that she was toothless and elderly. But Charles dissolved this evil spell simply by describing it to one of his shepherd companions—an effective method which he had learned while reading about the Fathers of the Desert. Afterward, whenever he saw the unattractive old woman, he felt no disturbance but only disgust.

8. FIRST MYSTICAL PRAYER

At the age of nineteen Charles had his first experience of mystical or passive prayer. He unhesitatingly attributed this grace to the Blessed Mother, for it occurred while he was praying before her image.

In the Jesuit Church of St. Peter in Sezze hung a copy of the famous and lovely picture of Mary known as "Salvation of the Roman People," which is enshrined in the Borghese Chapel of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. At this time Charles often went to the Jesuit Church to attend Holy Mass.

One day while praying before that beautiful Madonna, he felt in his heart and mind such ardent love for her that (as he later wrote) "I could well say, 'You have wounded my heart, O Blessed Virgin!'" He was given a vision of Mary "in divine light." He described the vision as "partly natural and partly supernatural." But he stressed that when it came, he was not engaged in discursive meditation. Without warning, God infused "a special light" into his mind, and Charles felt that his "soul was transformed into a supernatural being and enjoyed a mystic bliss," with all his desires and affections interiorly concentrated on her in a new kind of prayer, into which he states significantly that he "was drawn" without being aware of it. "In order to give me greater graces, the Lord introduced me into

another sort of prayer that was more recollected and heartfelt . . . an interior spiritual withdrawal which made me feel utterly renewed in an ineffable way."

Describing the important effects which this new form of prayer had on his spiritual life, Charles wrote: "The change that I underwent in this stage of prayer was very great. I was inspired in my soul by this divine grace to do everything for God, and I realized that our efforts, even though done with all possible care, were nevertheless nothing and had no value without the help of God . . . And it seems to me that whereas previously my spiritual desires and feelings had been dispersed, now I tended to be interiorly recollected, drawn by I know not what divine and supernatural restriction which restricted me within myself. And as if I were alone in some solitary retreat, I re-acquired what I had lost. My formerly over-ervert spirit was transmitted into a very sweet peace and quiet . . ."

He faithfully strove to retain his new inner recollection and peace of soul as much as possible during his daily work.

9. RICH FRUIT

In his autobiography St. Charles declared that this new state of prayer soon produced rich spiritual fruit in several ways. However, he stressed that all his new graces flowed from the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

The first result was that he began to go to confession more frequently, either to his Jesuit director or to the Franciscan Fathers. And soon he found that these more frequent confessions enabled him to make much better confessions, because his faults were fewer and fresher in his memory. Moreover, they made his soul feel "much lighter and better disposed to run to God as to its center." Yet he frankly admits that he had not yet taken out the roots of his faults.

Through more frequent and more devout reception of Holy Communion, he became ever more conscious of the supernatural indwelling of God "as on a throne within (his) soul." The Blessed Sacrament further increased his interior recollection and drew to itself both the interior and exterior senses of his soul in such a gentle and blissful way that his whole being seemed to be drawn up to God.

As a direct result, this otherwise irritable and passionate young man became calm, meek, and patient—even eager to suffer "for love of that Lord who had suffered for me and whom I had received in my soul." Now on days when he had been to Holy Communion, if his brothers or friends invited him to take part in some game with them,

Charles felt that he must rather preserve his inner union with his Lord in the Eucharist, and he would answer: "Not today, I can't because I have received the Blessed Sacrament!"

Another very important fruit of his fervent Communion was a new devotion to the Passion of Christ, which he called "the life of the soul and the key of Heaven." In his words, "Our good Lord, when I received Him in the Blessed Sacrament, put into my heart and mind the remembrance of His holy Passion, because as an all-wise teacher He wished gradually to draw me up the holy mountain of perfection. For the basic principles of perfection derive from that Passion, which comprises acts of all the virtues that Our Lord practised."

At this time Charles had not yet read any books describing the Passion in detail, except for one popular work in verse. But as he prayed and meditated before a striking large Crucifix in the Cathedral of Sezze each morning before going to work, he acquired a mystical understanding of the fundamental fact that "Our Lord had suffered exceedingly frightful pain and the death of the Cross for our salvation."

His meditation on the Passion led him to offer generous sacrifices to God in return for all the graces which the Redemption brought to humanity. "Inspired by this devotion, I began to fast and take the discipline on Fridays. When I was outdoors with the other shepherds, I would get up in the middle of the night and retire to some place where I could not be heard, and there, raising my mind and my eyes to heaven, I would scourge myself, thinking of the fearful stripes that were inflicted on Jesus Christ at the column. And while I was doing this in response to an inner urge, Our Lord would draw my whole spirit up into His love with gentle and sweet touches, so that my soul would seem to be bathed in a heavenly dew, and during that visitation of the consoling Spirit of God I would remain absorbed in interior recollection for quite a while."

However, Charles frankly admitted in his autobiography that at first he found it very hard to scourge himself and that he would hardly do so as long as it took him to recite three Our Fathers and Hail Marys. But eventually with God's help he overcame that natural repugnance. In this connection he wrote: "What will a soul not do when it is wounded by the Spirit of God and taught by love? It exposes itself to everything. What is difficult becomes easy for it; what is bitter, sweet. And that which we are so fond of—our flesh—it mortifies by prayer, fasting, and scourging."

Another striking fruit of Charles' more fervent and more frequent communions was a growing compassion for the poor. He gave out alms more often, praying to God with hope and faith that Providence would

supply the means for him to continue to do so. He never avoided a pauper. The only time he refused to give something to one he was quickly overcome with remorse, like St. Francis.

As word of his generosity spread, needy persons would wait for him every morning outside his home or along the road he would take. One morning during a local "recession" an unusually large group, including many children, clustered around him and caused a well-to-do lady to tell them angrily to leave him alone. But Charles turned to her and said: "Madam, it is not right to scold or drive away the poor of Jesus Christ, because they represent the Lord Himself who became poor for us!"

For a while even his parents yielded to the suspicion that he was stealing, until they found out the truth and let him continue his charity work.

A final fruit of Charles' new devotion to the Holy Eucharist was his realization that, in order that he should learn how to lose himself and belong entirely to God, the Lord was leading him along the path of obedience. The teacher that Providence used to give him these valuable lessons was Charles' devout father, whose favorite virtue was obedience. He would say to the youth: "My son, I would rather see you truly obedient than holy. And know that to obey is better than to make sacrifices, because obedience is a great sacrifice that a man makes of his whole self to God." When the father gave an order, even if it seemed difficult to perform, he wished Charles to obey it without saying a word, with strong trust and hope.

The boy soon found that his prompt obedience earned God's blessing. "With this more divine than human standard," he wrote, "I learned to deny myself and submit my judgment to others. Although at first I wanted to express my opinion as a more reasonable one, nevertheless I submitted to my father's will. Later I realized through experience that a continuous miracle flowed from his words. Some fields which were naturally sterile produced rich harvests after I farmed them to obey him. And as all that I did in obeying him proved more successful, I no longer said anything and just began to obey him in all simplicity."

(To be continued)