

The history of these devotions and many more besides, together with the indulgences attached to them, are charmingly presented in Father Marion's book. There are also chapters on Saint Anthony's life and the miracles authentically attributed to him, together with an appreciation of him as a follower and teacher of the Franciscan way of life. Apostolic Letters on Saint Anthony by Popes Pius XI and XII, and an Encyclical Letter from Minister General Valentine Schaaf, O.F.M., complete the book.

This latest work of Father Marion's first appeared as a series of articles in *Everybody's Saint Anthony*, a monthly

periodical issued by the Franciscans in Bangalore, India. Certainly a book on the historicity and authenticity of legends and devotions surrounding Saint Anthony is as badly needed in this country as in India. But lest the reader of this review be led to suppose the book is dry and technical, we must say that it is quite the contrary. The historical facts behind the popular devotions make Saint Anthony seem so real and alive, so attractive and lovable, that anyone who reads this book will surely find himself cherishing and promoting more spiritually sound devotion to Saint Anthony than ever before.

SISTERS YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE

Because we have learned that so many Franciscan Sisterhoods are strangers to each other (which is a shame, really) we decided to alternate *THE CORD'S* regular biographical sketch with a short history of some one of the various Franciscan Congregations. We have no doubt but that you will do your best to cooperate, for surely you want the rest of the family to know about you as much as you want to know about them. So, here's what to do. Write up an informative, factual, interesting history of your Institute, to the length of about *eight* or *nine* typewritten (pica or elite) pages. Leave an inch margin all around, double space, and indent paragraphs three spaces. Send us the manuscript as soon as possible; or, if you have a printed pamphlet or some other literature on your Congregation, you may send that to us and we'll select what we consider pertinent.

Please let us hear from you soon. The whole Franciscan family is waiting to meet you.

THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE *THE SPIRIT OF THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION*

To be true religious, we must become living stones in the spiritual edifice of our Order. Only as such can we become fully integrated into the Order and partake of its life. But living stones are not passively set in place; they strive to place themselves, to integrate themselves into the organic structure of the Order which has been built as a holy temple of God. Therefore it cannot be said that we partake of the life of the Order if we simply let it surround us; we must actively *live* it by absorbing it into our heart and mind, for only then can we hope to become living stones—which in fact is what our vocation demands of us. Naturally, this presupposes that we are conscious of the spirit that animates our Order. But before we take up this question, there is another and more basic point that we must pause to consider—a point that is really a matter of spiritual life or death for us: What is the meaning of the religious vocation? We do not mean the spirit of our Order, but rather of the religious life in general. The answer to this question is clearly given in the Gospel. The religious vocation is the call to follow Christ in total surrender to God, by separating ourselves from the world, and by carrying our cross daily with Christ.

1. *The Spirit of Consecration*

The spirit of consecration to God is basic for the religious vocation. When we pronounce our vows we give ourselves completely to God, not only by an act of worship, not only by a devout promise, but by the sacrificial act of vowing. In virtue of our consecration we are removed from the profane sphere and made holy to the Lord—even to the extent that an injury done to us becomes a profanation and a sacrilege. More than all other creatures of God, more than all other Christians and in a higher sense than these—we are marked with the divine seal as the property of the Great King. Through this consecration we become a constant act of worship, a living prayer, an unceasing immolation.

Now, if this spirit of consecration is alive in us and if it permeates all our activities, we should have no worry about purity of

intention. Yet we hear so much prattle about the split between religious life and the labors that burden religious—as if those labors were not imposed in virtue of that very life itself. Our consecration makes all our labors holy; whatever we do becomes an act of religion, an act of worship, a truly sacrificial act. If we are assigned to study for instance (and study is the most common cause of tension among religious), will our studying be the same as that of the secular student? Not at all; for we are consecrated to the Lord, and in virtue of this consecration our studying is an act of worship. For the religious who lives his consecration, to study is to pray. If we are truly what we should be, how can we possibly complain of conflict between our religious life and our studies? If we learn to live in the atmosphere of our consecration, we shall have no difficulties with our work, no matter how onerous or time-consuming or ubiquitous it may be. Even if we have to perform tasks that are commonly considered mean or servile, we should be able to regard them reverently for what they are—true acts of worship, transformed by the power of our religious consecration. Awake or asleep, eating or fasting, sweating in a kitchen or a classroom—whatever we do in the realm of our daily life is an act of worship.

Furthermore, our consecration gives us the specific character of sacrificial victim. Unless we live as victims—unless we regard ourselves as living holocausts to be consumed in the fire of divine Love we are not really living our consecration. Practically, what does this mean? It means simply that we must constantly realize we are the property of God, wholly, irrevocably, and voluntarily. To belong wholly to God means that everything we do, everything we have and are, belongs to Him, and we have no right to take back any part of ourselves or to give any part of ourselves to creatures. We have no right to murmur or complain, or to give way to self-pity. We have no right to seek the easy ways through life, for comfort is not in harmony with the role of victim. We have no right to content ourselves with fulfilling the basic requirements of the vows and virtues and leaving perfection for the zealots; for only a *perfect* victim, a lamb without blemish, is acceptable to the Lord. To belong to God irrevocably means that we hold firmly to the ideal of our consecration without ever looking back on the world we have left, without

any toying with thoughts of “what might have been” or “what still could be.” It means there can be no lapses into pleasant infidelities, no slipping back into the ways of the world, no occasional casting off of the insignia of our consecration to more freely indulge our *gaiete du coeur*. We bound ourselves by vows once for all; we placed ourselves on the altar of sacrifice; it behooves us to remain there.

To belong to God voluntarily means that we give ourselves to Him in the total surrender of our consecration, with the gladness and freedom and generosity of the lover to the beloved. As a reluctant bride distresses the bridegroom, so the unwilling victim, the timorous soul who shrinks from the consuming flames of divine Love, distresses the Eternal Bridegroom. We must be willing victims, ever humbly grateful to the Lord for the sublime part He has assigned to us in the life of the Church.

Our spirit of consecration, then, makes us wholly the Lord's property. We do not live for ourselves, nor for our superiors, nor for the Order, nor for any work or office. We live for God and for Him alone.

2 *The Spirit of Separation from the World*

By consecrating ourselves to the Lord we separate ourselves from the world. Thus an essential part of the religious life is the spirit of denial. We have the words of Christ: *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast* (Mtt. 19:21). And we also hear Him explaining that this selling of everything entails much more than mere property: *Everyone who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall possess life everlasting* (Mtt. 19:29). Our consecration, then, means renunciation of this world—not simply the world in the evil sense, the world of which Satan is prince—but of everything that ordinarily can become an impediment to our total surrender to God. For the love of Christ we broke all the ties that once bound us to creatures, even in a lawful way, so that we could strengthen the one tie that would bind us to the Lord. No creature has any further right over us; we are the property of God, and if for any reason we turn back to creatures—even to our parents—it can be done only according to the will of God, with His permission, as it were.

This denial and separation from the world must be final and complete. The break cannot be made halfheartedly; it must be made firmly, thoroughly, with a holy radicalism. There is no compromise possible. When the Lord calls, all human voices must be silent. When He calls, we must follow without hesitation, no matter where He leads us, at all times yielding ourselves trustingly to His good pleasure. When the Lord calls, we must leave all things behind us. Like the Apostles, we must leave our little nets and boats, we must leave our relatives with their rivalries and contentions to settle for themselves, and even, if the Lord demands it, we must leave the burial of our father to others. And once we have set our hand to the plow, we dare not look back, under pain of being declared unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of course religious must take part in worldly affairs. It would be quite absurd for us to go about completely oblivious of the world around us. We are men, not angels; even the cloistered contemplatives are at least aware of the ground under their feet. Furthermore it is a sure indication of a mean, selfish, and frontiered heart to remain indifferent to the sufferings of the world, to take no interest at all in our friends and relatives and benefactors, especially those who are entrusted to our care. Our attitude must always reflect a heart that is warmly alive to the welfare of others; but at the same time our attitude must reflect the spirit of our religious consecration. If we are called to imitate Christ, we must look upon the world as He did, with tender and loving compassion for its ills and miseries, with sympathetic understanding for its joys and yearnings, with solicitude for its errors and follies. We must put on the mind of Christ, then we can give the world what He gave, and what He expects us to give in His Name. But first must come the separation, the denial, then the hundredfold return.

3. *The Spirit of the Cross*

Our consecration means not only that we give ourselves wholly to God, but also that we give ourselves as Christ gave Himself—or as He **described Himself**, took on the form of a slave, humbled Himself, and **was given to death**. Hence the spirit of the religion is the **spirit of the Crucified Christ**. We have

His own words for it: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For he who would save his life will lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake will find it* (Mtt. 16: 24-25). This spirit of love for the Cross is essential to our vocation. Do we ever stop to consider how often Christ spoke of the persecutions that would come upon His friends? He not only spoke of denial and separation, but He also very often mentioned persecutions and injustices—a point we are inclined to overlook. *Amen, I say to you, that there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, who shall not receive now in the present time a hundred-fold as much, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children and lands—along with persecutions.* (Mk. 10:28).

This is not new to us, of course; we learned the theory in the novitiate. But lack of the *spirit* of the Cross very often leads religious to nerve-shattering crises. If we have really given up everything for the sake of Christ, if we are totally His own property, if we have answered His call generously and trustingly, then why do we refuse to go His way, and all the way, with Him? Why do we shrink from humiliations? Why do we sink into the quagmire of bitterness and remain there for the whole time of our religious life—perhaps die in it? Or even lose our soul in it? Why do we allow our personality to become warped in the wormwood of resentment? Why do we fail to study the meaning of the Cross and conform our life to it? The Cross is our vocation; have we still the mind of a novice who knows the theory of the spiritual life without yet knowing the implications? If we shrink from the Cross we shrink from our vocation. The spirit of the religious vocation demands conformity to Christ, not to the Christ of the Transfiguration, or to the Christ of the Marriage Feast, nor even to the Christ of the Hidden Life, but to the Christ of the Passion. Our divine Master was unjustly criticized by the rulers of His people; He was unjustly condemned to death by His religious superiors, whose authority, incidentally, He clearly acknowledged (Jn. 19:11). He bore the ignominy of carrying His Cross publicly, like a slave and a criminal, through the streets of Jerusalem. He suffered all the pains that can afflict the human heart—ingratitude, treachery, betrayal of friendship, apparent failure,

ridicule, mockery, physical agony, spiritual desolation. And He died as a criminal between criminals, in the sight of His own Mother. We all know this; we have all meditated on the Passion. Yet—how many religious vocations have been lost because of refusal to follow Christ on the way of the Cross, through real or imaginary persecutions through injuries to feelings, through public and unjust humiliations? These defections were and are the simple and inevitable consequences of failure to recognize love of the Cross and of the Crucified Christ as the heart of religious consecration.

Without a deep and thorough knowledge—and knowledge strengthened with conviction—of the full meaning of the religious vocation, we cannot hope to become living stones in the Order. With the grace of God we may remain in the Order, to be sure, but only as stones—cold, hard, and dead stones. Let us beg, then, for the grace to become living stones. Christ said to the Samaritan woman: *If thou didst know the gift of God, and who says to thee, 'Give me to drink, thou perhaps wouldst ask of him, and he would have given thee living water' (Jn. 4:10). Have we asked this living water of Him who has called us?*

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.

ARTIST OF DIVINITY

Hanging among the paintings in the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice is a picture signed Caterina Vigri; another, bearing the same signature—this one a picture of Saint Ursula and her companions, dated 1452—is exhibited in the Gallery of Bologna. That both of these paintings came from the brush of a very clever artist is unmistakable, and there is evidence of a rare delicacy of line and expression; but Caterina Vigri was a person whose perception of beauty extended far beyond the canvas to the ultimate—Divinity Itself—and as a canonized saint, Caterina of Bologna,¹ she is invoked as the Patroness of painters and artists.

This daughter of one of the principal families of Ferrara was born on September 8, 1413 in Bologna—in Bologna because her mother, Benvenuta Mamellini, had returned to her own family for the birth. Promp-

ted by love and consideration, her husband, John Vigri, who held a doctor of laws degree from the University of Bologna and had been newly assigned to a professor's chair at the University of Padua, had refused to burden her with the added hardships of setting up a new establishment. The child was a talented youngster and her parents saw to it that she was well tutored. To their own training was added that of the tutors of the Court of Ferrara, for, when Caterina was but ten years old, the Marquis of Ferrara persuaded John to send his daughter to Court as maid of honor to his young Princess Margaret. The lovable little Vigri girl soon charmed the entire Court with her beauty and her winning ways, her innocence and her very natural spirituality. The Princess loved her completely and Catherine and Margaret d'Este spent many companionable hours together over their studies, which included not only the fifteenth century essentials for a woman of culture, but also the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and a great deal of Latin. When Margaret married the Prince of Rimini, Catherine had been with her for three years. Contrary to the young bride's hopes, however, she was unable to persuade her much-appreciated Caterina to accompany her to the Court of Rimini. Catherine Vigri had made up her mind to return to her family, for her dreams were of service in a far nobler Court.

She had been home a very short time when John Vigri died, leaving a large fortune to his only child. Beautiful, talented, charming of manner, and an heiress! Fortunately for Catherine's dreams, when the suitors came seeking her hand, Benvenuta refused her cooperation; and before long this lovely fourteen year-old heiress, with the whole-hearted sanction of her mother, had joined a group of young girls who, under the leadership of a devout townswoman, Lucy Mascheroni, were leading a kind of monastic life in Ferrara. These virtue-conscious girls, without benefit of vow or cloister, dividing their time between prayer and good works, were directed in their spiritual seeking by the Franciscan Friars of the Observance.

During her first five or six years with the group, Catherine went through another period of training, tutored this time by Divinity—with a permit for Satan, also—for Providence was preparing this artist-soul for work on material other than canvas. In retrospect, the guidance and purpose of the Master Hand is easily distinguishable in the favors, the trials and temptations which she experienced, for Caterina Vigri was being divinely conditioned to teach souls. There were her visions, her bouts with the deceptions of the devil; there was the time when, delighted at having overcome an especially violent temptation, she taunted

Satan with his inability to deceive her, and Satan-like, he came back at her with deceits so refined that, but for grace, he would have confused her to the point of succumbing. A warning against presumption, and not very subtle one at that! She was subjected to blasphemous thoughts from which she could find no escape, to doubts about the Real Presence and to an overpowering inclination to sleep—she fell asleep everywhere and at all times. It became such a struggle to keep awake that sometime during Holy Mass she would spend the entire time on her knees with her arms extended in the form of a cross. Never once, however, did she give up striving, and after she had successfully passed through her period of preparation, God stepped in with His peace and wonderful gifts.

Deeply edified by the fervor of the life which the girls led, the Princess of Verde set about building a convent for them which, she specified, was to be called the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament.

With this materialization of their hopes in sight, they began to consider adopting one of the established Rules. Lucy favored the Augustinian, but Catherine, who had been following the Tertiary Rule, pleaded for that of Saint Francis. Her presentation of the case for the Poor Clare Rule must have been very convincing, for before long she had won all the others to her way of thinking; and Lucy, seeing the unanimity of opinion, acquiesced.

It was in 1432 that they were invested with the Franciscan habit and were given the First Rule of Saint Clare by the Provincial of the Friars. In answer to their appeal for assistance, the Nuns at Mantua sent them as Abbess Sister Taddea, the natural sister of Princess Verde, along with a little group of very fervent Religious to help initiate the community at Ferrara into the observances of the Rule. Like a soul released, the twenty-year old Catherine ran along the way to perfection; sacrifice and self-denial were the ordinary; so exact and fervent, so imbued with the spirit of their Holy Mother was she, that the others came to regard her as a second Clare.

Her first appointment was that of baker, and to Catherine's way of thinking, it was an ideal one, for it gave her the opportunity of serving the others. Nevertheless, she found the heat of the ovens almost past bearing and when it began to effect her eyesight, very sensibly decided that it was time to do something about it lest she become a blind burden to the community. When the Abbess suggested, however, that she return to the ovens and leave her health in the Hands of God, she did so, unhesitatingly and cheerfully content.

Conscious all the while that her trials and the extraordinary graces being given her were not meant for herself alone, she began presently to keep a sort of diary in which she wrote of her experiences, thinking that after her death it might serve as a help to others—but only after her death, for her humility could bear the thought that her notes might be read by the nuns while she was still among them. Fearful lest the notebook fall into the hands of her companions, she would, after each entry, sew it inside the cover of the cushion on the chair beside her bed. The Sisters, curious, and suspecting that she was doing something of the sort, searched until they found her account, then inadvertently gave themselves away by the careless stitches they made in their haste to cover up the traces of their indiscretion. When Catherine detected the sewing that was not her own she was greatly disturbed and burned the pages immediately in the bake ovens.

After a while her attempts to deflect attention from herself, to conceal her virtue, her gifts of miracles and visions, became futile and her Superiors, appreciating the worth of this blessed soul, entrusted Catherine with the guidance of the novices—a post for which Divine Providence had so prodigiously prepared her. Since Sister Catherine had already experienced most of the trials and difficulties to which her charges would be subjected, the novices found in their Mistress an understanding heart—that boon which is so inestimable to those who are new to the religious life. She counseled them, she exhorted them; but more effective by far was her own day by day life, for there is no teaching more conducive to desired results than words in action. No matter what their difficulty, there was always sympathy; no matter when, there was always time—she told them once to be sure to awaken her if she happened to be asleep when they were troubled. At one of the annual visitations, Catherine was rebuked for sensuality because it was noticed that at times there were so many egg shells on her plate. But Catherine had kept only the shells. She had begged the extra eggs, shelled them, then given them to those of the novices who were finding it difficult—human nature being what it is—to adjust to the rigorous fasts of the Rule.

Her horror of idleness was innate, and, with a realization of all the dangers which it invited, she often found occasion to warn the Sisters of the value of minutes. For her free time—like all the modern hobby-lovers—she found occupation for both mind and hands; she painted, she wrote, she composed Latin hymns. Much has been made of the breviary which she copied by hand in these odd minutes on parchment-like

paper, illuminating it beautifully in the richest of colors. Never selfish or possessive, she lent it to anyone who asked, and to such an extent that it came to be regarded as common property.

The office of portress followed that of Novice Mistress, and to Catherine's keen soul-sight, this stepping down into the ranks again was not the demotion that it would appear to worldly judges. Without a doubt her Divine Spouse was pleased with her service as portress, for tangible evidence is still in existence today at the Convent in Ferrara. It is a little cup given Catherine by a favorite among the poor to whom she ministered as portress. There was an air about this man that attracted her and he held her interest by his constant topic of conversation, the Holy Land. He spoke of the places connected with the life of Christ and His lovely Mother as though he knew them intimately, so that Catherine suspected that he must have made several pilgrimages to those sacred spots during the course of his life. One day he made her a present of a cup which, he said, was the one that Mary had often used to give the little Jesus a drink. When it was revealed to Catherine that her favorite beggar was none other than Saint Joseph, the cup became a treasure, and it remains to this day at the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament.

Very much one in spirit with the Seraphic Father, his most cherished devotions were also hers. Catherine's love of the Crucified was so great that Francis manifested his approval of her absorption in this devotion by appearing to her displaying his gift of the stigmata. Her love of the Divine Infant was rewarded with a vision, too, on the Christmas of 1444. Having obtained the necessary permission to pass the night in the Convent Church, she had by midnight completed the thousand Aves in honor of Our Blessed Lady—a goal which she had set for herself—when Mary bearing her little Son, came directly to Catherine and placed the Divine Infant in her arms. Catherine's joy knew no bounds. As she pressed His face close, brushing His little cheek with hers, her very soul seemed to melt like wax before a great flame. She kissed His fragrant cheek, but as she turned to kiss the Divine lips, He disappeared, leaving her enveloped in an aura of love and joy. Ever after, her cheek and lips, where they had touched the face of the Infant, were marked with a very distinguishable whiteness.

As word got abroad—as it has a way of doing from even the most cloistered of communities—of the fervor and sanctity of these daughters of Francis at Ferrara, vocations came to them from every part of Italy, so many, in fact, that it was impossible to accept all of them, and the Superiors decided to make other foundations. Much against her will

Catherine was appointed Abbess of the new establishment to be made in Bologna, the city of her birth. When on July 22, 1456, with a little group of the most fervent nuns from Ferrara, she arrived at Bologna, they were met and made welcome by a procession of jubilant townspeople, led by Cardinals and magistrates. The people themselves had petitioned for the the Poor Clares, and they knew of the sanctity of Catherine Vigri, of her gift of miracles and of prophecy, and they rejoiced at her presence among them.

As Abbess of the newly-founded Convent, called like its parent foundation, the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament, Catherine was all that she had been as Mistress of Novices and more. She was predominantly a kind, considerate, understanding mother and her concern was for the over-all welfare of her daughters. Cognizant of their material needs, she made ample provision—within the confines of the Rule, however, for she was adamant where poverty was in question. In her house must be observed absolute poverty, and to preserve it, she stepped to the front line of battle, side by side with Clare and Francis. She was often heard to say, too, that any nun who during her life was exact in the observance of the Rule would find herself among the confessors and martyrs in heaven. No effort was spared by her to have the Rule lived, spirit-perfect, in her community. That she must have been successful is borne out by the fact that when the election was held at the completion of her first three years as superior, absolutely the only objection raised to her re-election was that by her extraordinary kindness she made the rigorous Rule too easy to observe.

The Abbess Catherine was also a woman of tact. She was remarkably successful in preserving peace and charity among her Sisters, delicately guiding them toward that tolerance which is paramount to mutual understanding, and teaching them the art of imputing good intentions to the acts of others. So well were her principles incorporated into the daily lives of the nuns at Bologna that it was two years after her death before a new Abbess was elected, and then not because a need was felt, but solely because the Canonical Visitor insisted on it—and even at that late date, an Abbess had to be sent from Ferrara, for none of Catherine's daughters could be prevailed upon to succeed her.

At the last Chapter which she held, February 25, 1463, Catherine spoke to her nuns for almost three hours, exhorting them to the practice of virtue and observance of the Rule. Her last request, after she had announced to them that she was soon to die, was that they retain that peace and charity among themselves which were so firmly established at

that time. She reminded them of the all-important items conducive to good community relations—always to speak well of others, to be constant in humility, and never to meddle in matters which were no concern of theirs. Just a few days after this instructive and rather sorrowful farewell address to her daughters, Catherine became so ill that she was obliged to remain in bed. On March 9, having received the last sacraments, she lay on her bed scarcely breathing, but each breath whispered the name of her Beloved. So quietly did she go to Him that the watching Sisters were not aware that she had left them until they perceived that an otherworldly perfume was beginning to permeate the room, and noticed that her prematurely old-looking features (she was only forty-nine) eased into the beauty and radiance of a sleeping girl.

She had been in the grave eighteen days—and that without a coffin—when, because of the unaccountable fragrance and the miracles taking place on the site, her body was disinterred and found to be incorrupt. For over four centuries it has remained in that state of preservation. It can be seen today, in an oratory of the Convent Church behind a glass enclosure and seated on a throne. It seems a bit of a paradox that she who had long ago refused all worldly pomp for the pearl of great price, and whose spirit is now in possession of her Treasure, should be thus exhibited, surrounded by splendid hangings, seated on a richly decorated throne and garbed in a grey dress of costly material. Caterina Vignati, daughter of a popular lawyer and diplomat, maid-in-waiting to a Princess heiress to a large fortune, endowed with unusual physical, mental, and spiritual gifts, made her way to God with a singleness of purpose and simplicity of heart that refuses to be overlooked. She found her way as a Poor Clare Nun, and very quickly became the embodiment of that certain and direct path to the Divine Embrace, the Franciscan Rule. With the soul and drive of an artist, she bent all her energies toward perfecting the Image of the God of Beauty, first in her own heart and then in the heart of those entrusted to her care. And those of the Seraphic family who have been commissioned to teach would do well to pause and consider the means whereby she accomplished her task of tracing Divinity.

Sister Maura, O.S.F.

¹More about Saint Catherine of Bologna can be found in Grossetti's *Life of Catherine of Bologna*, Leon's *Lives of the Saints and Blessed of the Three Orders of Saint Francis*, and Butler's *Lives of the Saints*.

PROCESSIONAL

My eyes are dim with the tears of Your courtship,
But You are a gentleness on my thorny crown.

I have put You for a seal upon my sorrow
And by this garlanded candle,
I swear to follow where no flowers are.

By voices singing, mark, I vow
To spend my songs like reckless coins
And buy some smiling silence in some dark.

By organ peal, by incense curling,
By rioting candle, and by innocent bell,
By victim-flowers' spilling scents,
I here espouse Your blood, Your sweat, Your tears
(My eyes are dim with the tears of Your courtship
But You are a gentleness on my thorny crown).

I will scatter my youth like petals
Before Your face.
I will pour my grief like balm
Into Your gaping sorrows.
I will come before You
Wearing the streaming robes of my virginity.

Now are my feet turned from the shining valleys
And my face uplifted to the dark mountain.
(But You are a gentleness on my thorny crown.)

Now is my soul shut up in a jealous tower
And my heart bound up in quiet.

Give me the promised crown!—
The thorns prepared from all eternity.
For my eyes are dim with the tears of Your courtship
And every wound is wide.

Sister Mary Francis, P.C.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

A Letter from Saint Bonaventure to a Confrere¹

My dear Brother:

The blessed Augustine used to speak in this manner to our Lord Jesus Christ: "I know, O Lord, that ingratitude, the root of all spiritual evil, is utterly displeasing to you; like a scorching wind it destroys whatever is good; it is an obstacle to the flow of divine mercy to men; and many evils find their source in this vice, and works that were once alive with merit die from it, never to be revived." Ingratitude, then, is the source of all evil; hence it is necessary that man give thanks for the benefits God has showered upon him. And gratitude must prove itself the more intense according as the blessings received are the more abundant. "For," says Saint Gregory, "appreciation for gifts should grow with their increase." And only by meditating on the magnitude of God's blessings can man recognize the enormity of his debt of gratitude.

See how bounteously God has blessed you. Consider that he has created, redeemed, and called you. Now, from what has he called you? He has called you from a misery-laden world, a world abounding in the snares of evil spirits who seek to draw souls to the eternal pains of hell. And then, why has he called you? Without a doubt he called you that you might praise him and love him. Of all gifts, this is the greatest; it is the office of the angels themselves. For the praise of God is the sole occupation of the angels in paradise. What should be your life, then, you who have been called to the office of the angels! God has called you from the miseries of this world, has set you on and led you along the straight and sure path to eternal life. Indeed, this is the greatest of all graces which God has conferred upon us out of the immensity of his goodness.

Suppose they who are called to enjoy eternal life ask him: "Lord you have created us and called us to the possession of this life. What then must we do to attain it?" To this he will answer: *And I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father has appointed to me* (Lk. 22:29). Now consider not only under what conditions the Father allotted Christ this kingdom, but also the path he trod in attaining it.

If we carefully meditate on the life of Christ, who is the mirror without spot, we shall find that he walked, first of all, the road of profound humility; secondly, the path of extreme poverty; thirdly, the way of perfect charity; fourthly, the highroad of unlimited patience; and fifthly, the pathway of admirable obedience.

Over that same road we too must travel if we wish to follow after and attain to Christ. As Saint John tells us: *He who says that he abides in him, ought himself to walk just as he walked* (1 Jn. 2:6). Follow Christ, therefore; his path must be your path.

Humility

In the first place, Christ walked the way of profound humility. He humbled himself to such an extent as to wash the feet of his disciples. Now if in this menial task the very Son of God, the King of Angels, humbled himself by stooping to the feet of his disciples, what should our humility be? To humble oneself before a superior or an equal is not extraordinary; but to so do before an inferior is a much greater good and most meritorious. In this way a man can speedily acquire abundant grace and become rich in the love of Christ; for to the degree that a man humbles himself, God will exalt him. Believe me, beloved Brother, that if a man were at pains to demean himself, he would acquire more grace in one month than another in forty years.

In *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* it is related that one of them hid himself away in a cell and there led a most rigorous life for many years. After some time a doubt entered his mind about a particular question. He asked God to show him the correct solution. The drift of the doubt was this: Do the blessed in heaven pray for their loved ones? And if so, in what manner do they pray? He petitioned the Lord for a long time but received no answer. Then he said humbly: "I see I have made little progress in the service of God; for that reason the Lord does not show me the solution to my doubt. So I will go to my confrere and ask him to solve this question for me." As he was about to go out the door, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: "Know, Brother, that your whole life of seclusion and all your austerities did not merit the help of the Lord in solving this question. But your humility in deciding to seek help from your con-

frere was so meritorious and pleasing to God that he has sent me to answer the question for you. First you asked: 'Do the blessed in heaven pray for their loved ones?' Yes, dear Brother, the just do pray for those whom they have loved in the Lord, and also for those who seek their aid. They pray that their dear ones be protected from evil and freed from the temptations of the world, and, if they are in error that they be corrected and quickly united with them in heaven. You also asked: 'If they pray, in what manner do they pray?' I tell you their very desire is their prayer; whatever they desire they obtain without delay. Their prayer consists in offering once more to God their former bodily sufferings, or their good works done for the sake of Christ. Still, their prayer is always in perfect accord with the divine will; otherwise they would pray in vain."

Another illustration to the point is the case of a Friar Minor who had great devotion to Our Lady. He asked her to show him how he could best please her Son. "Perform all the menial tasks of the friary," she answered, "and humble yourself."²

Then there is the story of one of the Desert Fathers who was asked to explain humility. He replied that it is indeed a great good and a gift of God. "A man comes by humility," he said, "in this way: he should take upon himself manual labor; reckon himself a sinner; subject himself to all; give no heed to the sins of others, but rather with his eyes always on his own transgressions, let him beseech God for pardon."

Similarly, another holy Father of the desert was asked to define progress in perfection. He replied that to progress in the spiritual life means simply to humble oneself.

Poverty

The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was likewise one of extreme poverty. It was with this in mind that Saint Bernard said: "Examine the whole life of the Savior, from his virginal birth to the gibbet of the Cross, and you will find nothing in it but the greatest poverty." The poorer a man is, therefore, the more closely he conforms to the Son of God.

Someone once asked the blessed Francis what is the surest way of arriving at perfection. He replied that it is the way of poverty.

Charity

Then again, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ was one of perfect charity. His love for us drew him down from heaven to earth. That same love was the cord that bound him to the pillar when he was cruelly scourged. For he loved us more than he loved himself, seeing that he willed to die that we might live and to be sold that he might redeem us from the dominion of Satan; and thus he gave his soul and body for us. Charity is that mark by which the true disciple of Christ is known. Did not he himself say: *By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another* (Jn. 13:35)? It is charity that makes a man a true son and follower of Christ.

This question was once put to a saintly Father of the Desert. What is the reason why we labor day and night and yet do not arrive at perfection as our ancient Fathers did? To this he replied that the ancient Fathers lived according to the maxim that the welfare of another should be preferred to one's own. Thus it was that they came to such great perfection. But with us, we put forth such labor and yet do not arrive at perfection for the very reason that each of us constantly seeks his own welfare and advancement, not that of his neighbor. So if you wish to attain to great perfection and make it your own, and that in a very short time, exert every possible effort to serve your Brothers, and prefer the welfare and advancement of the others to your own.

Patience

Furthermore, our Lord Jesus Christ was a model of the greatest patience. No matter how much he suffered, and all the time unjustly, you will never find him complaining. As an innocent lamb he was led about: *who when he was reviled did not revile, when he suffered, did not threaten* (I Pet. 2:23), but like the meekest of lambs permitted himself to be ill-treated. Patience it is that shatters all the insidious snares of the enemy.

We are told that a man once heard some devils talking together. One asked another how he was faring in the endeavor to lead the monks astray. "Well, as for me," he replied, "I cannot overcome

them, because every time I provoke them to anger and discord, one will immediately confess his fault to the other, and thus by his patience he frustrates all my plans."

In like manner, dear Brother, whenever you are rebuked by someone, let this be your ready response: "The fault is mine; next time I shall try to do better."

Obedience

Finally, our Lord Jesus Christ was a man of admirable obedience. He accepted an obedience that brought him to death, and not to just any kind of death, but to death on a cross—a death more painful, more shameful, more dishonorable, than any other. And because he was so perfectly obedient he was exalted to such heights. Thus, if one wishes to be exalted, he should strive to practice complete and perfect obedience.

It is recorded in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* that "one of them once remarked that whoever gives himself wholeheartedly to obedience for the love of God acquires more merit than a hermit spending a solitary existence in the desert. This was the reason he gave. Another holy Father had told him of seeing the faithful in heaven divided into four different ranks. The first comprised those who had patiently borne infirmity for God's sake; the second, those who had given shelter to the poor; the third, those who had spent their life in solitude; the fourth embraced all who had been obedient for love of God. He also noted in this vision that those who were obedient were wearing an added golden crown. They had merited more glory, he was told, because what they had done on this earth they had done through obedience, while the actions of all the rest had been tinged with self-will." Of all sacrifices, that of obedience is the most exacting, because it has for a victim one's own will. And so, my dear Brother, if you wish to make great progress in perfection, if you wish to please God, let your whole endeavor be to fulfill in selfless obedience whatever is commanded.

With all this, strive to be a lover of prayer; for it will make you a humble religious, patient and obedient. Through it, you will come to have everything really worthwhile. Indeed, it is prayer that is the key to the possession of God in this life as well as in the next. Did

not Francis remark time and again that as for him it seemed quite impossible for a person to make progress in the service of God unless he were a friend of prayer?

Now if you want to have the spirit of prayer, you must observe silence; and if you wish to observe silence, you had better cultivate a love of solitude. In *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* you will find this example. One of the Fathers, noted for his sanctity, lay on his death-bed. A group of monks came begging him to leave them a final word of advice. His counsel was simply this: "My Brothers, to me nothing seems more beneficial than the practice of silence." Dear Brother, make this your resolution: When time comes for manual labor, do it as well as you can, but always in silence. When the work is finished retire immediately into solitude. But, a warning! Do not be idle when you are alone; for idleness is most dangerous, especially in solitude.

One of the Desert Fathers was once asked how it is possible to please both God and man. He replied: "Let your works be many and your words few."

Again we read of the Abbot Arsenius, who while still living in a palace, made this his prayer: "My Lord, show me how to attain salvation." "Arsenius," a voice replied, "flee the company of men and you will be saved." So he left the palace and embraced the monastic life. When once more he prayed: "My Lord, show me how to attain salvation." Thereupon he heard a voice speaking to him: "Flee, Arsenius; observe silence and be at peace. These are the roots of a sinless life; these are the sources of salvation."

Then in the same book there is the story of Abbot Macrius. He to give this advice to his Brothers: "After the Masses in the church, immediately flee." At length one of the monks asked: "But Father, whither in this solitude can we further flee?" And the abbot placed his finger upon his lips and said: "Such conversation as this is what I would have you flee." And with that he entered his cell, closed the door, and continued in prayer, remaining there alone.

I do not doubt, dear Brother, that if you observe what I have written here, in a short time you will arrive at great perfection. Instead of my personal presence, you have these my words. Read this letter often and whenever you do, imagine that I am speaking the

words written here. Just before you retire each evening, examine yourself as to whether you have lived throughout the day according to the advice I have given you in this letter.

Greetings in the Lord. Pray for me.

Fr. Mel Brady, O.F.M.

Fr. Kieran Quinn, O.F.M. (Transl.)

¹*Oper Omnia* (Quaracchi ed.) vol. VIII, pp. 449-503.

²It is difficult for the modern American religious to fully appreciate this association of humility with so-called "menial" tasks. The medieval attitude, and even the present day attitude in many parts of the world, makes a sharp distinction between social classes and the work proper to each. The fact that Saint Bonaventure washed the friary dishes may not strike us as the very powerful example of humility that it actually was to his contemporaries.

THE DAY AFTER

In the Franciscan ceremonial for the religious profession of women, it is prescribed that the young Sister recite the beautiful and significant words of the Breviary: *Regnum mundi et omnem ornatum saeculi contempsi, propter amorem Domini mei Jesu Christi: Quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi*. This is difficult to render in English. Perhaps the best translation would be something like this: The kingdom of the earth and all the pomp of the world I have despised, for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ, Whom I have seen, Whom I have desired (literally, "loved," though desire is implied), in Whom I have believed, Whom I have loved (and here "loved" implies choice).

Perhaps the young Sister does not realize that on this solemn day of her spiritual espousals she is mapping out in these few words the entire course of her religious life. We can hardly blame her for lightheartedness. The day is so bright, the chapel is so radiant with lights and flowers, her heart is so filled with glowing excitement that she cannot possibly stop to ponder over the deeper significance of the ritual's texts. The whole day is tense with gladness; the community receives her with the kiss of peace, her parents and relatives and dearest friends embrace her with joy and holy pride. The only tears shed that day are tears of the purest happiness. Only on the morrow, or perhaps much later, when the young Sister finds

herself at her new post or assignment, she may stop to ponder over the words she spoke on that day of all days.

And let us hope that it really is the day of all days for her; that this one day proves to be not merely a glittering symbol but a fixed and stable pattern of all the days that are to come. Soon she will find that the poetry of the novitiate has changed into the uneven, unsteady, if not totally bewildering prose of routine community life. Soon she will learn that love is not the pretty thing of pat sentiment and pious attitude that she may have mistaken it for in the novitiate. Love is a passion; and if it is to be strong and genuine it must be fed on sacrifice. Saint Paul has exactly this in mind when he tells us that *strength is made perfect in weakness* (II Cor. 12:19).

But now, let us briefly analyze the quotation we began with. The Latin text is much more to the point because it is more precise. We all know that the religious despises the world and its pomp for one thing only—"the love of my Lord Jesus Christ." But the course of the religious life is set off by different stages. The first is *Quem vidi*—Whom I have seen. This is the period of early youth when the first stirrings of our vocation began to be felt. From the Tabernacle came the calm but insistent call of the Master, and we responded to that call through the series of steps that finally led us to religious investiture. Thereafter the word *vidi* gradually changed to *amavi*. The Latin word *amare* connotes impulse, feeling, affection, passion. It is distinguished from the more sober and much weaker *diligere* which carries more the idea of love by deliberate choice and voluntary election. If you compare the Latin text of the Gospel of Saint John (21:15-17), the difference between the two words will become clear. The Lord asks Peter: *Diligis me? Dost thou love me more than these?* Peter, impulsive and fervent by nature, immediately answers: *Amo te—Thou knowest that I love thee*. And so the play on words continues, the Lord using the former word until the third time when He asks: *Amas me?* He advisedly uses the strong term last—*Amas me?*—Dost thou really love Me with thy whole heart?—to teach Peter that this supreme love is not attained unless it be tried in the crucible of sacrifice, that is, until our *diligere* has become *amara*—bitter. Peter understood. The bitter Passion of his divine Master had taught him the meaning of love. Therefore he was grieved when this question was put to him for the third time. This is the lesson we all have to learn, especially the novices who are delighted to repeat over and over again the answer of Saint Peter: *Yes Lord, thou knowest that I love thee—quia amo te*. But this is not yet perfect love, tried and trustworthy. We must earn our *amo te*

(pure, supreme, delightful love) by our *diligo te* (love tested by trial and sacrifice and faith). And this brings us to the next stage in the religious life.

This period has over its entrance gate the inscription: *In quem credidi—In Whom I have believed*. Faith is the foundation of the spiritual life, whether in the cloister or in the world. We know that the life of every Christian is and should be a life of love, for love is perfection. But there are times, even for religious, when faith alone seems to remain; when troubles and trials overwhelm us; when those who should help us fail, and our friends no longer understand; when our inmost soul seems frozen, wrung dry, completely abandoned. The glamor and glory of our former hopes and aspirations grow dim, beclouded. We seem to be going backward. We struggle on merely because we have vows to keep. Our work has lost its appeal and interest. There are treacherous sands beneath us, threatening clouds above us, and *the mountain myrrh* and *the hill of frankincense* (Cant. 4:6) seem endlessly far away. This is the time when we must find strength in the Master's words to Peter: *Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail* (Lk. 22:31-32). And there comes to mind another of our Savior's words: *Blessed is he who is not scandalized in me* (Lk. 7:23).

But then, is religious life a paradox? A paradox it is, and one of the mysteries of divine grace. But did we not despise the world and all its pleasures for love of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can it be that love has departed from us? By no means. Read our text to the end and you will understand: *In quem credidi, quem dilexi*. Do you notice that the word is *dilexi* and not *amavi*? Perhaps on the day of profession both terms seemed alike. There was enthusiasm in the word *amavi*. But now experience has taught you to use the more modest term *dilexi*. Peter had to learn this lesson; why should we be spared it? We have to learn the love that is based on experience, on sacrifice, on deliberate and often difficult choice. Note the words of the Canticle: *Fortis est ut mors dilectio—love is strong as death* (Cant. 8:6); and note that the word is *dilectio*, not *amor*. This is the love of the life of faith; it will carry us through every trial until the day when in heavenly bliss it will become beatific love or the love of the Seraphim.

And now you ask, what does all this mean? It means that we must prepare for the day after; for the day when the spiritual consolations, the hopes and aspirations, the enthusiastic resolutions of the novitiate will have lost their primitive zest and spirit. This is bound to come, for

it is the Master's way. We must learn to carry the cross after Him if we desire to become worthy of Him.

Do we ever stop to think how much faith means in our life? Not the faith of the *Credo*; nor the articles of revealed truth; but that living faith that penetrates to the innermost depths of our being, that faith that is our total dedicaion, our rock-fast loyalty to our Divine Master, the Shepherd of our soul, the Spouse of our heart. Our entire outlook is anchored in faith, our destiny, our love—love that never reveals itself in outbursts of effusive emotion but remains quiet, hidden, and *strong as death*.

And how can we, and must we, prepare for this when, as the saying goes, "the iron is hot"—that is, during the novitiate? This is the paramount question that concerns the Mistress of Novices as well as the novices themselves. In fact, it is the one truly vital matter of novitiate training, for if it fails, the prime purpose of the novitiate fails, and the young religious soon sink into soporific mediocrity or return to the world. For this reason the medieval name "tirocinium" was more appropriate than our modern word "novitiate." Etymologically, the latter denotes a newness in a state or manner of life, while the former denotes a time of practice, experience, and apprenticeship, and carries with it the age-old saying that we should learn not for the school but for life. As the instruction of a pilot concentrates chiefly on the manner of steering a ship through dangerous waters, and as the training of a soldier must prepare him for active combat, even so must the training of a *good soldier of Christ Jesus* (II Tim. 2:3) ever keep in sight the day when the young religious will echo the cry of the Psalmist: (41:11): *My bones are being crushed, while my foes taunt me, while they say to me daily: Where is thy God?*

Saint Francis used to tell his friars that they should carry their cell with them into the world. And Saint Bernard advised his monks: "Keep the Rule, and the Rule will keep thee." It is easy to understand these wise admonitions, but it is not easy to find the key to them or to express in one word all that they imply. Yet somehow the word "responsibility" appeals to us. For in speaking of "key" there comes to mind the admonition which the Bishop gives to the young cleric as he ordains him to the first of the Minor Orders, that of Porter. While he hands him the keys of the church, the insignia of his office, he says: "So fulfill your office as it behooves men who must give an account to God (*quasi reddituri Deo rationem*) for the things that are kept under these keys." This is responsibility, pure and simple.

Responsibility is a big word. Have you ever tried to fathom its full

meaning? Let us pause for a moment and examine its etymology, after the manner of the learned, and perhaps we shall understand it a little better. The word is derived from the Latin *respondeo*, which in turn goes back to the Greek *spena* or *spendo*, meaning "to pledge oneself." The Latin verb has the same meaning, and from it are derived words such as spouse, sponsorship, and the like. The prefix *re* brings out the full meaning—"to answer for a pledge made or a duty or obligation assumed." This brings us right to the heart of religious life. By our vows we have taken upon ourselves certain duties and obligations, and we are answerable for them not to our superiors but to God, and to God alone.

Responsibility is not numbered among the Seven Virtues, nor among the Seven Gifts. Did the Holy Spirit forget it? Not at all; responsibility is rather an essential to all the gifts and virtues, for without it they lose their energizing sap, so to speak, they lose their freshness and flavor, they wither and die. Unless it penetrates to the very marrow of our being, unless it is the driving force behind all our endeavors, our spiritual life is in danger. Responsibility is a broad term, and a strong term. It includes the strong virtues of faith, fidelity, loyalty, and everything else that signals the man who stands firmly for a conviction and has the courage to live and die for that conviction. Our Lord pointed out this wonderful quality in John the Baptist when He asked the Pharisees the incisive question: *What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind* (Mtt. 11:7)? He did not wait for the answer; everyone knew it. But the Master's powerful figure of speech clearly indicates that responsibility is the first and foremost requirement for anyone who aspires for a place in the Kingdom of God. The Order of Deaconship is conferred with the words: "Receive the Holy Ghost unto power and unto resistance of the devil and his temptations. In the Name of the Lord." Here the Latin word for "power" is *robur*, which means, literally, an oak. This is the language of the Church. She makes it clear that anyone who is to serve in the sanctuary or be engaged through the holy vows in the service of the apostolate must have that admirable quality of oak-like responsibility.

Saint Bonaventure, in his beautiful book, *The Six Wings of the Seraph*, speaks wryly of certain religious who are neither very good nor very bad. They are at peace with their confreres, with their superiors, with themselves, with the whole world. They do little or no harm to anyone, and are loved. They should be called, as he suggests, "baptized babies." Here the Franciscan Doctor gives a striking example of the type of religious—all too common in his own day as well as in ours—who are totally lacking in the sense of responsibility. Now, Canon Law insists that no Order

receive candidates unless they give promise of becoming useful members of the Institute. This is especially necessary for Institutes of religious women. A Congregation that is made up primarily of responsible women and only a few "baptized babies" can do great work for the Church; but one that is made up primarily of "baptized babies" and only a few responsible women will have to be regarded by the Church as little more than a kind of pious nursery. Saint Francis had scant affection for irresponsible religious. The useless friar was immediately labelled "Brother Fly" and invited to seek his comfort elsewhere. Every religious—priest, Brother, or Sister—should dedicate himself wholly and entirely to the service of the Order, which means the service of Christ and of the Church. It is a sorry sight to see religious standing by listlessly, not to say stupidly, without so much as moving a limb when there is so much work to be done. The person who finds nothing to do in or around the convent, beyond what the superior commands or strict necessity obliges, simply does not belong there. Some religious almost seem capable of invoking the latest Labor Union laws. They do their work—perhaps well, perhaps not so well; but always with an eye on the clock, always on the watch for a chance to slip away, always reluctant to go an inch beyond the line of strict obligation. No, this is not the spirit of Christ, nor of any of the saints, nor of anyone who has the welfare of the community at heart. That welfare should be the pride and glory of every religious; they should feel responsible for it, and responsibility cannot be measured by clocks or superiors.

And now let us go back to the novices. How shall we help them to acquire the spirit of responsibility? First of all, the young religious must learn to look upon her vocation not merely as a cloak or a garment; not merely—to use the language of the mystics—as the *pearl of great price*, but as another Self. The Scriptural terminology "to put on Christ" means precisely this, the transformation of self into Christ so that with Saint Paul she can say: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me* (Gal. 2:20). This means, in essence, that her vocation has wrought a complete change in her existence. It has set her a new goal, a new outlook; all her attention, her hopes, her loves, her labors, her interests, are now to be directed toward Him in whom she has believed, and whom she has loved. She must be taught to regard this new objective with the utmost seriousness, regardless of who sees her, or helps her, or guides her. To put on Christ is her own personal task, her own personal responsibility, and she must be made to see the religious life in this light and in no other. A sound, solid basic training in responsibility, stripped of all the

pretty fluff and sentimental clap-trap of artificial piety, is a must for every novitiate. And for the children of Saint Francis—the most uncompromising of realists—it is a *sine qua non*. For responsibility is realism. This is what Saint Paul meant when he repeated after the Prophet Habacuc: *He who is just lives by faith* (Rom. 1:17). He meant that sense of responsibility that keeps our faith in the Divine Master constant, unwavering, unshakable, no matter what the world, the flesh, and the devil may do to us. Here again the young religious must learn to take her stand with the indomitable Paul of Tarsus who defied all aggression, all temptation, all suffering because, as he confides to Timothy: *I know whom I have believed* (II Tim: 1:12).

This sense of responsibility must strike deep and strong roots during the time of the novitiate. Training in obedience is necessary, and self-will must be broken; but at the same time a sense of responsibility must be cultivated. Novices should be taught to stand on their own. This does not mean unwarranted freedom or license; it means simply that the young religious must learn to think and act for themselves, mindful at all times that they and they alone are responsible for their conduct. Furthermore, novices should be taught how to use their time. It is really distressing to see religious frittering away hour after hour in useless occupations, busying themselves with matters that are of no benefit to mind or body, to themselves or to the community. An integral part of novitiate training should be the art of making oneself useful. Sometimes we seem to forget that among the greatest gifts our Creator has bestowed upon us are our two hands. The *Pontifical* calls the human hands the tools of intelligence, the handmaids of the intellect. Marvel at the form, the structure, the flexibility and adaptability of our hands. And then let's put them to work.

Perhaps all this sounds rather too solemn and serious for the novices. After all, the novitiate is the hey-day, the springtime, or we may say, the honey-moon of religious life. We quite agree; and we hasten to add that it would certainly be a calamity if our superiors were to quench this spirit of joy and insist on sternness and austerity on every eager young face. The novitiate should be the brightest, gayest part of the entire religious house. There should be life of every kind—luxuriant plants, gleaming gold-fish, a warbling canary or two—and if at all possible, a cuckoo clock. The Psalmist says: *Serve ye the Lord with gladness: come into his presence with exultation* (Ps. 99:2). After all, the Mistress of Novices is raising flowers for the Lord, not pickles. And the Sisters appointed to work with the novices should be of a pleasant and cheerful disposition.

Any Sister who cannot produce a wholesome smile and a rippling laugh that is neither squeezed by the corners of a too decorous mouth or dimmed by a too rigid eyebrow should be taken from the midst of the novices and advanced to a higher office. Just as the plants and the fishes and and birds all need sunshine for healthy growth, so the young religious need the sunshine of cheer and spiritual joy. Then they will learn to appreciate the Psalmist's words: *O Lord, I love the abode of thy house and the place of the tabernacle of thy glory* (Ps. 25:8). They must keep their ears attuned to the voice of Saint Peter who wrote to his neophytes—after he himself had learned the hard way: *Crave, as newborn babes, the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow to salvation; if, indeed, you have tasted that the Lord is sweet* (I Pet. 2:3).

But milk alone will not do. The novice must learn to eat the bread of the strong. She must prepare for the day of crusts and crumbs; the day when work is work and more work and her body aches and her head swims; the day when she finds herself in the midst of unruly youngsters, the butt of their pranks and cruel jokes and the bewildered object of parental wrath. She must steady herself now for the time when her ears will be ringing with the cries and complaints of the sick, the wailing and the nagging of the aged. There will be days of wrestling with pots and pans, brooms and mops and pails. There will be times when the coffee is too strong for some, too weak for others, and the soup too hot or too salty, and the whole meal that she spent hours to prepare will be greeted with looks of faint disgust. And other temptations will come, too. The world she left without a tinge of regret will somehow come to look very attractive now. Perhaps her friends will achieve success in the career that she herself once thought about, and old ambitions will arise to taunt her. Perhaps when she finds the going especially rough and no one seems to understand, the security of married life may appear to her as a haven of love and joy. She may find her talents disregarded by her superiors, her hopes and dreams frustrated by assignments she dislikes. Then what? Unless as a novice she became rooted and grounded in Him in whom she has believed, unless she developed a strong sense of responsibility, she will become a soured and embittered religious, or a useless, lackadaisical religious, or she will simply fail to persevere as a religious at all.

I still remember my first lesson in responsibility. It has stood me in good stead throughout the years. When I was a small boy, my mother announced one evening that we were having company for supper. Being a good hostess, she began to prepare a luscious batch of potato pancakes. She knew my weakness for those crips little cakes, and being busy else-

where, she allowed me to watch the frying. It was the old-fashioned method of cooking in a large pan held over a blazing open fire. She showed me how to turn the little cakes when they were sufficiently browned, and left me in charge. I was enormously proud of my responsibility; and, as if to share in my new dignity, our little Spitz came over and sat at my right, while our cat, another friend, sat wistfully twitching her whiskers at my left. Boy-like, I began to wonder what would happen if I set the two a little closer together. I picked up the cat and placed her beside the dog, and forthwith a battle ensued. When the battle was at its height I suddenly remembered that something had to be turned. But in my hasty excitement I turned over, not the pancakes, but the whole pan—and the prospective banquet lay smouldering in the flames. I shall never forget the lesson in responsibility my mother taught me that night; I can still feel it.

But now let us be serious again. The novice who learns to realize what responsibility means has learned a lesson of primary importance. It will give her steadiness and mastery in the trials that lay ahead. If she can bring the smile of interior joy and exterior equanimity from the novitiate into community life, she has acquired the greatest of all arts. And if she has learned to take her work seriously, but not herself, she will advance rapidly in the service of God. After all, it is very great wisdom—and very rare wisdom—to realize that others can and will do your work better than you; that you are only a tool, and it is the work, not the tool, that counts. Strive to be the best possible tool in the Hands of the Master, but never forget that He has many other tools, and can easily dispense with all tools. Finally, the novice must be made to understand that there will be changes, within her and without her, for that is life; and she must be prepared to meet them. It is precisely these changes that will test her responsibility. And she will meet with those who tell her she is no longer a novice—which is simply another way of saying: Take it easy. Others may hint that the Rule and Constitutions were fine for the Middle Ages but hardly practical for modern America. And she will be hurt time and again by those pests of community life, the backbiters, the tale-bearers, the gossips, the minders of other peoples' business, the nervous and the irritable. She may find her superior cold and unmotherly; the members of her community uncongenial. And then you may be sure someone will show her the way to the Spiritual Dispensary where she will find all kinds of bottles and boxes. One will be labelled: **DON'T BOTH-ER WITH TRIFLES**; another, **WORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PRAYER**; another, **SAVE YOUR HEALTH AND ENERGY**

FOR THE EVIL DAY, and the most dangerous of all sedatives, **I CAN'T HELP BEING WHAT I AM; GOD MADE ME THIS WAY**; and the ultimate, **WHAT'S THE USE OF TRYING? I HAVEN'T THE MAKINGS OF A SAINT**.

Yes, there are plenty of analgesics and sedatives in this Dispensary. But do you know that the back door opens out onto the Biblical Broadway? Yes, the Bibles speaks of Broadway; Saint Matthew describes it for us as the broad way of secularism, indifferentism, the broad and easy way of those religious who have lost the spirit of the Order and the sense of responsibility. And it leads to eternal ruin. But the narrow path that leads to life (Mtt. 7:14) is the steep way of faith, fidelity, loyalty to your Master and Spouse. Take it now, right at the beginning of your religious life, and keep to it faithfully. Let holy prudence direct you; let the wisdom of the Holy Spirit inspire you; let the oaken staff of personal responsibility support you, and some day you will be able to say with Saint Peter: *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee —quia amo te* (Jn. 21:17).

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O.F.M.

QUERIES AND REPLIES

Since any priest having the ordinary faculties of the diocese can impart General Absolution to Franciscan communities, is it permissible for such a priest to use the short formula?

Although the short formula suffices for the valid imparting of General Absolution, nevertheless it may be used only in a private way, that is, in connection with the Sacrament of Penance. What, then, is to be done in case the priest, for some reason or other, fails to impart the Absolution to the community? It may be of help to know that the Indulgence can be validly imparted not only on the day appointed, but also on the entire previous day; and, in case a religious is legitimately impeded on these two days, the Indulgence can be received during the seven

days immediately following. Hence it is recommended that if the Absolution was not given publicly or if a religious was legitimately absent, the Absolution should be asked for from the confessor in the confessional. The short form may then be used. This procedure, however, in case it is general for the community, should have the endorsement of the higher superior. (See Bonzelet, O.F.M., *The Pastoral Companion*, nn. 163, 164.)

Since there seems to be some variety of opinion as to the proper vestments to be used at Sacramental Benediction, the question is: What is the duty and responsibility of the Suster Sacristan in this matter?

The *Ceremoniale* of the Friars Minor prescribes that for the Benediction of the

Blessed Sacrament, when the Sacred Host is to be exposed in the monstrance, the priest should wear amice, alb, cincture, stole, and cope. Since, however, it seems to be the prevailing custom in certain places to use only the surplice and stole under the cope, the Sister Sacristan will do well to put out all the vestments and leave the choice to the priest, who after all carries the responsibility.

What procedure is prescribed for a Franciscan community that desires to make changes in the ceremonial for religious investiture and profession? Hitherto we have been following the Franciscan Rituale.

It is assumed that the contemplated changes have to do not with an occasional alteration or omission, but with permanent changes in important ceremonies, customs, or prayers, especially if they involve changes in the Constitutions. In such matters permission ought to be obtained from the source of the original approval. Aside from this general rule, it is well to consult a canonist in particular cases.

If the Constitutions prescribe the recitation of five decades of the Rosary daily, can the Franciscan Crown be said instead?

There are two considerations involved here: the Constitutions and the Indulgences attached to the Rosary. As to the first, it would not be right, of course, to change the Constitutions arbitrarily and permanently, even though there may be a greater spiritual gain. As to the second, Indulgences are attached to certain objects with very definite and precise conditions, which conditions have to be strictly ob-

served in order to gain the Indulgences. Now it is a fact that the Franciscan Crown gains for each recitation a Plenary Indulgence; the other Rosaries do not. Nevertheless the substitution can hardly be recommended except for the sake of a temporary expedient or for some laudable purpose. And it should be kept in mind that the Indulgence attached to the recitation of the Dominican or Crozier Rosary cannot be gained by reciting the Franciscan Crown, because the conditions laid down for the Indulgences are different for each.

Naturally, members of the Franciscan family should say the Franciscan Crown or Rosary of the Seven Joys daily, and for this purpose the Constitutions might well be amended. Meanwhile, since no beads are required for the Crown, and since the entire seven decades need not be recited at one time but may be said at various intervals throughout the course of the day, no child of Saint Francis should lightly forego the rich gain derived from daily recitation.

Should candles be lighted on the altar during the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin in choir? Is there any official ceremonial prescribed for such recitation?

There is no official directive or prescribed ceremonial for the recitation of the Little Office. Since it is of simple rite, however, candles may well be lighted. In general Franciscan communities should strive to adapt their practices, as far as possible, to the Franciscan *Ceremoniale*. To avoid confusion and arbitrary changes of doubtful validity, it is well that for all community exercises the approval of the proper authority be sought.

FRANCISCAN BOOKS

JESUS OF NAZARETH. Hilarin Felder, O.F.M. Cap. transl. by Berchmans Bittle, O.F.M. Cap., Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1953. Pp. xii — 353. \$4.75.

When Bishop Felder died in 1951 at the age of 84, he could offer to the Divine Master a life spent entirely for Him in the arduous labor of teaching and writing. Among the last of his works to be published is this present volume, *Jesus of Nazareth*, a reissue of an earlier work that appeared in 1938 but was destroyed during World War II. The present edition has been thoroughly revised and brought up to date, with new notes and modern American references.

Originally, *Jesus of Nazareth* grew out of a series of lectures delivered by Bishop Felder at the University of Freiburg. The audience—university students and professors from all departments and other intellectual groups—showed a lively interest in these lectures and at the close of the series a prominent professor of natural science urged the Bishop to make his lectures more widely available in book form. So many of Bishop Felder's learned friends expressed a similar desire to know more of Christ, His divine personality, the fundamental features of His humanity, that he consented to write a book that would appeal to these people. The present work is the result. It is written for educated laymen, but not necessarily for the scholar; it takes into account Biblical scholarship, but mainly accents the human and divine nature of Christ and appeals to the heart of the reader, stirring him to a deeper appreciation of the magnificent personality of the Son of Man.

The author admitted that he wrote this book from his heart, and the reader cannot fail to realize with every page that

this is truly a work of love. It is also a work of sound and solid scholarship, erudite without the least trace of pedantry, vivid without unwarranted supposition or addition of imaginary details.

The first part of the book deals with the Higher Criticism of Christ. The next five parts are devoted to the personality of Jesus, the fulness of His virtue, His messiahship, and His divinity. The last part looks into the beliefs held in the early Church concerning the divinity and messiahship of Christ, not only as set forth in the synoptic Gospels, but in the Pauline Christology and Johannine Theology as well.

In every respect, this is a book of wide and deep appeal.

HOLINESS IS FOR EVERYONE. Martial Lekeux, O.F.M., transl. by Paul J. Olligny, O.F.M. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953. Pp. 150. \$2.50.

Here at last is a book for those of us who think the very idea of our becoming a saint is just too absurd to be even funny. Fr. Martial Lekeux, whose sister Maggie died a few years ago in the door of sanctity (Fr. Marion Habig wrote a book about her called *Maggie*), sets about systematically dispelling all such comfortable notions of ours. Every man alive, insists Fr. Martial, can, if he will, reach perfection—his own personal perfection. In twelve brief, succinct, and lively chapters the author shows us not only how to go about the business of sanctifying ourselves, but also why we absolutely must do it.

Primarily, the book is intended for the layman, and is written in the form of a dialogue between the hesitant Christian and the insistent Friar. All the usual

objections raised to striving for higher perfection are neatly met and demolished, leaving no room for further argument.

Holiness is for everyone. Religious know that; but they might like the book to give to their friends who think sanctity is something for priests and nuns exclu-

sively. Teachers in high schools and colleges would do well to keep the book within easy reach of their students. It is written in a way that will keep young minds interested and alerted to the fact that perfection is the duty and right of every follower of Christ.

IT IS PART OF FRANCISCAN LIFE TO HELP OTHERS CARRY THEIR BURDENS

The Exiled, The Hungry, The Homeless, The Destitute

*Over one-half million gallant Vietnamese
—90% of them Catholics—are now added to the 40,000,000
dispossessed around the world!*

To lighten their overwhelming burdens of hardship
in the coming year, an appeal will be made on
Laetare Sunday, March 20th, for the

BISHOPS' WELFARE AND EMERGENCY FUND

Homeless and hunger are still burdens, too, for the destitute
in other war-shattered lands:—

- 3,000,000 in South Korea whose homes were destroyed or cut off in the Communist North;
- 3,500,000 refugees from Red China still seriously crowded in Hong Kong and Formosa;
- 2,000,000 flood and drought-stricken refugees in India and Pakistan;
- thousands of Escapees who still flock to Berlin every month, and millions of Expellees who are still unintegrated in West Germany;
- Italy's overcrowded, landless millions in the southern provinces;
- the border areas of the Near East where almost 1,000,000 Arabs are still unresettled!

*Won't you help carry their burdens a little of the way
during this coming year?*

BE GENEROUS ON LAETARE SUNDAY, MARCH 20th

Call their need to the attention of your parishoners, your
school children, your friends and benefactors

THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE

When the first Friars travelling through Italy and preaching the holy Gospel were asked: "Who are you?" they answered: "Penitents from the city of Assisi" (*Legenda III. Soc.*). And when they preached in simple words the Gospel of penance, what else were they doing but following the instructions of Saint Francis: "In all the preaching you do, admonish the people to penance. . ." (*Epist. ad Custodes*). Penance indeed was the pivotal point of the new religious ideal of our Seraphic Father. When shortly before his death he looked back at his life, he saw that its true beginning was penance. "The Lord," he wrote, "gave it to me thus to begin to do penance. . ." (*Test.*). Penance was the keynote of the new song that came from Assisi, as it was the keynote of the good tidings that came from Palestine. We hear it in all the words and writings of Saint Francis, we hear it resound in his life and in the lives of the first companions, and we still hear its echo in the name given to the members of the Third Order—the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

Penance, therefore, must be in the center of every Franciscan life worthy of the name. However—and this is all important—it must not be just *any* penance, but *Franciscan* penance, and this means it must be the penance of the holy Gospel.

1. *What Franciscan Penance Is Not*

It is unfortunate that the word "penance" has assumed, or rather has been narrowed down to, a meaning that makes it easy for us to disregard its full significance. Usually when we speak about penance we have in mind the Sacrament of Penance, especially contrition and atonement for sin. But this is rather repentance. And who would deny that we must repent our sins, that we must confess our guilt and ask pardon, and offer some kind of reparation? There is no doubt that we must repent our sins, but the penance of holy Gospel is something much deeper.

A more dangerous form of misunderstanding Franciscan penance is to distort it into the idea of penance as mortification. Yet again, this is a common usage of the term. When we speak about our penances or about doing penance we are usually thinking of exterior