

any of the ancient collections of the writings of Saint Francis. Nor does Ubertino expressly say it is an authentic prayer. Hence on the side of manuscript evidence it may be rejected. Furthermore, it is redolent of twelfth-century Benedictine and Cistercian writers, and seems to be the work of a scholarly mystic. In fact, it is found in great part at least in the *Liber Meditationum*, c. 35, once ascribed to Saint Augustine. If possible, of course, that Saint Francis knew and adopted the prayer as his own.

The *Adoramus Te* is found in the Testament of our Seraphic Father: "The Lord gave me such faith in churches, that I would simply adore and say: We adore Thee, most holy Lord Jesus, (here and, *words not in original text*) in all Thy churches throughout the world, and we bless Thee, because by Thy holy Cross Thou hast deemed the world." Saint Francis does not claim that he composed the prayer or was inspired to compose it; and liturgical scholars would, no doubt, point out that in part it was already to be found in the liturgical books. One finds part of it also in what seem to be twelfth-century directives on religious life, the *Documenta vitae religiosae* (*Patr. Lat.* 184, col. 1177), in which the monk is told that as he approaches the cross on entering the church he should say: "Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, etc." Until evidence is found, however, that the complete prayer existed before the time of Saint Francis, we may surely hold that its Franciscan form comes from the Seraphic Patriarch.

Ref: 1) For Absorbeat:

Jacques Cambell, OFM, "Les ecrits de S. Francois d'Assise devant la critique," *Franziskanische Studien*, 36 (1954), pp. 261-63.
Fred. ab Antverpia, OFM Cap., "De fontibus litterariis vitae S. Francisci Assis." *Collectanea franciscana*, I (1931), p. 440.

2) Adoramus Te:

Kaj. Esser, OFM, *Das Testament des hl. Franziskus* (Munster, 1949)
Jacques Cambell, OFM, *art. cit.*, 205-207.

I. C. B.

THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

AND ALL YOU ARE BROTHERS

"And wherever the Brethren are located or meet one another, let them act toward one another like members of a family. And each should with assurance make known his need to another; for if a mother nourishes and loves her child in the flesh, how much more eagerly ought one to love and nourish his brother in the spirit? And if any one of them should fall into illness, the other Brethren ought to serve him as they would wish to be served themselves (II Rule, VI)."

These words of our Rule are certainly familiar to us. We have read them so often and heard them so often that we know them by heart. But if we pause to ask ourselves how we fulfill them in actual practice, we will very probably find ourselves embarrassed for an answer. It is an old Franciscan dictum that a man knows only as much as he does. If we apply it here, most of us will have to confess that we know very little about the meaning of Franciscan brotherhood.

I. *And all you are brothers* (Mtt. 23:8)

It is not in any way surprising that we should call ourselves brothers, nor is it anything especially remarkable that we should speak of our Order as a brotherhood. Anyone who takes his Christian life seriously normally thinks in terms of brotherhood, for we are brothers not primarily because we belong to the Franciscan Order, but because we are all baptized in Christ.

Frequently and in various ways Holy Scripture speaks of the new life that is ours through baptism. When, for example, we are told of the union of the baptized with each other and with Christ, we are given the figure of the vine and its branches. Saint Paul speaks of the mystical body of Christ, in which the faithful are the members and Christ himself the Head. And again we have the words of Our Lord explaining to us: *One is your Master, and all you are brothers* (Mtt. 23:8). These words have certainly not been forgotten by the Church; she uses them again and again throughout her liturgy. But one cannot help wondering at times if they have not been forgotten by Catholics. We cannot deny that non-Catholics—even non-Chris-

tians—display a much deeper and much more sincere and practical spirit of fraternal charity than we do. There is a definite tendency among us to separate ourselves into self-contained little groups. The laity, the clergy, the religious—each group tends to lead its own exclusive life, and if we do not encounter mutual hostility among the groups, we do encounter a disturbing degree of mutual indifference and ignorance. We hesitate to speak here of race prejudice and nationalism; but we could perhaps test something of the genuineness of our Christianity by noting our reaction to the sufferings of fellow Christians in distant parts of the world. The degree of our indifference is the degree to which we have fallen from the Christian spirit. This tendency toward exclusiveness and indifference to other groups is a grave evil. The Church *must* have a strong fraternal spirit among her children; she must not allow love to grow cold. For salvation is not with the clergy alone, nor with the faithful alone, but with all Christians as organically united members of the Church under Christ. This is precisely the mission of the Order of Friars Minor: to embrace the spirit of evangelical brotherhood and to preach it, by our words and by our living example, to the whole Church.

Christ said: *All you are brothers*. He did not say that we should *become* brothers, but that we actually *are* brothers. He did not present brotherhood before us as something for us to desire and strive for, but as something we can attain to by daily practice. The followers of Christ are by very nature brothers. There is no question of choice between us. We are not free to choose whom we shall recognize as our brothers and whom not; by the simple fact of baptism we *are* all brothers. Just as a child must of necessity recognize the other children of his father and mother as his brothers and sisters, whether he likes them or not, so every Christian must acknowledge all other Christians as his brothers and sisters in Christ. The spirit of brotherhood is absolutely essential to the Christian life; in fact, no man can be called a Christian who lacks this spirit. We have the uncompromising words of Saint John to dispel any illusions to the contrary: *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are made known. Whoever is not just is not of God, nor is he just who does not love his brother* (I Jn. 3:10). *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides*

death (Ibid. 14). And there are not only actions to be accounted for, but even thoughts and feelings—for a thought against love is as evil as an act: *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer* (Ibid. 15). We cannot be content to avoid sinning against love in a merely negative way, by refraining from hatred; we must fulfill the law of love by positively loving. *My dear children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth* (Ibid. 18). If love is not the ruling power behind all our works, they count for nothing; they are the works of the dead; *for he who does not love abides in death*. There is no alternative; we must choose between love and death, salvation and damnation.

Is it not strange that we speak so much about love of neighbor, and so little about fraternal love? Certainly Christ himself often spoke of love of neighbor, but his remarks were always directed toward the Pharisees and had reference to the Old Law. When he spoke in terms of the New Dispensation he spoke of brotherly love. He told his disciples: *All you are brothers*. And how well they remembered that. Notice the frequency of the term *fratres* in the Epistles they wrote to the faithful. But actually, the term is on our own lips with equal frequency. In every *Confiteor* the priest says at the Mass, he confesses to the brethren and asks for their prayers—*et vobis, fratres. Imitamini quod tractatis!* Let us make this admonition apply here—let us make our life conform to the law we profess and practice the doctrine we preach.

Perhaps it would help us to deepen the spirit of brotherhood in ourselves if we would take notice of how many times, and in what contexts, we use the word *fratres* in the liturgy. Perhaps the usage has become mechanical with us, so that we utter the word with little realization of its implications. But let us try to use it consciously. For instance, instead of thinking “congregation,” we could think “brothers and sisters.” Instead of loving our “neighbor,” let us try loving our “brother.” At first blush this may seem a little childish, but if we set our mind to it seriously we shall soon notice a change for the better in our mental habits and attitudes toward others. Fundamentally, the problem for us is this: to strive to realize that Christian life is life in a brotherhood, in a family, and to make this realization visible and effectual in our daily thinking and acting.

2. *The Order of Lesser Brothers*

We are accustomed to say that the religious state is the longed for of the faithful for the primitive Church, for those days when *multitude of the believers were of one heart and one soul, and one of them said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.* (Acts 4:32). But never, perhaps, had the longing come so close to fulfillment as in that time when God, through his servant Francis, brought forth in the Church the Order of Lesser Brothers. Francis knew the words of Christ, *all you are my brothers*, and he gave them a position of primary importance in his first Rule. He saw in those words an essential demand of the Lord upon his young community; therefore he took the title "Brothers" as the official designation. Our name, then, contains within itself a command incumbent upon all of us, the command to be in reality what we are in name. "Lesser Brothers" is more than a mere title; it is a confession. Through our name we have exemplified in the Church for seven centuries an essential requirement of Christian living; for therefore, there can be no problem about *becoming* brothers; if we are not already what our name signifies, what are we, then? The children of Saint Francis are possible only as brothers and sisters. But it is undoubtedly significant that in almost every country of the world today we have lost our title of Lesser Brothers among our people. Only our official title of Friars Minor remains to us. Particularly, we are now simply Franciscans. We can account for this, of course, on quite legitimate social and historical grounds; but it would be good for us to ponder a little on the fact that the people no longer think of us in terms of brotherhood, whereas the contemporaries of Saint Francis could hardly think of him and his first followers as anything but brothers. And the reason is simply that to Francis it was completely self-evident that all who followed him actually were his brothers. Else why would they have joined him?

To understand fully and clearly the deepest meaning of the Franciscan spirit of brotherhood, it is necessary to think in terms of grace and super-nature. We have all been baptized to a new life, born again as children of the one Eternal Father. Christ by his death purchased for us this rebirth; as man he became our brother, and died for us as our brother. Thus our redemption becomes a sign of brotherly love, from which it follows that we simply cannot be anything

else but brothers to each other, even as we are to Christ, through our adoption as sons of God. Now the question is: Do we really take this doctrine seriously enough? Do we let it form our thinking, guide our attitudes, and control our relations with our fellow creatures? We poor mortals always tend to consider the life of grace and super-nature as not quite real. We easily take the transitory and the mundane as much more factual. But according to the words of our Rule, we must learn to revise our thinking: "for if a mother nourishes and love her child in the flesh, how much more eagerly ought one to love and nourish his brother in the spirit?" This demands supernatural thinking; and if such thinking is difficult, it is none the less obligatory. Our role in the Church is exactly this: to make the supernatural the greater and stronger reality, to make our fraternal love felt as a greater and more powerful force than any love that arises from the natural man.

When we were received into the Order, we passed along the row of our fellow-religious to receive the kiss of peace, while the choir sang the beautiful words: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum.* How good and pleasant indeed it seemed to us then, for brothers to live together in unity of mind and heart. But soon came the routine of daily living, and we began to wonder if we were *really* all brothers. Somehow we changed our terminology. Our "brothers" became our "confreres," and eventually, merely "the friars." If the closest relation we admit is that of confrere, then we can hardly expect genuine fraternity to thrive among us.

It was a beautiful custom in our Order for the friars to embrace each other in greeting and in farewell. The custom has all but disappeared among us now; in fact, we almost consider it unmanly. But in former times the friars were not quite so reticent about showing their fraternal affection; on the contrary, they used every means to express it and to strengthen it. In modern friaries the greatest concern seems to revolve around keeping the proper distance from one another; and the distance becomes so very proper at times that the arrival and departure of a friar can go completely unnoticed by the community. In the last analysis, it would seem that the passing of the fraternal embrace is but a symbol of the passing of the fraternal spirit among us. We have to convince ourselves again and again that

all who belong to the Order are our own brothers and sisters. Then let us act toward our fellow-religious as toward members of our own family. What is your brother doing? What assignment has been given to him? Are things going well with him or badly? Does anyone know? Is it entirely his fault if no one knows? Perhaps he really is a man with a mind like a key-ring, who keeps all his doings under lock and bolt. But perhaps he is not secretive but merely cautious; and perhaps you have given him reason to be cautious. Most likely, however, you do not ask about him because you simply do not care. Whatever he does is all the same to you.

In an Order like ours, there are two things to avoid; we must avoid being merely inhabitants of the same building, and we must avoid forming cliques and political parties. Fraternal love should draw us together; fraternal reverence should protect us. If we sincerely want to discover what degree of fraternal love we possess, we might check ourselves on some of the following points: the departure and arrival of our fellow-religious; the common use of things; the cells of others; anniversaries and feastdays, illnesses and deaths. All these things are of relative importance, to be sure, and our salvation will probably not hinge on our attitude toward any or all of them; nevertheless our attitude toward them will determine the answer to a vitally pertinent question: Are we still a brotherhood? Or have we become a mere pious organization?

3. *Brothers of All Men*

If we are called the Order of Friars Minor, it is not solely because we are to live together as true brothers, but because we are to be brothers to all men—and, if we are perfect imitators of our Seraphic Father, brothers to all creatures. Through our Order the *one heart and one soul* of the early Christian family remains alive in the Church of today. If we truly live as brothers within the bosom of the Church, the spirit of fraternal love will diffuse itself throughout the entire Mystical Body of Christ.

But there is another point to be considered. Ever since the time of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, there have been religious whom the people called Brothers and Sisters. Today when we speak of Sisters, all the daughters of the Seraphic Father are included in the term. But

when among the friars a distinction is made between the Fathers and the Brothers, we must remember that the Fathers are none the less Brothers because of their priesthood. To the Brothers of the Order alone this beautiful Franciscan name still remains, but the priests of the Order must *live* the name as fully as if they too bore it. In fact, it is especially through the priesthood that so many opportunities arise to manifest our fraternal love. The people have a fine sense for such love, especially the poor and the social outcasts who find so little understanding in the world. It is to the glory of our Order that the lowly and simple folk have ever sought us out for help and comfort in their needs. They have always felt that the way to us must be easy, for they recognize in a son of Saint Francis a brother to all men. The poor still love us and look upon us as their own, because they have never forgotten the love of the Poverello for them.

It remains for us only to strive for a deeper realization of our brotherhood, after the example of our Seraphic Father. The beginning of his *metanoia*, of his complete turning to God, lay exactly in this, that he sought out the poor and the needy and called them his brothers. His love for God led him among the miserable, and in ministering to them his love found satisfaction. We have his own words to this effect: "When I was in sins it seemed exceedingly bitter to me to look upon lepers, and the Lord himself led me in among them and I practiced mercy toward them. And when I came away from them, what seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness of soul and body for me" (Testament). "Christian brother," he addressed the leper. And in his day, to be a brother to lepers was the ultimate of Christian love. But where shall we find the equivalent in our own day, and in this healthy and wealthy country of ours? Are there none who need us? Indeed, there are thousands who stand in crying need of us, and we have only to lift up our eyes to see them. The important thing is: when we see them, do we recognize them as our brothers and sisters?

Certainly, fraternal charity can be abused. Beggars and vagrants are seldom Saint Benedict Joseph, nor are they above taking advantage of our kindness. But Saint Francis never inquired whether or not a man was worthy of help. When robbers asked for food, he called them his brothers and commanded that they be fed—and the robbers

were converted. But what about ourselves? When we serve the vagrants who come to the friary door, how do we do it? What face do we present? What spirit do we show? Let us not say: "That is not my assignment; I have no contact with the poor." Perhaps not; but the spirit of the Order as a whole is bound to manifest itself, in one way or another, in every individual member.

We owe fraternal love not only to our fellow-religious, as we have said, but to all men. And not only love, but fraternal reverence as well. Let us always remember that. Loving reverence will never permit a cold, crude, or rough manner toward other men, nor even toward other creatures. It is difficult to be both lovingly fraternal and reverently fraternal, but it is necessary. We have the example of our Seraphic Father to guide us, the most courteous and gracious of men and the most lovingly and tenderly fraternal.

We know how desperately our modern world needs the example of brotherly love. Surely there is no dearth of talk about the universal brotherhood of man, but there is precious little evidence of its reality. Let us, then, look to our vocation as Friars Minor, as Let Brothers, and live it to the full. This is our mission, our destiny—show the world what brotherhood means in actual practice. Let us not lose sight of it. Only as brothers and sisters can we be true children of Saint Francis. "So let us begin, my Brothers; for up to now we have done nothing."

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.

BLESSED MARY ASSUNTA

"Observance of the Rule is real holiness. . . . When anyone tells me about the extraordinary I am the most incredulous man in the world. But when holiness results from the practice of virtue and the observance of the Rule, I believe in it." These were the words of Pope Saint Pius XII when he first heard of the very unobtrusive sanctity of Sister Mary Assunta Pallotta. Sister Mary Assunta, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, died in China on April 7, 1905, at the age of 26. On November 7, 1954, she was beatified by Pope Pius XII. The nature of her sanctity is quite precise

expressed in the words of Saint Pius X. During her life she worked no miracles, had no visions, and was not known for severe physical penances. Hers was a real sanctification of the ordinary duties and difficulties of daily religious life. Her sanctity, simple and distinctly Franciscan, is so very reminiscent of the Little Flower's way that she has been called the Seraphic Flower. Her life demonstrates very vividly how easy the way of sanctity can be, even in the uneventful humdrum of daily life.

Blessed Assunta was born in August 20, 1878 at Force, a little town in the Marches of Ascoli-Piceno, Italy. At Baptism she was given the name Assunta Maria Liberata. Her parents, Luigi and Euphrasia Pallotta, were poor people; and the pinch of poverty made itself felt early in the girl's life. After she had been in school for only two years, untoward circumstances took her father away from home. The little family, deprived of his support for a while, had to struggle along on its own. Assunta, although an exemplary little student, had to leave school and devote herself to the housework and the care of the family's four younger members. After she had grown a little bit older, she began to work for wages in the town and surrounding countryside. Her work included a variety of things, even some that we Americans would hardly expect of a woman. Besides being employed at dressmaking and house-keeping, she worked as a day laborer in the fields and even as a hod-carrier for a construction crew. But in all her work she maintained a dignity which forced even the rough masons to watch their language when she was present. Her life touched the basic warp and woof of human existence but she gave it an exceptional beauty.

From these earthly surroundings her soul mounted upward. In the midst of countless daily distractions she developed an intense love of the Blessed Sacrament. Every evening she would run off to the church for a while, even after the most fatiguing day's work. She was allowed to receive her First Communion only at the age of twelve, as was the custom in those days before Saint Pius X. After receiving this Sacrament which she had long desired, her already fervent piety grew by leaps and bounds. Her devotion to Christ was very direct and personal, a real communing between the Master and His disciple. It was accompanied and strengthened by a deep attachment to His Blessed Mother. The Rosary was her constant companion. She fingered it frequently during her labor at home and in the fields, and even far into the night.

Assunta did penance, too, though she probably had few sins of her own for which to atone. In imitation of the saints, she used to fill her bed with bricks or pieces of stone or wood, in order to make it less comfort-

able. When this came to her mother's attention, there developed a little wordless conflict between the two of them, the mother always throwing the things out, the daughter just as unflinchingly putting them back.

In regard to food Assunta had developed a deep mortification motivated by charity. Since food was never very easy to obtain, she willingly ate the unappetizing items so that the others could have what they would relish more. Or she would ask her mother to put more water into the soup so that there would be some extra for a neighbor girl who had none.

But not all of life was seriousness. Although by disposition Assunta was quiet and retiring, her mother thought it best for her to attend the masked dances at Carnival time. We do not know how much she enjoyed these occasions, but we do know that God used one of them to bring her religious vocation to a head. Assunta was twenty. On the closing evening of the Carnival, she, her mother, and a girl friend attended a masked dance in the town. When Assunta removed her mask, her innocent beauty showed forth in all its youthful radiance. A young man approached her in the crowd and said, "Assunta, you are beautiful. I would like to embrace you." Assunta was upset at this and asked to leave the dance early. The next day she told her friend, "Unless we become Religious we cannot be saved; at least, I cannot." Her vocation had made itself felt through the simple occurrences of daily life, just as her whole sanctity was to come from God through the ordinary.

Several problems immediately faced the aspirant. Her mother said that her help was necessary for the support of the family. But Assunta's desire was so strong that this contradiction affected her health. When her mother found out the cause of the illness, she gave her consent.

Next, there was the problem of her poverty. A dowry was out of the question: she had nothing to give but herself. Anxiety over this difficulty racked her soul for several months and she despairingly thought that God must not want her. Fortunately her case was brought to the attention of the Superior General of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who agreed to accept her without any consideration of a dowry. So, on May 4, 1898, she lovingly said farewell to her family and departed for Rome. There, on May 6, she was received into the convent of Saint Helen.

The six years of Blessed Assunta's religious life in Italy were spent in three convents. Three months of her postulancy were spent at Saint Helen's convent in Rome, where she worked in the kitchen. Next she rendered three years of humble service in the fields and farmyards of the novitiate-house at Grottaferrata, not far from Rome. She received the

habit on October 9, 1898 and made her profession of vows on December 8, 1900. Her religious name was Sister Maria Assunta, an inversion of her baptismal name. The two years preceding her departure for China in 1904 were given to household duties in the convent at Florence.

During these years her spirit was growing strong and firm in virtue. Her goodness was not a self-conscious type, but she was certainly conscious of trying to develop it to heroic proportions. During her novitiate she had heard of the quick strides to sanctity made by Saint Gabriel of the Seven Sorrows. She told her companions that, with good-will, everyone could reach a perfection equal to that of the young Passionist. With such a noble ideal in her mind she set out like a giant to run along the road to holiness.

Her whole life was centered in awareness of God. She tried to live in His presence from the beginning of the day to its end. Confidence in the guiding care of Providence, conviction that His hand directed the happenings of daily life, recognition of His presence in her soul by grace—these simple and direct dispositions led her along an ascent to God so quick and quiet that it was unnoticed even by many of those who lived in the same house with her. This direct relationship with God found its completion not in visions and ecstasies but in a gladsome effort to be united to God in all the actions of her life. In a letter written to her family in 1903 she expressed her ambition very simply: "I ask God for the grace to make known to the world purity of intention, which consists in doing all things for the love of God, even the most ordinary actions."

This effort was evident first of all in her spirit of recollection and prayer. Silence was her constant companion. It was such a treasure to her that, even in giving directions to her helpers at work, she was careful not to harm it. Going to and from her work, she always kept her eyes lowered so that her inner silence would not be disturbed. Prayer was often on her lips during the day. She took advantage of every stroke of the bell to remind herself and her co-workers of the presence of God.

In the convent her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament had a yet greater opportunity to express itself. As a community the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary are especially dedicated to Eucharistic adoration. In this regard Sister Assunta was certainly no laggard. Her periods of adoration were times of intimate, personal communing with Christ. She would kneel motionless, her eyes fixed on the Host. If her companion complained afterwards that the time was long, she would answer, "Oh no, Sister, it is so short! How can we find the minutes long when we are

at the feet of Jesus, the source of grace, ready to give us whatever we wish for our souls?" Whenever she passed the door to the chapel she would kneel for a short prayer before hurrying on to her occupation. In order to be constantly close to her Divine King, she made frequent Spiritual Communions. In this way she extended the effects of her morning's Communion through the whole day and repeatedly tapped its rich stores of grace.

Her devotion to the Blessed Virgin also found a new outlet in the convent. The Franciscan Rosary, the Crown of the Seven Joys, is worn on the habit of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. This key to spiritual joy was often in her hands, opening the door to the deep joys of Christianity. During many a spare moment it was the means that united Maria Assunta to Mary, Queen of heaven.

From these deep inner springs there naturally poured forth an abundant fountain of good works. Assunta saw God's hand working in all the incidents of her life. In joys or difficulties her favorite expression was, "It is all the same." In other words, since everything comes from God, it is all good.

This spirit made her an example of obedience. She realized that, in the ordinary course of events, there is no more direct way to know God's designs than through the commands of a religious superior. Her obedience gave her spiritual balance. Her carefulness in regard to the rules of her community would have easily become scrupulousness, had it not been for her obedience to her confessor. Cheerful naturalness in obedience endeared her to her superiors. She was described as the kind of religious who always comes to the superior's mind when there is an extra job to do. And like all such religious, she was overburdened with work. But when one of the sisters remarked with wonder about all the work Sister Assunta did, she answered cheerfully, "It's very easy. I do only one thing at a time, as if I had only that to do, and do not think of anything else. I say to myself, this is my charge and it must be done as well as possible."

But, in spite of all her services to the community, she never liked to put any burdens upon it. In fact, she was happiest if she could give up something to another and least willing to set forth her own needs. Though a complete equality existed among the sisters, she always considered herself the least worthy of anything good, since she had brought no goods with her to the community. She wore old clothes with honor and lent dignity to patches. With her Seraphic Father, she saw in poverty a blessing of the Lord and His poor Mother.

Her consciousness of God's presence enabled her to see Him especial-

ly in her sisters in religion. They were the virgins consecrated to Christ, His favorite daughters. Her love for them showed itself in her cheerful attitude. They later said of her, "Her thoughts were all for Jesus, her smiles all for her sisters." One of her companions remembered seeing her lose her smiling composure only once. This happened when an impulsive friend of the sisters gushingly exclaimed, "You are a saint." Sister Assunta blushed and then became very pale.

She loved the company of her sisters and cherished the happy moments of relaxation with them during their recreations. But she looked for their enjoyment rather than for her own. Whenever there was some extra job to be done during recreation, she was at the community's service. Once, while she was at the novitiate, one of her superiors found her alone doing all the work of the poultry yard, while the others were recreating. The superior started away to get the forgetful helpers, since Sister Assunta was doing the work of three. But Sister Assunta begged her not to disturb their recreation, saying, "It's really nothing; I can finish it all myself."

Her consideration for others led her to accept serious pain rather than hurt them. When she was doing the laundry in the house at Florence she once ran a pin deep into her hand, but she said nothing about it. She was afraid that she might embarrass the sister who had forgotten to remove the pin. Later her hand became seriously infected and had to be lanced. While the operation was going on, she did not complain, even though the pain caused tears to roll down her cheeks. When the doctor apologized for hurting her so much, she replied with a smile, "Oh, Jesus suffered much more in His Passion."

During her short religious life in Italy Sister Assunta became a dear model to all who knew her. But she also imbibed deeply the example of those who had gone before her. On July 9, 1900, seven of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were martyred at Tai-Yuan-Foo in China, victims of the Boxer Rebellion. This incident stirred up the missionary aspirations of Sister Assunta, so that on January 1, 1903, she wrote to the Superior General from Florence, asking to be sent to China. The answer was a long time in coming, but finally in early March 1904 word came that she was to depart with the next group bound for China. Her destination was Tong-Eul-Koo, a small town about seventy miles distant from Tai-Yuan-Foo, where the seven martyrs had given their lives. She was overjoyed at the news of her assignment but, as she told her superior, "If Jesus had preferred for me to stay in Florence, it would be all the same to me."

The departing sisters gathered at Rome, where they received the blessing of Pope Saint Pius X. The humble Sister Assunta was so taken aback in the presence of the humble pope that she tried to escape notice behind the others. It was almost by force that she was finally brought forward to kiss his hand and receive his blessing.

On March 19 the little group of ten sisters boarded a boat at Naples bound for India. The trip to Bombay took seventeen days, with the sea rough and stormy. Sister Assunta showed herself quite human by becoming sea-sick. After a few days' stop at Bombay the sisters went by way of Singapore and Hong Kong to Chefoo, then inland through Tientsin and Peiping to Chengting, where the railroad ended. From here they had to ride for six days in palanquins, a kind of sedan chair carried by two mules, one in front and one behind. In this joggy, swaying fashion they traversed the last mountainous lap of their journey and finally arrived at their destination. It was June 21, 1904. The trip had taken three months and a lot of patience. Sister Assunta had stood up wonderfully under the test. Her superior for the trip wrote later: "I do not remember ever having heard her complain. By her unfailing good humor and simplicity she was a very agreeable companion."

At the mission Sister Assunta continued to develop those quiet virtues she had shown in her native Italy. She was always perfectly obedient to her superior. She carried out with complete fidelity even commands that others would not have taken seriously.

The missionary sisters at Tong-Eul-Koo took care of 330 orphans and gave attention to many sick people who daily visited their dispensary. Sister Assunta was assigned to work in the kitchen. She did her work faithfully and well, practicing the many little economies which are very valuable in so large an institution. The sisters were often surprised that she could make so little go so far. The heat and inconveniences of kitchen work were borne gladly, since she was happy to have something to offer to God.

The sight of so much paganism in this new world deeply grieved her heart, which was so zealous for God's glory. This gave her a great eagerness to learn the native language so that she could help with the catechizing. Among the first things she learned were the prayers of the Rosary, which she would say with the young Chinese girl who helped her in the kitchen. This girl had witnessed the death of the seven martyred sisters. Hearing her recount the story of their heroism gave Sister Assunta great joy.

But life was not always a smooth road for the little sister. In China God allowed her to be deeply disturbed by scruples. She was in great torment of soul, imagining that she might still be guilty of certain faults, that she was useless for the work of the mission, that she had not lived up to the graces of her vocation. But the more God left her in this darkness, the more did her soul strive toward Him. She made a vow to perform all her actions for love of God, offering to the Sacred Heart all her thoughts, words, and deeds, as well as all the prayers to be said for her after her death. After she had borne her trials for a while in patience, God restored her soul to its usual peace.

Things were going rather smoothly at the mission. Then in 1905, toward the end of an exceptionally severe winter, typhus struck the region. From all sides the sick poured into the mission for help. Some of the orphans contracted the disease, and the weaker ones began to die. The sisters, their resistance worn down by overwork and constant contact with the disease, soon began to feel its effects. It claimed its first victim in their community on March 19. That day was the first anniversary of Sister Assunta's departure from Italy; it was also the day on which typhus forced her to bed. The doctor analyzed the case as not too serious, but Sister Assunta felt sure that she would die soon. Fervently she made a general confession.

A few days later, March 24, a second sister was dying in the room next to that of Sister Assunta. When the superior came in, Sister Assunta asked whether she might offer her own life to God in order to save the other sister, whom she considered much more valuable to the mission than herself. But the superior told her to leave that to the will of God, and Sister Assunta obeyed without another word. Minutes later the other sister died.

This death affected Sister Assunta deeply. The next day she asked to receive the Last Sacraments. When she was told that she was not sick enough to be anointed, she insisted that she would die soon and that she wanted to receive the Sacraments while she still had full use of her faculties. The priest, faced with such insistence, decided to comply with her request. She begged pardon of the assembled community for all the bad example and scandal she imagined she had given. Then she answered the liturgical prayers and received holy Viaticum with exemplary fervor.

Three days later her condition took a serious turn for the worse. Her suffering became intense but she offered it all for others. As the sickness progressed, she fell into a delirium, in which she frequently called upon

God and the saints. At one time she repeated over and over in Chinese, "Eucharist, Eucharist." But she was unable to swallow. Spiritual Communion, which had so often supported her during life, had to be her assistance at death.

Her suffering ended just at sunset on April 7, 1905. Her soul went home to God. At that same moment a wonderful perfume filled the whole sick-room. One of those who experienced it described it as "a delicious odor of balsam and incense, of roses and violets." No natural explanation was found for it. The same fragrance accompanied her body to the grave and was present for several days in the three rooms Sister Assunta had occupied at different times during her illness. It was evident not only to the missionaries but also to the people, who came in crowds to witness the prodigy.

On April 8 Sister Assunta's body was carried to the grave. Here her story might have ended had not God taken her case into His hands. She had thought only of Him during life; He would not allow her to be forgotten in death. In 1913 the bodies of the sisters buried at Tong-Eul-Koo were exhumed and transferred to Tai-Yuan-Foo. When the body of Sister Assunta was removed from the grave, it was found to be preserved in the same state as when it was buried.

It was this fact which brought her case to the attention of Saint Pius X. When he heard she had done "nothing" but observe her Rule and carry out all her simple duties, he took special interest in opening the proceedings for her beatification. The long and pains-taking process advanced with surprising rapidity. In 1923 the cause of her beatification was formally introduced and in 1932 her virtues were declared heroic. The public seal of apostolic approval was given to her life on November 7, 1954, when Pope Pius XII declared her Blessed.

Why did God raise up this sincerely humble and straightforward soul for our reverence and imitation? Pope Pius XI answered that question on the occasion when he declared her virtues heroic. He stated that strife in the world arises from three powerful currents: "the unceasing search for material pleasures, the insatiable greediness for riches, the arrogance and pride of life in all its relationships." "How opportunely," he continues, "the humble virgin of Force comes before us. With the example of her brief and humble life, which is yet very noble, and now glorious she speaks clearly to everyone. She tells us that with divine grace not only can one resist those three currents, a fact which many worldlings deny so as to justify and excuse themselves, but she also shows us that

one can walk against the current. And one can do this with such success as to arrive at the triumphant exercise of obedience, chastity, and evangelical poverty, satisfying—supreme glory for a creature—not only the precepts but also the counsels, that is to say, the highest and most intimate desires of the Creator."

Fr. Fintan Warren, O.F.M. ✓

ON SEEING. . .

how to nail down
for the future generations
the absolute wildness
of a bird-track in the snow
is more or less
my problem.

not that as a sign
this (same bird-track)
is in itself unreadable,
but that a mark
of such importance
should be left, so—
on the roadside,
is at least a foot-step
closer to
the issue.

what the transient
wrote
was plain
confusion:
heel-print

of creature
wondering where to
turn—

yet
in the snow
and sunlight,
how resplendent!

how firm
and delicate
at once:
how memorable
and transitory;
how worthy to be
(as it will)
carried
from age to age:
this moment
here recorded,
of a winged-thing
at the cross-roads.

ROBERT LAX ✓

THE DIES IRAE (II) *

We now come to the turning point in this immortal poem, The climax of the drama ends with the sixth stanza, and the last line, "naught shall unavenged remain," sounds like distant thunder that moves across the mountains of eternity. One senses how the phrase *nil inultum* would throb on and on in the recesses of a guilty heart. But now the next stanza ushers in an introspective mood, lyrical in its transition from fear to hope. First we find the soul, bewildered and confused, entering into herself.

Quid sum, miser, tunc dicturus,	Then, wretched me, what shall I say,
Quem patronum rogaturus,	What advocate shall I invoke,
Cum vix justus sit securus?	When even the just is not secure?

The soul stands before the severe and relentless Judge who will demand an answer to the order he himself issued when he was with us on earth: *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou canst be steward no longer* (Lk. 16:3). "Oh, that stewardship of mine," the soul laments, "now I see its tremendous value and importance. My long life, my vocation, those mountains of graces, of blessings and opportunities, that I neglected, if not squandered and abused. But now it is too late. Oh, terrible word—too late! The day and hour have come and passed, and now I stand before the judgment of God in all my naked humanity, deformed and bowed under the heavy load of sin."

Unable to endure the stern countenance of the Judge, unable to utter a word in her own defense, the soul looks about for help. Is there no one to plead her cause, to say something that would at least relieve this agony of tension? Where is Our Blessed Lady, the Mother of Mercy? Where is Saint Joseph, the kindly foster-father of Jesus? Where is the Guardian Angel to whose care the soul has been committed during life? Yes, they are near and willing to help, but the soul realizes that there will be a moment—a terrible moment—when the pleadings of others will be of no avail—that moment when the lips of the Eternal Judge will open to pronounce final and irrevocable sentence. That moment has come now for the soul, and with it this unbearable suspense. "Even the just man is barely secure," the soul groans to herself, and the thought is re-echoed by a thousand voices that ring forth from the pages of Holy Scripture and the lives of the saints. Even the "Vessel of Election," the great Saint Paul, comes forward to sustain this truth with his inspired confession: *Nay, I do not even judge my own self. For I have nothing on my con-*

science, yet I am not thereby justified: but he who judges me is the Lord (I Cor. 4:4).

But as the soul lifts her agonized gaze to meet the piercing eyes of the Judge, there comes to her tormented memory an ancient song, or rather a refrain that runs like a melody of golden flutes through the pages of the Old Testament: *The mercy of the Lord endureth forever*. What did Saint Paul mean when he spoke of the *unfathomable riches of Christ, and the mystery which has been hidden from eternity in God* (Eph. 3:8-9)? In Celano's time the devotion to the Sacred Heart had not yet been promulgated, but the mystery of mercy was known to the faithful from the very dawn of Christianity, even as the twilight shadows were falling on Golgotha. Who can tell what happens in an anguished soul when all hope seems lost and when she grasps frantically, as it were, at the proverbial straw? This is precisely the state that the poet tries to depict as the soul in her desperation, despite the unrelenting countenance of the Judge, makes a direct appeal to his Heart.

Rex tremendae majestatis,	O King of tremendous majesty,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,	Who freely saves those who are to be saved,
Salva me, fons pietatis.	Save me, O Fount of Goodness!

In a remarkable statement, Saint Paul, writing to his disciple Timothy, after confessing to him "*that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief*, bursts forth into the glorious anthem praise: *To the king of ages, who is immortal, invisible, the one only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen* (I Tim. 1:15-17). The Judge is King—King of glory and mercy. At the thought of this an illuminating ray of hope comforts the bewildered soul. With a mighty impulse she tears herself away from the despairing terror that has held her in grip and casts herself upon the mercy of her Judge. "For is not my Judge also my Saviour?" she cries out in hope. "Did he not come into the world to save all men? And has he not spared multitudes of our fallen race?" There is new strength and confidence in the penitent soul as she boldly, almost commandingly, addresses her Judge. Her first words still reflect the awe and dread of what has gone before. "Rex tremendae majestatis" means awe-inspiring majesty. But in the next line the soul expresses the relief that fills her, for salvation is in sight; and the last line ends in comforting hope and love.

This stanza pictures the Throne that has three steps. On the highest step stands the King of awful majesty; on the second, the Savior whose record of saving souls is an open book, on the third and lowest, the same

*The first part of this study appeared in the March 1955 issue of THE CORD.

Savior bends down in the attitude so beautifully described by Saint Paul in his letter to Titus: *But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared* (Tit. 3:4). Celano calls the Savior the Fount of Goodness. No more appropriate and meaningful title has been or can be found to convey all that the great Heart of the Savior of mankind possesses. The word "pietas" is frequently misunderstood. It does not mean piety or devoutness, nor is it covered by our terms sympathy, kindness, or gentleness. It comprises all these, to be sure, but fundamentally it denotes the relationship that exists between parents and children, between the members of a loving family. Thus it connotes that spiritual relationship that exists between God and his great family. The term "salvandos" is a bold expression implying that we *must* be saved, for how can a father forget his child? As the Savior said to Nicodemus: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that those who believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting* (Jn. 3:16).

Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae;
Ne me perdas illa die.

Call to mind, O kindly Jesus,
That I caused thy bitter way;
Do not cast me off that day.

What a marvelous change the Fount of Goodness has wrought in the soul! The dread, the anguish, the horror of the previous scene are being dispelled by the aurora that rises slowly in the eastern sky. It is the aurora of redemption, of the loving kindness of Jesus, the God-Man. The soul catches the last line of the previous stanza, "Salva me, fons pietatis," and makes a direct personal appeal to the Judge who is also her Savior. A kindly light suffuses the stern countenance of the Judge, a light that he cannot and will not conceal. For the Judge is still Jesus, the Infant Mary bore in Bethlehem, the boy of Nazareth who called Joseph the carpenter his father, the young man who for three years preached the kingdom of God and *went about doing good* (Acts 10:38), the loving Master who spoke the unforgettable words: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest* (Mtt. 11:28).

With exquisite feeling the poet here places the most holy Name of Jesus on the penitent's lips. Never before, perhaps, has the soul realized the tremendous power and ineffable sweetness of this Holy Name, sent from heaven and first committed to the Immaculate Mother and Joseph, her holy spouse, and as the centuries rolled by, passing from tongue to tongue, from heart to heart, extolled among the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church. No wonder that this Name *that is above every name* (Phil. 2:5) stirred Paul of Tarsus to the highest flights of eloquence, aroused Bernard of Clairvaux to the sweetest verses of sacred poetry, and inspired the two great Franciscan preachers, Bernardin

of Siena and John Capistran, to proclaim and thunder it from all the pulpits of Europe until Mother Church accorded it a place of honor and dignity in the calendar of the ecclesiastical year. "Call to mind, O kindly Jesus," pleads the penitent soul, and with a fine touch of compassion and gratitude she emboldens herself to continue, "call to mind that I was the cause of thy bitter way to Calvary." The soul has penetrated the deepest mystery of the God-Man's mission on earth, the real motive of his passion and death. "Remember," the soul pleads, "that I was the cause of all thine anguish and agony, of thy heavy cross and bitter chalice. All this was done for me, thy creature, whom thou hast made to the image and likeness of God, cleansed in thy blood, nourished with the ever-flowing graces of the Holy Spirit. Great indeed was the price thou hast paid for me—an infinite price. And although I was a miserably poor bargain and totally unworthy of the purchase-price, still I dare plead with thee. There must be justice, but hast thou not said through thy prophet: *Mercy is founded forever* (Ps. 88:3), and is it not the refrain of all the Scriptures that *the Lord is good, his mercy is forever, and unto all generations his faithfulness* (Ps. 99:5)? Therefore, not for my poor sake, but for thy glory, O kindly Jesus, do not cast me off on that day of wrath."

Quaerens me, sedisti lassus,
Redemisti Crucem passus;

Tantus labor non sit cassus.

Seeking me, thou didst wait, fatigued;
Carrying the Cross, thou didst redeem me:

Let not such labor be wasted.

The soul, hopeful now and courageous, eagerly presses her point, recalling other scenes from the Savior's life. She puts him in mind of what happened at Jacob's well. Saint John tells the story: *Arriving with his disciples at the well, Jesus, wearied as he was from the journey, was sitting at the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a Samaritan woman to draw water. A long conversation with this woman, who was a public sinner, followed, and the Master did not dismiss her until light and grace had touched her heart. Meanwhile the disciples returned from the city. They had brought food and begged him to eat. But he answered: I have food to eat of which you do not know* (Jn. 4:5-15). Has her Judge forgotten this incident, the soul queries? Indeed not; and would he who, though wearied and fatigued from his long journey, spent hours on that hot afternoon to gain the soul of that woman, would he reject one who after all is close to him by sacramental bonds and by a faith that, though weak and defiled by sin, is still burning? Then the soul turns again to the mystery of the Cross, for that was the supreme test of Christ's love for man. As one of the Fathers so beautifully put it: "*Aspice crucem; tan-*

tum enim vales, O anima Christiana;" "look at the cross: there, O Christian soul, is thy price!"

The story of the Passion is the Book of the Seven Seals, which only the Lamb of God can open. He opened it on the sorrowful way through the streets of the Holy City up the barren hill of Calvary. "Carrying the Cross," or rather, "suffering the Cross," the penitent soul recalls with emphasis, and in these words expresses one of the greatest truths of our holy faith. Ever since the first Good Friday the Way of the Cross has held the attention and devotion of the faithful; it has peopled monasteries and hermitages, brought thousands to the life of penance and contemplation. The Royal Way of the Cross has become the highway of sainthood throughout the Christian world, because the Cross is the proof and the symbol of love.

The final line of this stanza is a masterstroke. Here the penitent soul clinches her argument: "Tantus labor non sit cassus"—even though the object redeemed is not worth much, the labor of redemption was enormous; "let not such labor be wasted."

Juste Judex ultionis
Donum fac remissionis
Ante diem rationis.

Just Judge of vengeance,
Grant the gift of remission
Before the day of reckoning.

The soul is gathering more courage with every stanza. She has the courage to address her judge by his sweet name of Jesus, and is confident that she has come close to his Sacred Heart. But she does not stop; rather she draws still closer and even dares to enter the secret council of the Triune God. Her words are but a variation of David's superlative line:

*Mercy and fidelity shall meet,
Justice and peace shall kiss (Ps. 84:11).*

In two lines the justice and mercy of God confront each other, and the former, so the penitent hopes, must carry away the victory. The first line of the stanza addressing the "Just Judge of vengeance," accords full credit to the divine attribute of eternal Justice which must have the right; but knowing that the divine Mercy is but another aspect of Justice and always immediately follows it, the penitent asks for it. God's mercy cannot be merited; it is a free gift to us. But the soul is sure of it and with a boldness that leaves no room for deliberation she begs for its givenness—even before the day of reckoning has come.

The prayer moves on with breathless rapidity. The soul does not wait for the answer of her Judge, but presses on with the best and

argument at her command. She argues with an act of perfect contrition. And how could he be deaf to such a prayer, who once said: *There will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents* (Lk. 15-10).

Ingemisco tamquam reus,
Culpa rubet vultus meus:

As one condemned I deeply groan;
My brow blushes with the consciousness of guilt;

Supplicanti parce Deus.

O God, grant pardon to this suppliant.

This act of contrition is perfect. It embraces the whole man, his interior, his exterior, even his posture. The verb "ingemisco" is well chosen; it is a sigh that comes from the depths of the heart. The term "reus" is equally effective, for it implies more than mere guilt, but also condemnation for the guilt. The term "supplicanti" describes a man who bends his knees to the dust and asks pardon of his lord. Here the poet has given us a graphic description of perfect contrition. One may well wonder how in the turbulent and warring thirteenth century a poet could rise to such a lofty conception and deep realization of the enormity of the crime of rebellion against God. To the world of his day, and no less to our own, this stanza offers a perfect lesson in true repentance. Nor is this feeling of remorse only temporary. Suppliantly the sinner remains kneeling before his judge. As Father Faber says, the abiding sorrow for sin is one of the most wholesome and fruitful spiritual exercises. It places Adam's children in their true relationship to the Creator and lends power and freshness to our whole spiritual life. It does not necessarily stem from sorrow for sin in general, nor even from any actual sin committed; rather it makes us conscious of the sinfulness of all mankind and makes us cry out, together with the whole sinful world, the beautiful prayer of David: *Wash me thoroughly of my guilt, and cleanse me of my sin* (Ps. 50:4).

Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihî quoque spem dedisti.

Thou who didst absolve Mary Magdalen,
And didst give ear to the thief;
To me also thou gavest hope.

Humanly speaking, the strongest argument a culprit may produce in his favor is to remind the judge of how he has dealt with other people. It is like examining the judge's own conscience. It is an appeal to his fairness and honesty, and above all to his sense of justice. The poet chooses two of the greatest sinners from the Gospel, Mary Magdalen the public sinner, and the thief convicted of murder. The world had condemned both, but the Savior granted pardon, and the pardon was given in the most amiable manner.

Quite ingeniously Celano uses the word "absolvisti"—recalling the formula of sacramental absolution in the tribunal of penance which the Savior himself instituted. The word "exaudisti" also recalls liturgical usages, and with particular force and emphasis the poet gives prominence to the theological virtue of hope. Somehow we are inclined to overlook the charm and power of this beautiful virtue which is so genuinely Catholic. It is the golden link between faith and charity, the ladder that reaches from the groundwork of faith to the heights where charity reigns. It is a gift of God, and Saint Paul makes it the mark and characteristic of Christian living. *You were called in one hope of your calling* (Eph. 4:13), he wrote, and begged his own to keep apart from *others who have no hope* (I Thess. 4:13).

Preces meae non sunt dignae,
Sed tu bonus fac benigne,

Ne perenni cremer igne.

My prayers are not worthy,
But thou, who art good, graciously
grant
That I may not burn in unquenchable
fire.

Calmness has now settled upon the troubled soul. Holy hope has shed its mellow light and warmth over the scene. The soul sees more clearly than ever God's greatness and her own nothingness; the power of divine mercy and the weakness of a sinful creature. In the light of this vision the full truth is manifested, and that truth engenders humility. There is no virtue, no perfection, without humility. Humility is the ground and basis of all striving for union with God.

The poet, who was the son of the humble Poverello, knew this and consequently after having taught the penitent soul the need and power of prayer, makes her feel the weakness of prayer that is not lifted up by divine grace. This new turn of thought presents the soul as an absolute captive in the hands of the Almighty. With the Psalmist she sighs: *For thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us by fire, just as silver is tried; thou hast led us into a snare* (Ps. 65:10-11). She looks back upon her prayer—a prayer that was wrung from her inmost being—and she humbly confesses: "Preces meae non sunt dignae."

This frank admission brings to the penitent's mind the Savior's remarkable saying: *One there is who is good, and he is God* (Mtt. 19:17). If power is the first notion of God that nature teaches us, and truth the second, then goodness surely ranks third. Such was the philosophical teaching of the day, and Celano speaks with complete conviction when he writes: "Sed tu bonus." But he proceeds still further when he makes

that divine *bonitas* become *benignitas* in response to a poor sinner's plea for mercy. *Benignitas* is a beautiful word; Holy Scripture uses it sparingly, perhaps for that very reason. Saint Paul sets forth its full meaning in his words to Titus: *But when the goodness and kindness* (*benignitas et humanitas*) *of God our Savior appeared* (Tit. 3:4). It is much to Celano's credit that he presented in this brief verse the glorious truth that the goodness of the Triune God manifests itself so wonderfully in the *benignitas* of the Savior toward poor sinful mankind. But the climax occurs in the third verse. For how could the good God and the benign Savior suffer a poor repentant mortal to fall prey to the unquenchable flames of eternal hell-fire—"ne perenni cremer igne?" The last phrase is strikingly realistic. It is the term used to denote the burning and utter consuming of human bodies in the ancient cemeteries.

Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis,
Voca me cum benedictis.

The cursed having been silenced
And cast into the biting flames,
Call me with thy blessed ones.

This is almost an echo of the prophecy made by the Savior when he spoke of the Son of Man seated on the throne of his glory; and before him will be gathered all nations, and he will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left (Mtt. 25:31-33). Here the penitent, by implication, makes an act of faith inasmuch as he accepts without doubt or reservation the Master's prophecy concerning the Last Judgment in its literal wording. Meanwhile we cannot but observe his supreme confidence in the good and benign Master who will, he is certain, look to his right hand and assign to the penitent, who now appears before him in the garb of the humble prodigal, a place among the sheep. "Statuens" corroborates the first line: the penitent not only seeks a place among the sheep but he desires to be firmly established there forever, close to the King he loves and longs to serve for all eternity.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis:
Gere curam mei finis.

Suppliantly I prostrate myself and
implore thee,
My heart is ground to ashes;
To thy care I commit my last end.

This is a re-statement of the King's own verdict, according to Saint Matthew: *Then the king will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'* (Mtt. 25:34). *Then he will*

say to those on his left hand, 'Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt 25:41). With this scene before his mind, the poet, as if playing a mighty organ, resumes his original theme and in a stirring *majestoso* describes the curse of the Almighty upon those who shall be condemned forever. Strangely enough, the penitent soul now dares to assume what she had dreaded before—the role of announcing with conviction that divine justice must be avenged.

The word "confutare" is borrowed from the language of ancient court procedure. It means the complete silencing of the culprit and implies his condemnation. The word "acribus" has the connotation "sharp," "bitting," and carries the onomatopoeic suggestion of the crackling of the perpetual flames of hell. In the final line the poet reverts to his attitude of childlike supplication—"voca me cum benedictis."

The gates of hell are now shut and, as the old legend goes, there is seen the inscription written by the hand of the Almighty: "Forever Never." The gates will remain shut forever; they will never be opened.

Lacrimosa dies illa
Qua resurgit ex favilla
Judicandus homo reus:

A day of tears that day will be
When sinful man rises from ashes
To be judged.

One more prayer is wrung from the very depths of the penitent's heart. It is the last, but it embraces all the emotions, hopes, and longings that a crushed conscience can muster. Prostrate on the dust from which he was taken, the penitent offers a truly contrite heart to God. Here the poet plays upon the original meaning of "contrition," from "conterere" "to grind to pieces." Like ashes, the Biblical symbol of penance, his heart is crushed and ground. The last line is spoken with complete abandonment to divine mercy. The sinner has exhausted all his powers. He can say no more, and now he surrenders himself unreservedly to his Maker and Judge.

Huic ergo parce Deus.
Pie Jesu Domine,
Dona eis requiem. Amen.

To him, O God, be merciful,
Loving Lord Jesus,
Grant them rest. Amen.

These last two stanzas are not part of the original composition. Both in construction and in thought they differ from the rest of the poem. These additions were made at the time when the Sequence, formerly used in the Last and First Sundays of the liturgical year, came to be used in the Mass for the Dead. Though obviously additions, no one will de-

that they form a fitting and comforting end to the great dramatic Sequence. While they present a kind of summary of the thought and feeling of the original poem, they set forth the beautiful sympathy of Mother Church when one of her children is laid to rest. One may say that she picked from among all the stanzas the fairest gem for her final prayer: "Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem."

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O.F.M. ✓

SCRIPTURE READING WITH SAINT BONAVENTURE

(Comment. in Joannem, ch. XI, vv.11-16, Opera Omnia, Tom. VI, pp. 398f)

He said to them, "Lazarus, our friend, sleeps. But I go that I may wake him from sleep." His disciples therefore said, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will be safe." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought he was speaking of the repose of sleep. So then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead; and I rejoice on your account that I was not there, that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who is called the Twin, said therefore to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11: 11-16).

The name "Lazarus" means *one helped by the Lord*. And this name, in its spiritual sense, signifies a man who has the grace of God assisting him. *Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in the day of salvation I have helped thee* (Isaias 49: 8). This grace is a special sign of the love of God. Therefore, the one upon whom God lovingly bestows it should, like Lazarus, welcome it graciously. The Book of Proverbs voices the words with which the Lord condescends to speak of His love: *I love them that love me* (Prov. 8: 17). In return, God expects the chosen one to receive, cherish and re-act upon His gift of grace. According to Saint Bonaventure, this is "redamatio," or the "return of love" from the lover to the Beloved.

But, oftentimes, our gracious God finds the soul sound asleep: *Lazarus, our friend, sleeps* (v. 11). Here, the beneficiary has a som-

nolent indifference to the gifts of her Lord. Or, worse still, she may be asleep in the doleful death of sin: "*Lazarus is dead* (v. 14). On these points, Saint Bonaventure discovers that the *repose of sleep* (*dormitio somni*) is a highly equivocal term; it is a phrase of many meanings. So he describes four kinds of such sleep or dormition.

First, there is the sleep of laziness: *How long will thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou rise out of thy sleep* (Proverbs 6:9)? The grace of God finds this man "taking it easy" day and night. To him, grace offers the warning words of Christ to *do works. . . while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work* (Jn. 9: 4). And, should he drowsily turn over, undismayed, she prods him with the admonition of Saint Paul (I Thess. 5: 5): *You are all children of the light and children of the day. We are not of night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us be wakeful.*

Secondly, we may speak of the sleep of sin. And Saint Paul fairly shouts into the spiritual ears of those drugged with this deadly somnolence: *Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee* (Eph. 5:14). And yet, with this alarm incessantly ringing in the ears of many sinful sleepers, the Apostle of the Gentiles sadly admits: *Many among you are infirm and weak, and many sleep* (I Cor. 11: 31). If such sleep afflicts us, like Augustine at Milan, let us "take and read:" *The night is far advanced; the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Let us walk becomingly as in the day* (Rom. 13: 12f).

In the third place, there is sleep in the usual sense of repose. And although this is often not only harmless but even beneficial, at times it should be foregone in behalf of Christ or His little ones. This was the situation when the Saviour so needed, humanly, the comfort and consolation of His three chosen ones in the Garden of Gethsemani: *Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping* (Matt. 26: 40). One of them must have been at least half-awake and aware of the pressing petition of Jesus: *And he said to Peter, "Could you not then watch one hour with me? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Ibid. vv. 40f). In our own lives, have we not often too easily given in to rest when, like the Apostles, our *eyes were heavy* (Ibid. v. 43)? Spiritually speaking, our slumber of indifference may seem

harmless enough. But, possibly, at the very moment when we are sleeping Christ is beseeching our prayers lest some member of His Mystical Body be *betrayed into the hands of sinners* (Ibid. v. 45). And then suddenly, all too late, we may awaken to the realization that the betrayer has laid hold of one who was dear to His Sacred Heart: *Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand* (Ibid. v. 46). Lest this happen, let us strive always to be alert to the needs of those belonging to Christ, saying: *But I go that I may awake him from sleep* (v. 11).

Finally, we come to that sleep which seems more properly applied to Lazarus. And this is the sleep of death: *Now Jesus spoke of his death* (v. 14). When Christ had first mentioned the sleep of Lazarus, the Apostles had taken it in the third sense, namely, the sleep of repose. For Jesus had said: *Lazarus, our friend, sleeps. But I go that I may wake him from sleep* (v. 11). Perhaps, naturally, our Lord wanted them first to take Him literally, so that then He could easily point out that in passing over to eternal life death is little more than a sleep. It is in this sense that the Church often speaks of her Saints and just men as "falling asleep in the Lord." But there was still another meaning that he wished to imply in those words. He wished to indicate to them and to us that, of all four kinds of sleep, the only sleep really to be feared is the sleep of sin. Not only laziness, not only neglect of a positive duty, but also and especially the terrible torpor of mortal sin must be avoided, or thrown off if we succumb to it. He even warns us, as he warned Peter, of the deceptive drowsiness of venial sin: *"Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation* (Mt. 26:40f). Beyond doubt, the sleep of mortal sin is the worst kind of death. And mortal sin can catch us napping in the drowsiness of venial sin.

However, in our present text, the Apostles took Christ literally when He spoke of the sleeping Lazarus. So they replied: *"Lord, if he sleeps, he will be safe* (v. 12). They were thinking of the "sleep of the innocents," the healing sleep of nature that refreshes the mind and body. To correct their misconception, Jesus said to them plainly: *Lazarus is dead* (v. 14). How this short statement must have startled them. They reacted spontaneously. When Christ said, *Let us go to him* (v. 16), Thomas echoed the words for his fellow Apostles: *Let*

us also go (v. 16). The doubting disciple even tried to draw the others into the greater sacrifice of the sleep awakening in eternity: *That we may die with him* (v. 16). And, if Peter were ever bested in his impetuosity, it was here when Thomas spoke for all the rest: *Let us also go that we may die with him* (v. 16). And though this outburst of generosity may seem foolhardy to us, have not our promises often resembled the resolution of Thomas? At the death of a dearly-loved friend, did not our determinations approach the heroic? But when confronted by some comparatively trivial temptation, we forgot our pledge. Were we not at one time willing to share the sorrow of our friend, if not even to die in his stead? Yet when faced with the daily demands of living faithful to his memory, we failed miserably. Perhaps, like the Apostles, we forget that it is not great things that are asked of us, but little things. The little sleep of that temptation, the nap of carelessness to an occasion of sin, or even dozing in venial sin, can lead to the deep slumber of mortal sin. Indeed, slight sins can drug our wakefulness.

Each of us can remind himself that he is also a Lazarus, truly *one helped by God*. May we not become spiritual sleep-walkers; but, rather, let us pray that God may help us, that Christ may say of us: *I go that I may wake him from sleep* (v. 77). Wide awake, then, I must become alert to the needs of some other Lazarus. Perhaps, unable to help himself, he languishes in the tomb of purgatory. With the indulgenced prayers and graces at my disposal, I can literally stretch forth my hand to him in his hour of suffering need. Having succumbed to the sleep of death, he now cries to me in his sleepless sorrow: *Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me* (Job 19: 21). In reply, am I not bound, Christ-like, to keep my eyes open for opportunities to help release him from his entombment? Like the Master, must my compassion not compel me to *groan in spirit* at his plight? Or has my conscience become so insensible to the ravages of sin, that I can not even imagine the frightful consequences of unatoned-for faults? While I long so ardently to be remembered well by others, do I fall into the lethargy which shuts my eyes to the needs of the poor souls? Even our glorified God asked for our remembrance: "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22: 19). Would He not then, want us to

share His help at the moment of Consecration with the suffering souls? Perhaps we carelessly or drowsily skip over the memento for the dead in daily Holy Mass. If we do, we are shutting our eyes to the fact that someday that will be our place of remembrance—if indeed we are remembered at all and not fully forgotten in turn. At least we could practice a selfish gratitude to those who have gone before. For though they cannot help themselves, it is well known that the poor souls can help us. Let us then, beg their help to keep us awake to the constant dangers surrounding us in life. If God will keep us wakeful and vigilant, it might well be that some poor, grateful soul has besought this grace for us. May the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen!

Fr. Owen A. Colligan, O.F.M. ✓

FRANCISCAN BRIEFS

BOOK REVIEWS

MEDITATIONS ON THE RULE AND LIFE OF THE FRIARS MINOR. Fr. Pirmin Hasenoehrl, O.F.M., translated under authority of the Very Reverend Ministers Provincial of the United States and Canada. Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1954. Vol. I, pp. 696; Vol. II, pp. 613. \$12.50. ✓

The long-felt need for a Franciscan meditation book is now more than adequately supplied in this excellent work of Fr. Pirmin. The two large, handsomely-bound volumes cover the entire liturgical year, which forms the framework for the meditations. Subjects applicable to the Franciscan way of life are fitted into this framework in such a way that the close association between the Gospels and our Rule becomes strikingly clear. Specifically, meditations on the three religious vows are woven into the principle cycles of the Ecclesiastical year: on poverty, for Advent and Christmas; on obedience, for the weeks after Epiphany; and on chastity, for the weeks after Easter. The Lenten season is devoted to meditations on the Passion. From the Sunday Gospels thoughts are taken that form the basis of meditations on the Rule and other writings of Saint Francis, principles of the spiritual life in general, and the fundamental truths of faith. There are also meditations for the special Franciscan feasts.

The form of the meditations follows that of Saint Peter of Alcantara; they are simple, brief, and pointed, and on the whole, excellently constructed for community meditation.

This is a book that should be made generally available in every Franciscan community. A thoughtful and prayerful following of these meditations must of necessity produce a deepening of Franciscan spirituality in every community that uses it.

S.M.F.

UNION WITH CHRIST. Leo Veuthey, O.F.M. Conv., translated by James Meyer, O.F.M. Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1954. Pp. 96. \$2.00

Readers of *The Franciscan Herald and Forum* who have profited from the series of articles entitled "Union with Christ" will be delighted to find the series available in book form. The work is already so well known that it seems superfluous to discuss it here. Suffice to remark that it treats of Franciscan asceticism, bringing out its Christocentric character and its tendency toward the mystical union as its normal goal. Each chapter of the book deals with some pertinent aspect of ascetical theology, beginning with a treatment of the Mystical Body and running through nine chapters on Mary, prayer, the Mass, poverty, humility, chastity, mortification, and suffering.

Sister M. Michaeline, O.S.F., did the jacket design for the book and the title page and chapter divisions. Interpretations of the symbols accompany her designs. Unfortunately, the printing is not up to standard.

The translation was made by the late Fr. James Meyer, O.F.M., for thirty-three years editor of *The Franciscan Herald and Forum*, and author and translator of numerous works on Franciscan spirituality. His death is a deep-felt loss to the Franciscan apostolate in this country, especially the apostolate of the press.

S.M.F.

SISTERS' DIVISION OF FEC TO MEET IN INDIANAPOLIS

It was announced at the closing sessions of the FEC that the meeting of the Sisters' Division is to be held at Marian College, Indianapolis, during the Thanksgiving recess, November 25-26. The subject will be the same as for the FEC: "Nature, the Mirror of God."

For information, write to:

Sister M. Carol, O.S.F.

Marian College

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The FEC unanimously expressed its sympathy to the members of the Franciscan Institute and to all who were affected by the untimely death of Father Philotheus Bohner, O.F.M., Founder and Director of the Institute. It also expressed "its own indebtedness to the deceased by dedicating the Report of the Conference to this great Franciscan who continually found in nature a mirror of God."

THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

THE MEANING OF MINORITAS

During the past month we have considered the various aspects of our Franciscan life in penance and have tried to discover wherein we fall short of our ideal and into what alien paths we tend to stray. It now remains for us to synthesize these aspects of the Franciscan ideal or to find one single aspect that embraces them all. This we can discover at the feet of the Infant of Bethlehem, and we shall call it, for want of a better term, *minoritas*.

1. *Why Minoritas?*

It is especially necessary for us children of Saint Francis, living as we do in this sophisticated age of worldly pride and wisdom, to study our way of life, *whence it comes* (Phil. 1:10). For our name of Friars Minor stands as a sign of contradiction and contempt to the vast majority of our contemporaries. If we cannot defend it to our selves, we cannot hope to defend it to the world.

Our Order has a history some seven centuries long. It looks back upon an ancient tradition, yet a tradition sufficiently flexible to be adapted to the needs of every age. Actually, therefore, we have two traditions: the unalterable ideal, the total imitation of Christ, which is the essence of our way of life, and the ideal of adaptability in matters of external observance. This latter tradition is one of the clearest signs of spiritual vigor. An Order that continues throughout several centuries and keeps in close touch with the world must have the strength to conform to the times in manner and outlook without detriment to its essential spirit. Therefore, while the ideal remains intact, it must be expressed in new forms. An apostolic Order must be equipped to enter new fields of activity; it must be prepared to give answers to the questions that continually arise in human society; it must be able to adapt itself to the ever-changing customs of an ever-changing world—and all this without sacrificing or compromising its spiritual integrity. For if the Order clearly understands its divine mission, the specific purpose for which the Holy Spirit has called it into being, it can always fulfill that mission. It can always belong