

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

acts of mortification such as fasting, restricting sleep, denying comfort to the body, or inflicting on ourselves various kinds of physical pains. To say that these works are not penances would be ridiculous. To deny that they are necessary for everyone, at least to a certain extent, would be quite perilous. For every man has to gain control of his body; every man must deny himself even in things that are indifferent, if he hopes to keep a safe distance from forbidden things. It is, we might say, a sacred duty to inflict pain on our body and accept the sufferings God sends us in order to complete what is still lacking in the sufferings of Christ. There are many reasons, therefore, that should induce us to love and embrace penance in the sense of mortification; not the least would be that our holy Father Francis himself gave an example of great mortification. Indeed, he was so harsh to his body, his poor "Brother Ass," that toward the end of his life he even asked pardon of it.

Nevertheless, it would be a serious misunderstanding were we to identify the Franciscan ideal of penance with a life of bodily mortification. Unfortunately, there are religious who never reach a deeper understanding of their ideal. Small minds that they are, they display great zeal for mortification and self-laceration of all kinds; but they fail to see that they are only satisfying their immature desire for being "good religious." It is not so much that they want to be good in the sight of God; they want to be good in their own sight. The works of mortification help them to that, for these acts can be felt, they can be known, counted, and measured, and thus they can give one the deep satisfaction of having accomplished something. Such religious have never learned that penance is essentially of the inner man, and that exterior mortifications can—of course we do not say *must*—go hand in hand with Pharisaic pride. Has our own Order been secure against this pride? We have had reform movements in our ranks that sprang from the true spirit of penance and received the blessing of the Church; but we have also had movements that sooner or later found themselves in conflict with the Church. Pope John XXII had to remind the stout defenders of Franciscan poverty that poverty without charity is of no value. The Spirituals, with their tenacious clinging to the letter, ended in condemnation; and during the last century an indiscreet zeal inspired

by the Alcantarine rigorism brought the leader in open conflict with the Church and severe punishments upon his blind followers.

Would God that this indiscreet zeal for mortification—which is only a kind of disguised pride—would be restricted to the novitiate and there taken care of. But it is all too often carried far beyond the novitiate, and sometimes with disastrous results. At best it is a sign of spiritual immaturity; and if it is clung to tenaciously even against the will of the superiors, it is outright disobedience; and if it is carried to the extreme of being imposed, by means of impassioned rhetoric or biting criticism, upon one's confreres, it is plainly against charity. Even Saint Bonaventure had to endure the attacks of such narrow-gauged minds. Many of his own most highly respected confreres could not understand why he, who so admirably fulfilled the other requirements they demanded of a saint, failed to be a model in the matter of physical mortification. He answered them, of course and quite humbly; it was simply that for him his delicate constitution and the life of study to which he felt called ruled out the extreme bodily penances that had characterized the life of Saint Francis and his first followers; nor indeed, he insisted, were such penances the essence of the Franciscan ideal. But Saint Bonaventure never denied that mortification is necessary, and that in general we are inclined to do too little in this direction rather than too much. It remains true, nevertheless, that the works of mortification are not our salvation; they must be carried out with discretion, and above all they must flow from the true spirit of penance.

2. *What Franciscan Penance Is*

Franciscan penance is the penance of the holy Gospel. There in the pages of Sacred Scripture Saint Francis discovered his ideal, his form of life. There he listened to the good tidings, the overwhelming goodness and mercy of the Father, whose kindness appeared in the Incarnate Word, and whose boundless love gave us the Only-begotten Son—and with the Son, pardon and life and the promise of eternal beatitude. But there in the Gospel Francis also heard the Voice in the wilderness announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God: *Do penance!* Then he listened to the Word of God telling him that no man can be saved unless he does penance. Francis understood that

penance was the answer God expected from him. He knew well that he—like all of us—had gone astray on the broad highroad of his own will, and not on God's way. He knew that he had erected idols in his heart, forgetting that God is the Lord; that he had been seeking his own interests and ambitions; that he had not placed the love of God in the center of his heart; that he had shown little or no care at all about his Eternal Father's business. What then could his answer be but to turn around on his highroad and go back to God his Father to break himself and to admit that he had done wrong and had been blind and ungrateful, to put off the old man and to rid himself of his illusions and little idols and restore to God the central place in his heart. Clearly, the penance of Saint Francis is the *metanoia* of the Gospel, the change of mind and heart completely away from self and the world, and completely toward God.

There can be no doubt that in this sense Francis understood penance. For as he tells us in his *Testament*: "The Lord gave me to begin penance in this way: When I was still in sin it seemed bitter to me to look at lepers, and the Lord himself led me in the midst of them and I did mercy to them. And when I came away from them what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of mind and body for me. And after that I did not wait long and left the world." Here was the beginning of the penance of Saint Francis, his change of mind, of outlook, of heart and feeling, of his entire life. Francis broke himself, for he denied himself, said "no" to himself, and by denying himself he found something—or rather Someone—who from then on would fill his whole mind, his whole heart, his entire personality. With utter radicalism he accepted the Master's invitation: *if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For he who would save his life will lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake will save it.* (Lk. 9: 23-24).

Franciscan penance, therefore, is certainly negative in the beginning, for it is the emphatic "no" to the old man and his ambitions and interests. But it does not rest there; it is also, just as strongly, an emphatic "yes" to God. Franciscan penance is a turning back with the whole heart and mind to Him who is the only meaning of life. Franciscan penance is the dethronement of self and the

dethronement of God; the complete renunciation of all worldly things and the complete embracing of the one thing that matters—God and His holy will. And thus it was that the "penitent" Francis, who with holy radicalism chose the life of penance, who in the sight of men gave up everything of this world, regained everything in the Lord. It was the "penitent" Francis who tasted and found how sweet the Lord is, and it was the "penitent" Francis who discovered his Lord in creatures and rejoiced with them in the Lord. It was the "penitent" Francis who, because he was completely absorbed in God, had such great and tender love for all the children of God.

In this connection it is good to read the last chapter of the First Rule of the Friars Minor (*Regula non Bullata*). It is really the song of the whole life of our Seraphic Father. After enumerating the *magnalia Dei* in creation, in the work of redemption and salvation, and after addressing the entire celestial hierarchy and the whole Church, all states and nations, and finally his own "lesser brothers and useless servants," he "begs and entreats that all of us may persevere in the true faith and in penance, for there is no other way of salvation for anyone." Then he continues: "With all our heart and soul and mind and strength and fortitude and understanding and all our faculties with all our endeavor, affection, and yearning; with all we desire and will, let us love God the Lord, who has given and still gives us our whole body and soul and life, who has created us and redeemed us, and only in His mercy will save us; who has done and keeps doing everything good to us, miserable and wretched, corrupt and foul, ungrateful and wicked as we are. . ."

Franciscan penance, therefore, is the complete breaking of the man who is called by God's mercy, and who, out of gratitude, turns around, changes his mind and heart, and resolves with our Seraphic Father: "Let us desire nothing else, wish for nothing else, take pleasure and delight in nothing else but our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. . ." And when he has completely turned to God: "Let nothing hinder us, nothing keep us apart, nothing stand in the way. All over, everywhere, at every hour and at any time, day after day and without ceasing, let us all believe in Him with a true and humble faith, cherish Him in our heart, and love, honor, adore, serve, praise, and bless Him. . ."

3. Our Life in Penance

There can be little doubt, then, what the life of penance must first and above all mean to us. We cannot take it in the sense of exterior and interior mortification alone; nor can we take it even in the sense of denying ourselves—for that would be only a half-turn, not a complete *metanoia*. We must take it in the sense of a full turn—completely away from ourselves and completely toward God. The Franciscan penance is that form in which we realize the spirit of our vocation. The habit and the cord do not make a Franciscan; only the spirit of penance and of complete conversion can make us true sons and daughters of the Seraphic Father.

There is the great danger in our religious life that it may never have occurred to us that we must do penance, that we must break ourselves and let ourselves be broken, that we must lose ourselves in order to gain ourselves in the Lord. Most of us are inclined to consider the religious life—our Franciscan life—a placid continuation of our former more or less pious life in the world. We willingly accepted the mortifications and hardships entailed in the observance of the Rule and Constitutions and in community life. Our conduct may be quite exemplary, as far as externals go; and we may honestly think we have reason to be pleased with ourselves. So may our low-religious. We may even have been placed in positions of trust and far-reaching responsibility in the Order. But let us be thoroughly honest now. Is it not true that the old man is still alive in us? that our ideals and ambitions have changed but slightly if at all? Are there not still the little idols of our adored Ego—our selfishness and our selfishness, our unwillingness to give to others, our desire to be something in the eyes of men, especially in the eyes of those above us? Are we not still striving for the first places? still very much concerned about our well-being on a purely natural level? We want to be loved and to be loved; we want to be respected, admired; we want to know and be known, to see and to be seen. Perhaps we are determined to refrain from boasting, but how much does our contentment depend on praise and flattery, on success in our work and enviable achievements? If we have the courage to look deeply into our hearts, we shall find many idols there to which we still sacrifice freely.

If such is the condition of our heart, can we really say that

we are doing penance? The spirit of penance that our Seraphic Father expects from us is diametrically opposed to any kind of worldliness. A worldly religious is nothing else but one who has not made the complete change of mind and heart that causes all things apart from God to lose their value. A truly penitent religious, on the contrary, is one who has set God firmly in the center of his life, in the center of his very being, who is turned to God in every respect, always and everywhere. In all his decisions he first asks what the Lord wills; in all his judgments he asks how the Lord would judge; in all the love he gives to men, it is God's love that he gives; and he desires only the things that the Lord wills him to desire.

Although the logical place for effecting this change, this *metanoia*, is the novitiate, how few in fact really accomplish it there! Usually a religious has to begin his life of penance as Saint Francis did. The call to penance may come in a severe test. God may take away something very dear to us and demand our unconditional surrender to his will. Perhaps a transfer, a difficult situation in the community, misunderstandings, dislike, slanderous reports, a broken friendship, a breach of confidence—all such things may come as tests of our true conversion to God. But the call to penance may also come to us in the gentleness of prayer, in reading or conversation, or in spiritual instruction. It then comes to us as an inner light in which we perceive how much our little Ego rules our life, how selfish we are even in a religion, how ardently we pursue happiness in the service of God and how sluggishly we pursue the God we serve. We then see ourselves in the full foulness of our ingratitude, in the contemptible folly of our efforts to straddle the fence between worldliness and penance. We see there is no purity in us, only misery and wretchedness. When this light is given to us, it is a great grace. We need only the courage to open our soul wide to its searching rays, to face ourselves squarely and admit the truth of our timorous half-measures, of ourpicable double-dealing, of our selfishness and ingratitude. Then surely we will be given the greater courage of the complete *metanoia* that our vocation demands of us. We will then be doing penance by turning ourselves away from ourselves and giving ourselves to the service of our heart.

If we live this life of penance, it is a sure sign that love of God

is thriving in us, the radical love that makes us able to say with the boy Jesus; *I must be about my Father's business* (Lk. 2:49). And then we shall have that purity of mind and heart that our Holy Father expects of his children: "They are pure of heart who despise the things of this world and seek only heavenly things, never ceasing to adore and to contemplate the true and living Lord God with clean heart and mind." If we have this purity, then we are truly possessed by God, completely turned to Him, we are then what Saint Bonaventure called our Seraphic Father: *Homo Dei*—a man, or woman, of God.

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE

The roots of this comparatively young congregation actually go back to the time of our Holy Founder, Saint Francis. Toward the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, pious people organized into groups which later on became tertiary groups. Virgins and widows who so grouped themselves became known as Beguines and spread rapidly over all Europe, especially Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and the German-speaking regions.

The Beguines (also called Forest or Field Sisters), did not pronounce regular vows, but they did promise obedience and chastity for the duration of their membership in the organization. They earned their livelihood by means of sewing, weaving, teaching, nursing, and other such works, and dedicated themselves to diligently performing their religious exercises. Many practised great self-denial and rigorous penances.

Their rapid growth was soon followed by a decline as the spirit of laxity and comfort gained a strong foothold among them. To correct the abuses which had arisen, Clement V, in the Council of Vienne (1312) dissolved the institute of the Beguines (Waldschwwestern) and they were commanded either to revert entirely to secular life or to enter an approved Order. Many of the Beguines requested admission to the Third Order of Saint Francis.

Several of the Beguine houses which had accepted the Rule of the Third Order of Saint Francis went a step farther in their zeal and changed the former promises to vows properly so called. There was an

other reason, though external only, which persuaded so many of the Beguines to pronounce vows. After the Council of Vienne had declared all communities of Beguines dissolved, several Bishops went to the extreme in enforcing this Decree of Dissolution—they also enforced it in the houses of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, because they were not recognized as members of the Third Order; they were living in communities and were placed on the same level as the Beguines. A veritable storm of opposition arose against these Tertiaries during the fifteenth century, and with the threat of the severest form of ecclesiastical punishment upon them, they were obliged to dissolve.

In order to save themselves, the Tertiaries, in addition to their Third Order promises, began taking regular vows. Thus, they were recognized as true religious before any tribunal. Considering the confusion of the time, we can see how these rash measures, although not universally carried out, led the Beguines first to the Third Order and then to true religious profession during the two-hundred year period after the Council of Vienne.

As a result of this historical development, Leo X made it obligatory for Tertiaries living in community to pronounce vows, and a special religious rule was set up (1521) for the seculars. The Council of Trent (1563) and Pius V (1566, 1568, 1570) brought the monastic character of the Tertiary houses to fruition by subjecting them to the laws of enclosure.

In this way, under the guidance of Mother Church and through the external influences brought to bear upon it, there gradually developed a new type of Third Order membership, that is, one with vows and life in a monastic community. The Tertiary ideal so perfected spread widely and was introduced into many localities. Thus, in the hands of Divine Providence, the ban imposed by the Council of Vienne became the source of a renaissance of Franciscan life.

One of the monastic communities affected, the Franciscan Nuns in Pfanneregg, Switzerland, had developed in this manner and flourished in the middle of the fifteenth century. Its interior spirit seemed to give every indication of a brilliant future. Meanwhile the Protestant Reformation broke out. In 1520, a certain Moritz Miles went to Wattwil, to which Pfanneregg belonged, as pastor, but he worked wholeheartedly for the Protestant Reformation and succeeded in drawing nearly the entire parish over to it. He also endeavored to effect a breach in the convent. He succeeded all too well. In the convent were two blood-sisters of Zwingli, and the reformer himself not only came from Zurich, the seat

of the reformation, but forced his way into the Forest-Hermitage and in a short time caused his two sisters and twenty-three other nuns to turn their backs upon the convent and their religious profession.

During the years of sorrow and suffering that ensued only eight sisters remained faithful. For nearly forty years they were without Holy Mass, without the Sacraments, without priestly care! That they persevered in spite of all redounds to their glory, but still more to the mercy of God. That they became lax is not to be wondered at. The ecclesiastical authorities tried to stem the growing abuses. The disalced provincial Jost Schussler, as visitor, tried to save Pfanneregg and lead it back to its pristine fervor. But his efforts (1573) to effect a reform were without success. Conditions came to such a pass that he and the Abbot Otmar Kunz of Saint Gall thought seriously of completely suppressing the entire rebellious convent. Their last hope was placed in the efficient Sister Elizabeth Spitzli, who was elected superior in 1575. Although she had good will and excellent qualities, she was not able to banish this bad religious spirit; and the convent chronicle sadly acknowledges that even she had erred far from "the true spirit and aim of the Order."

On September 14, 1586, Einsiedeln celebrated the Feast of the Consecration of the Angel (Engelweihe) with great pomp and ceremony. To cope with the throng of persons desirous of going to confession, two confessors were called from the newly-founded Capuchin monastery at Lucerne to help. The younger was a convert, Ludwig von Sachsen, a hereditary baron and the only son of the Grand-chancellor of Sachsen.

As Father Ludwig discharged the duties of his holy office in Einsiedeln, a nun approached his confessional. But, was it really a nun? Was it not rather some elegant lady wearing rings and bracelets, and with a silver buckle on her belt? After her confession, Father Ludwig asked her to what order she belonged. Imagine his surprise when she claimed to be "a child of the Order of Saint Francis," and stated that she was the superior of the convent at Pfanneregg and had come on a pilgrimage to this feast with her whole convent. So serious and full of the Franciscan spirit was Father Ludwig's talk to her that the penitent, with tears of sorrow, promised real amendment and placed herself under his direction. Elizabeth Spitzli went home with the firm resolution to carry out a reform in the spirit of the Capuchin Order, first in regard to herself and then in the convent. But her path was no easy one. Half a year elapsed. Father Ludwig visited Pfanneregg and found the superior firm in her resolution. He then fashioned for her a coarse brown dress according to the pattern of the Capuchin habit. This she joyfully donned in

place of the soft ashen-gray garment she had been wearing. The other sisters were by no means willing to follow the example of the superior and to abandon their comfortable mode of life. Thus matters stood; the courageous superior, with her plans for reform but without followers, wore the coarse brown habit *alone* for two years. Gradually, however, grace triumphed in the hearts of the sisters. Finally, in April, 1591, Father Ludwig, with the help of Brother Jacob, prepared the brown habit for all the sisters and presented it to them. The work of the reform was complete!

Father Ludwig led the "reformed" sisters still deeper into the spirit of the holy Order. In his guidance of these sisters, he was governed by the exact regulations which the Council of Trent, in its twenty-fifth session, had made for all religious. Through loyal adherence to these regulations and to those of the Constitutions of the Capuchins, he gave the convent its own laws which were later expanded and published with the approbation of the Apostolic nuncio (1599, 1607) and received the seal of approbation from the highest authority, Urban VIII (1625).

The renown of Pfanneregg soon spread. The people spoke of the "transformed sisters" with admiration. Soon petitions were sent to Pfanneregg from all localities asking that sisters be sent to introduce the reform. In a short time, many convents in Switzerland and in Germany followed the Pfanneregg reform and were called "Capuchins" not only by the people but by the Church also. They not only adopted the habit, but also the spirit of the Capuchin Order.

In recent times the movement has not ceased. Alstatten (1600, reformed 1609?) proved to be a blessed foundation; two little branches arising there developed into flourishing mission societies: Gaissau-Cartagena (North Colombia) and the other, Tubach-Pasto (South Colombia). The one of Gaissau-Cartagena was founded by the venerable servant of God, Bernarda Butler (1928). The Congregation of Pasto honors Mother Charitas Brader (1943) as its foundress. 1888 found Mother Bernarda Butler, Mother Charitas Brader, several other professed sisters, and several novices leaving the cloistered convent at Alstatten to answer the plea of Bishop Schumacher for volunteers to teach in his diocese in Ecuador. The sisters labored zealously among the Indians and Negroes for about seven years. They lived in direst poverty and suffered indescribable privations. They not only taught the children, but with special care they prepared hundreds of adults for the reception of the Sacraments. By the end of 1892, threatening clouds of persecution appeared on the horizon of Ecuador. But God always watches over His chosen ones, and a place

of refuge was offered to them in the neighboring republic of Colombia then under a Catholic government. With the permission of the Most Reverend Manuel Caicedo, Bishop of Pasto, and with the approval of the Government, Mother Charitas, under the guidance of the Missionary Capuchin Father Gasper de Cebrones, left Ecuador with six religious from Tuquerres.

Tuquerres, the cradle of the Tubach-Pasto Congregation, tried to help the newcomers in every way, but Lady Poverty reigned supreme in this house. Barley soup and potatoes were the sisters' daily food. They slept on straw sacks on the ground, but without sufficient blankets to keep them warm. However, a boarding school was opened in September and in October they took over the public school for girls. In the meantime, they started making vestments. This work not only enabled them to earn the wherewithal to keep body and soul together, but also helped them to keep up their courage. The Motherhouse was soon moved from Tuquerres to Pasto, the See City itself.

The religious persecution broke out in Ecuador in all its fury in 1895. Priests and religious were expelled. The little group which was still working in Ecuador also went to Colombia, but to Cartagena, an Atlantic seaport in the North. Thus the original branch which had set out for Ecuador was divided into two completely independent branches.

Due to the fact that the new work of the congregation was so different from that pursued by the original cloistered convent, the Holy See was requested to make some modifications in the Constitutions and also to allow the congregation to become a Pontifical instead of a Diocesan Institute. This request was graciously granted by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, and the *Decretum Laudis* was issued in 1922. Final Papal approbation of the Institute and of the Constitutions was obtained in 1933.

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate came to the United States in 1932 after the late Archbishop Rudolph A. Greken, D.D., then Bishop of Amarillo, had begged the Rev. Mother Foundress, Mother Charitas, to give him teachers for the children in the far separated parts of his diocese. Some sisters were sent to colleges in the United States and from there to teach in some of the schools of the diocese. They now teach in parochial schools in Texas, New Mexico, and California.

The Sisters number over six hundred members. They have schools in Colombia, Panama, the Canal Zone, and Ecuador, besides those in the United States. They also have missions among the Indians of South America, and on the islands of San Blas, east of the Panama Canal. In all they instruct more than 12,000 children.

THE DIES IRAE

The sun was spreading its rays over the rugged Abruzzi hills as I stood with my confrere Father Paschal, later Archbishop and Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, at the tomb of Blessed Thomas of Celano. We said a silent prayer and exchanged casual remarks on the world's greatness and the tomb's littleness. Blessed Thomas rests under the high altar in a little chapel outside the town of Tagliacozza. A missal and sundry other articles he is said to have used may be seen in the sacristy.

Everything about the shrine is poor and humble. Even the simple folk of the neighborhood who keep his memory alive and sacred seem concerned about naught else but to say a hurried prayer to one who, as the story goes, was a saintly man. Witnessing this scene one cannot help but feel the impact of the everlasting lesson, that all earthly greatness must be buried in the dust before it can rise to eternal greatness, on the day of wrath—*dies irae, dies illa*.

That Thomas of Celano was the author of this singularly powerful composition has been fairly well established. He was one of the first companions of Assisi's Poverello, and in those ranks the purest mysticism sought and found expression in matchless poetry of majestic power and exquisite charm. Besides the Seraphic Father, himself a poet both by nature and grace, we find Caesar of Spire, author of the rhythmic hymns in honor of Saints Francis, Anthony and Clare; Brother Pacificus, known as the King of Verse; and Jacopone da Todi, author of the immortal *Stabat Mater*. It was in those ranks that the genius of Thomas of Celano, whose facile pen gave us the *Lives* of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, as well as other notable works, found ample material and lofty inspiration.

It is not our purpose to present here a critical analysis of this superb composition or an evaluation of its literary form and worth. Rather, having been requested by persons who are aware of its tremendous spiritual power, we merely wish to set forth for the benefit of those who desire to meditate and reflect on these monumental stanzas, the thoughts, fears, and hopes that may have motivated the writer in putting them into verse.

The *Dies Irae* is one of the few sequences that have survived, and that still adorn our sacred liturgy. Its solemn, majestic lines now resound like distant echoes from the Age of Faith at our Masses of Requiem. Originally, however, it was used on the First Sunday of Advent. There it fitted perfectly. This Sunday, being the first of the Ecclesiastical Year, shares with the last Sunday of the Year, the Twenty-fourth after Pentecost, an atmosphere of sternness and solemnity. Mother Church has wise-

ly appointed the reading of the Last Judgement for these two Sundays. While the last Sunday features the account of that tremendous event by Saint Matthew (24:15-35), the first brings the parallel account by Saint Luke (21:25-33) which strikes a somewhat milder tone because it ushers in the Christmas Season.

Thus the two Sundays, the first and the last, like mighty sentinels raise their towers on high to give warning to mortal man to always *remember thy last things* (Eccli 28:6). At the same time we hear the Saviour's gentle word: *Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last* (Apoc 1:17). The Latin Proverb *Finis coronat opus* (The end crowns the work) underlies what the Church has in mind. The Last Judgment will decide man's fate for eternity. That should be our first thought and our last.

A mountain of literary works has been raised around this remarkable poem of Thomas of Celano. Many have tried, and have confessed their inability, to render it adequately into English verse. They acknowledge their failure to reproduce the full power, charm, and feeling of the original. From the classic writings of Cicero, Virgil, and Horace the author culled the best he could find, but instead of setting his words to the flowing, mellow rhythm of pagan imperial Rome, he chose the strong, sturdy and stalwart lines of his own day. What these may lack in grace they gain in power. It would seem that the supernatural light of revelation, of which the author has a firm and sure grasp, imparted new life and vigor to the language of *Roma Aeterna*. Sense and sound are made to harmonize and the plain trochees move forward with measured step, each one giving forth a peal of thunder or a flash of lightning as they march forward, turning neither to the right nor the left, but steadily onward in the path traced out for man by the Almighty.

"The *Dies Irae*," to quote Daniel, (*The. Hymn.*), "is by the consent of all the highest ornament of sacred poetry and the most precious jewel in the Latin Church." No wonder Michelangelo, in his masterpiece of the Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel, Goethe, in his world-famous *Faust*, and many other masters have borrowed the dramatic intensity and the overwhelming force of Thomas of Celano in their artistic conceptions. Although their views of life and eternity may have lacked conviction, they felt nevertheless that these verses, which were born in an age when the masses needed strong language to turn them away from strife and warfare and forgetfulness of the last things, carried a message of eternal truth—a truth that fits every age and people.

Do we need to translate this poem into modern tongues? Do the faithful need this translation when they hear it sung at the Requiem Mass? We hardly think so. The Latin words have so deeply impressed

themselves on our hearts and minds, and our Gregorian plain-song carries the thoughts with such overwhelming force, that the very melody urges the devout listener to meditate upon the truth conveyed, even though his mind may not grasp every word. He cannot help but sense in the three verses of every strophe, each one closing on the tonic, the slow and solemn tolling of the bell in the lofty tower. In a more realistic way the Germans call them the "triple hammerstrokes"—most effective in arousing genuine remorse in a guilty conscience.

Such "hammerstrokes" would fade and flow away like water when rendered in the smooth or clipped sounds of our modern tongues. Brother Thomas knew the force of consonants, the tones of vowels, the beauty and expressive faculty of rhyme and rhythm. With all these devices he seems to have played, blending with the greatest ease the word of revelation with the best of man's creation. Thus the immortal sequence of the humble friar stands before us *terrible like an army set in array* (Cant. 6:3).

The *Dies Irae* changes from the description of the Last Judgement in the first six stanzas to lyric meditations and heart-rending prayer in the remainder. The description is set in logical order: 1) the day of wrath; 2) the entrance of the Judge; 3) the sound of the trumpet; 4) the rising of the dead; 5) the Book of Life; 6) the judgement seat.

In Medieval days the holy Bible was in control of religion and life in the Christian world. There was no separation between Revelation and Creation. God's work manifested his power, truth and beauty; his word manifested his will. Such was the conviction of Saint Francis and his First Companions; such was the driving power of his seraphic love. Thomas of Celano sets into focus the end and destruction of God's work at the call of God's will. God is the Creator of all and the Judge of the destiny of all his creatures. The Son of God announced the final judgement and concluded with this solemn sentence: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away* (Matt. 24:35). This sentence weighed on the sensitive and believing soul of the poet when he penned the *Dies Irae*. The Last Judgement is an event of world significance; it marks the end of the universe, of God's magnificent handiwork and of man's labor and craftsmanship as well. Both are doomed because the creature thwarted the Creator's plan and purpose. The doom was forecast in the Almighty's malediction, and the echo of this curse reached the tribes and nations of old. The poet rises to a commanding height when he calls to witness both the sacred and the pagan worlds. The latter's testimony are the Sibylline Oracles of ancient Greece, which portend in obscure and mysterious language the day of a universal wreck-

age. The former are the voices of the Prophets written on the sacred pages of the Old Testament. David, the royal prophet, and type of the Saviour of the world, is quoted by Celano as the spokesman for all the Prophets. We can still sense in his lines the holy fright and dread that must have overwhelmed him as he read some of the chapters of the giants in the ranks of the prophets. Of all the inspired Seers of old, Sophonia is the most realistic. Thus he speaks: *The great day of the Lord is near it is near and exceeding swift. The voice of the day of the Lord is bitter the mighty man shall be there with tribulation. The day is a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of clouds and whirlwinds, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high bulwarks* (Soph. 1:14-16). In the light of these graphic lines we should read the poet's stanzas.

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla;
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Day of wrath—that day
Shall grind the world to dust
David and the Sibyl have foretold it.

Celano took his first words verbatim from the Latin Vulgate: *Dies irae, dies illa*. One cannot but sense the ominousness of the words as they were spoken in the guttural tones of the Hebrew tongue: *Jon ebrah jom hahu* (Soph. 1:14). The very sounds make one shudder, because they foretell the direst tragedy the world will ever witness; and the reason for this tragedy is the sin of man. The enormity of man's transgression is reflected in this outburst of divine wrath. God had made the world for his own glory and man's happiness. The harmony in creation first resounded in a majestic major key, but man's disobedience changed it into a mournful minor. The climax is the day of wrath.

From his high station the poet visualizes the devastation and ultimate destruction of God's domain. *Saeculum* means the world, the universe, but in particular the life upon it. As the Saviour prophesied: *For these are days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. . . And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations bewildered by the roar of the sea and waves. . . For the powers of heaven will be shaken* (Lk. 21:22-25). In the distance we seem to hear the crashing of the gates of Paradise as they are flung shut with the Lord's malediction: *For dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return* (Gen. 3:19). The poet adroitly expresses the crumbling of the universe into tiny particles of dust by the soft feminine *favilla* rhyming with *illa* and *Sibylla*. On the day of wrath man and all his makings will crumble. It is the contrast between God's omnipotence and man's frailty.

How humble and contrite we should feel, how wretched and con-

temptible, as the solemn melody of this stirring sequence fills the Church. What would the corpse in the coffin before us say if he could speak. "Remember," he would whisper, "the four last things, and thou shalt never sin." "Look at me," he would continue, "*Hodie mihi, cras tibi*—What has happened to me today, will happen to you tomorrow."

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!

What a trembling there will be,
When the Judge makes his appearance,
Rigidly to probe all things

Consternation will seize the nations as the Judge appears. Listen to his own words: *And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then will all the tribes of the earth mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty* (Matt. 24:30). Saint John, who had heard these words, confirms them in his own solemn manner: *Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him. Even so. Amen* (Apoc. 1:7). No wonder the imagination of the poet is arrested as he cries out: *Quantus tremor!* The nations are *bewildered* and *men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things that are coming on the world* (Lk. 21:25-26). But the physical pains do not compare with the anguish of soul and the sting of conscience. For this is *the day of tribulation and distress, of calamity and misery, of darkness and obscurity* (Soph. 1:15). There is weeping and wailing. The Judge is *the searcher of hearts* (Apoc. 2:23) who will require *the last farthing* (Matt. 5:26). Strictly and rigidly he will scrutinize everything. The word *cuncta* permits of no exception, no indulgence. Literally the verb *discutere* (derived from *disquaterere*) means "to tear apart, to pierce." Since nothing unholy can stand before God, there will be a tearing into, a piercing of the heart and its most secret recesses; a searching of every motive of our words and actions. Meanwhile the multitude await in fear and anguish. Powerfully Celano describes this scene through the drawn-out ending of *futurus, venturus, and discussurus*.

The lesson is, that the time spent every day in a thorough, honest, and searching examination of conscience will be well spent, and will lessen our anguish on the day of wrath.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum

The trumpet scattering round a startling
sound

Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.

Over sepulchres in every clime
To summon all before the throne.

The tuba or trumpet had an important part in Hebrew life. It was the common signal for summoning the people, whether for joyous festivities, military exploits, or days of mourning and imminent danger. The Judge, so the Saviour announces, *will send forth his angels with a*

trumpet and a great sound (Matt. 24:31). With rare ingenuity Thomas of Celano dramatizes this scene and makes it live and stir with action. The three verses, each one sustained by the threefold *O* or *U* sound, strike the ear like three measured blasts of the mighty trumpet. The blasts are scattering (*spargens*) over the hills and down the valleys, far into distant lands (*regionum*). The sound penetrates the sod or the stone of every sepulchre, for all shall hear the voice of the Son of Man. There is no pause, no hesitation; an irresistible force presses action. The call goes out to all, good and bad, for the Lord will also *gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other* (Matt. 24:31). And as Saint Paul warns: *For the Lord himself with cry of command, with voice of archangel, and with trumpet of God will descend from heaven* (I Thess. 4:16). Saint John carries the sound of the trumpet still further when he writes of his vision on Patmos: *And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up the dead that were in them; and they were judged, each one according to his own works* (Apoc. 20:13). *Coget omnes ante thronum*: There is firmness, force, and finality in these words. Like a mob of criminals the souls of all mortals are huddled before the throne.

This verse shows us the tremendous importance of the grace of graces—a happy death. Of what value, of what purpose is life if at the last moment it is a failure? And how do we know that we will be granted time to set matters aright? For, warns the Judge: *I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I shall come upon thee* (Apoc. 3:3). Yet he promises that: *He who overcomes, I will permit him to sit with me upon my throne* (Apoc. 3:21).

Mors stupebit et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura

Death and nature stand aghast
As the creature comes to life,
To give answer to the Judge.

With a bold stroke of genius the poet turns from the animate to the inanimate world, from man to the physical forces which he commands. But there are two of these forces over which he lost command when he first sinned. In fact it was the hope of conquering this dreaded power of nature that prompted man to sin. Listen to the tempter's lying words: *No, you shall not die the death. For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened* (Gen. 3:4-5). And listen to the penalty hurled down by the Almighty: *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken* (Gen. 3:19). From that moment on there was a league between death and the earth. The earth claimed man as part of its dust, and death was her agent and minister.

But now man, condemned by the Almighty, rises from the tomb. Death and nature stand aghast; they look upon risen man in wonderment and stupefaction. It is too soon to echo Paul's scornful cry: *O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?* (I Cor. 15:55), for the verdict has not yet fallen. First an answer must be given—an answer complete and truthful—to the Judge who is *the searcher of hearts*.

There the creature stands in all his naked humanity. And nature feels that it has been deceived because what it had claimed as its prey returns to life. The poet pictures nature as if blaming death for this loss, for death was to consign this mortal to the grave, and it had failed.

But the creature minds neither nature nor death. He has to render an answer to the Judge, an account of his stewardship. The light beaming from the Judge's countenance floods his whole being and penetrates every crevice and recess of his soul. What will the answer be? What, indeed, will our answer be?

Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur
Unde mundus judicetur.

Then is brought the book, all written,
In which is recorded all
Whence the world is to be judged.

There is a lull in the poet's mind. He senses a quiet expectancy spread over the multitude, for angels, God's messengers and friends, appear. The scene takes on the nature of a court procedure. The angels are bearing the ancient Book—the *liber scriptus* that contains the entire history of every man and of all mankind. The Book of Life figures prominently not only in the writings of the Old Law but also in the earliest traditions of the New. Saint Paul speaks of the Book of Life (4:3) and Saint John mentions it in numerous variations. *I saw the dead, he writes, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. And another scroll was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the scrolls, according to their works* (Apoc. 20:12). One scroll contained the records of the elect; the other, of the reprobate. Thomas of Celano comprises both in the *Liber scriptus*. Saint John was ordered to *take a scroll and eat it up, and it will make thy stomach bitter, but in thy mouth it will be sweet as honey* (Apoc. 10:9). By sweetness we understand the mercies of God; by bitterness his curse and the evils that follow. The word *amarus* (bitter), often used in the Mass and Office of the Dead, is the one word that adequately expresses the feelings of mortals on the *dies magna et amara valde*, the great and most bitter day. The sinful human soul which was created for God and which bears his image, feels entirely abandoned by him and by all that is good, sweet, and beautiful. The

damned bewail the loss of what should have been their eternal blessed possession—and this loss is all through their own fault. Abandonment, remorse, grief, and utter hopelessness come upon them like a stream of ugly waters from the Dead Sea. This is bitterness of soul in the extreme, which tears cannot quench. Now all is too late. There is a presentiment of the place *where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched* (Mk. 4:5).

The Book of Life symbolizes divine Omniscience. The omniscient Eye of God sees all and penetrates the most secret recesses. All these things are laid bare in the Book of Life—*unde mundus judicetur*. And now the poet describes the coming of the Judge.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,	When, therefore the Judge is seated,
Quidquid latet apparebit:	Whatever hidden is laid bare:
Nil inultum remanebit.	Naught shall unavenged remain.

With adamant consequence this scene follows the prophecies of ages carrying the message of the Lord's wrath. The *ergo* used in philosophical syllogisms clinches the argument. The word *sedebit* is the unrelenting fulfillment of the Saviour's own words: *And the Son of Man shall sit in judgement*. There lies a large and ominous order in the words *quidquid latet* (whatever is hidden). A man may hide his misdeeds from his fellowmen, but there is nothing hidden in the sight of the omniscient God. Our sins, though forgiven and not to be charged against us, are nevertheless known to the Almighty. They are in his eternal mind, but the Saviour's redeeming grace has cast its radiant glow over them, and from marks of iniquity they have become tokens of divine mercy. *If your sins be as scarlet, exclaims Isaias, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool* (Is. 1:18).

In an almost casual way, Celano writes down what is of tremendous consequence to us poor mortals: *Quidquid latet apparebit*. And, as if the words flowed naturally from this sentence he adds: *Nil inultum remanebit*. Are there sins on our soul that were deliberately hidden in the Holy Sacrament of Penance? Are there sins omitted out of cowardice, shame, or carelessness? faults or habits that we are loath to lay bare before the voice of conscience, lest the full realization of them force us to surrender and to make a clean breast of all? Are we afraid of ourselves? are we restrained by a misguided self-love? by a hidden pride or human respect? When the Judge appears—*Judex ergo cum sedebit*—all these foolish fears and shames will fade away before his vengeful ire. Thus with another bolt of the hammer upon the unbending anvil of divine justice,

our poet gives the final issue: *Nil inultum remanebit*—Naught shall remain unavenged. *Nil* is a bitter word, but it reaches the very depth of a guilty soul. Nothing, absolutely nothing shall escape the searching eye and the avenging lips of the Eternal Judge.

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O.F.M
(To be continued)

THE FIRST JOY—THE ANNUNCIATION

Now in the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the Virgin's name was Mary. (Luke 1:26, 27)

Our meditation on the first of Our Lady's joys coincides with her March feast, the Annunciation. In the beautiful words of the Evangelist St. Luke, describing the events of the angel's coming to a little girl in Nazareth with the divine decree of her destiny to be the Mother of the Savior, there is one phrase which sparkles above all others for the Franciscan eye. St. Luke tells us that Mary said to the angel: *How shall this happen, since I do not know man?* Underneath these words is hidden a great note of dedication, for inclosed in this significant phrase is the vow of her virginity to Him whom she called *God my Savior*.

The angel's message struck deeply into the heart of Her who was but a child. We know that all Israel's maidenhood dreamed the dream of mothering Him who would be *King over the house of Jacob forever*, and Mary's answer to the angel was but a profession of her dedication to the ideal of Israel—her dedication to a *spiritual service*, presenting herself to God, as St. Paul would later so beautifully describe, *a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God*.

In becoming Franciscans, each of us professed the same dedication manifested by the maiden of a town of Galilee whom we are

now so privileged and happy to call our Blessed Mother. The whole ideal of religious life can be summed in the one word—Dedication. Many think of us as *bound* to three vows—poverty, chastity and obedience—and yet do we not feel in our heart of hearts that we are dedicated rather than bound to these vows and that the depth of our spirit of dedication and love is the measure of the golden chain that links us through the hands of our Holy Father St. Francis to Christ's Church and through His Church to Christ himself? Bonds and fetters are ever the trappings of the prisoner. He some day hopes to shake them off for freedom, and yet our vows do not imprison us, rather they unite us.

Lost of the spirit of dedication, Franciscan life can suffer many of the tragedies of the world: boredom, discouragement, laxity or routine. Yet quickened with love and wisdom, which is but another way to say dedication, our vows become as three keys opening the house, the interior of which *eye has not seen*: releasing the celestial music which ear has not heard; unfolding the treasures of those things God has prepared for those who love Him. The apostle asks: *For who among men knows the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him?* Before others we may well appear to have the mind of Christ and yet be filled with the foolishness of worldliness which closes the ear to spiritual things. Yet the truly dedicated Franciscan is the *spiritual man who judges all things*, and knows he has *received not the spirit of the world but the spirit that is from God.*

When we first entered Holy Church in Baptism a foundation was laid, which is Christ Jesus. When we embraced the Franciscan way of life we can picture that a veritable Portiuncula was constructed over this foundation; its three walls our holy vows, the loving protection of the Queen of our order its little roof, but the door of this little house was left unlatched so that into it might continually pour the grace of the Spirit of God whose temples we are. The little house as we have described will not be closed up until our eyes one day are shut to all on this earth, and our souls brought before the just Judge. Further, the fact that the little house we have described remains unhinged should ever be a reminder to us that by dedicating ourselves to God in the spirit of St. Francis we have been made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

The doors of our Portiunculas are also left open that we may

suffer the same perils, labors and hardships that have sanctified holy men and women of God from apostolic times. Through the open portals may come contentions, envyings, animosities, dissensions, detractions, gossiping, arrogance, disorders, and yet these are the means which allow a dedicated Franciscan, with Saint Paul, to glory in his infirmities, *that the strength of Christ may dwell in him.*

When the spirit of dedication and love for everything Franciscan is strong, each of our imagined Portiunculas of grace and dedication draw our whole family together. Then it is that any soul may look at the building constructed by us and say with truth: *You have become imitators of the churches of God which are in Christ Jesus.* We are dedicated to leave strong monuments as a heritage to the other sons and daughters of the poor man of Assisi who, too, would follow in his footsteps. The love with which we work in making strong these memorials will be rewarded when one day the Lord our God will move each little Portiuncula on this earth into a good land of brooks and of waters, and of fountains: *in the plains of which and the hills deep rivers break out: a land of wheat, and barley, and vineyards, wherein fig trees and pomegranates and olive yards grow, a land of oil and honey. Where without any want we shall eat our bread and enjoy abundance of all things.*

Often St. Bonaventure turns our attention to the models that we have in developing a true sense of Franciscan dedication. Is there any more touching spirit with which we may accept Franciscan life, with all of its hardships and joys, than the sentiments of a Ruth: *for whither soever thou shalt go, I will go: and where thou shalt dwell, I will also dwell. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The land that shall receive thee dying, in the same will I die: and there will I be buried. The Lord do so and so to me, and add more, if aught but death part me and thee.* Let us pray God that the love and devotion with which we embraced the precepts of our holy Father St. Francis may ever dwell so deep in our hearts that we might say to him in Ruth's words: *Holy Father, the Lord do so and so to me, and add more also, if aught but death part me and thee.* No less beautiful is the example of the child Samuel ministering in the temple of God with such devotion and dedication that his thrice uttered—*Here am I*—gave cause to God to reveal to him the future. Well may we reflect, too, the priests who carried the ark

of the covenant into the middle of the Jordan when, under Josue the tribes passed through its channel. If every word of Sacred Scripture is fraught with meaning, as we know it is, let us attend that the priests stood there *in the midst of the Jordan till all things were accomplished which the Lord had commanded Josue to speak to the people, and Moses had said to him.* May it ever be said of us that we have stood as faithfully, and may we never despair or grow tired in the way of the Poverello until all things are accomplished which the Lord has commanded us to speak to His people.

This insistence on a great spirit of dedication to the life we have embraced may seem overemphasized and yet if we turn our glance to the Master *sitting on the Mount of Olives*, His words cannot but enkindle in us a deep realization of the necessity of embracing completely the way that He has led us to gain salvation: *Take care that no one leads you astray. . . many false prophets will arise and will lead many astray. . . iniquity will abound, the charity of the many will grow cold. . . false christs and false prophets will arise, and will show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

Considering those who reign with The Word of God in Heaven, the Evangelist St. John tells us that *the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and pure* follow Him on white horses. St. Bonaventure tells us that the word *armies* has a special significance in this context; for those who are joined to the armies of heaven are those who have freely followed Christ; divorced of earthly and temporal desires and dedicated to heavenly and eternal.² The Seraphic Doctor also tells us that we who are dedicated with devotion and perseverance to the Franciscan way of life merit to be included in the commendation which the apostle addressed to the Galatians: *Whoever follow this rule, peace and mercy upon them.*³ This peace shall not only be of this world but eternal, for one day we shall move from the Portiunculas of grace and devotion which we have built in this world and *we shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence, and wealthy rest.* No one of God's creatures is better able, nor more willing, to protect the devotion and dedication with which we would surround our Franciscan days, than she who mur-

mured to an angel of the Lord the simple, wholehearted, all-embracing words: *Be it done to me according to thy word.* When we pray the Aves of her first joy, may the Mother of God beseech Him to grant us that all our Franciscan days be lived according to the Word to whom she gave birth.

Fr. William J. Manning, T.O.F.

THE KITCHEN OF THE HEAVENLY KING

(Berthold of Regensburg: Seventh Sermon to Religious)

This sermon of Berthold's is a delightful and striking example of the non-technical Medieval sermon. Simple in manner of presentation, completely uninhibited in metaphor and application, it goes straight to the point. It is not a sermon for the overly-squeamish, but for those who can relish Medieval directness it offers excellent spiritual food for Lenten chewing. (Editor's Note.)

And though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality (Wis. 3:4). In this world the Lord has many different kinds of kitchens. Religious who suffer trials are, as it were, being prepared in the kitchen of the Lord to be carried by the angels to the table of the heavenly banquet; and there are certainly many kitchens in which they are thus made ready, that is, the various religious Orders of the heavenly King.

Now, when animals are taken to the kitchen of their masters, they are afflicted. So too are Religious in religion. But after they are prepared they sometimes come into great honors. For they are borne by knights and servants on gold or silver platters to the table of the lord or king or emperor, to become part of their bodies. In like manner you Religious, if you wish to be honorably borne by angels into heaven to the banquet and table of the Lord, must suffer in patience while you are now being completely prepared for the Lord. For just as the animals are first skinned clean, the Religious are first cleansed by poverty of all attachment to things, that nothing which

belongs to the world may remain to them. As (in the Old Testament) the hide belonged to the priest and now in the courts of the lords it belongs to the cook, so our "hide" belongs to our superior. And as a man who stole a hide or part of a hide from a cook would be a thief, so is a Religious a thief if he receives anything of his own. Of such an act he must be very wary because there is a sentence against thieves, as Solomon says: *If a thief be taken he shall restore sevenfold, and shall give up all the substance of his house.* (Prov. 6:31) That is, he shall give up all the good which he has merited in heaven and which he is doing on earth. Furthermore he shall restore both sevenfold because, for that small act of self-will, he must burn as a thief for a great theft on all Sundays, which will ever be for all eternity.

Let us note moreover that the head is somewhat more difficult to skin than the other members. By the head, which is the higher part of the body and more important than the other members, is signified some possession which is more difficult to give than any other. What is the greatest of all possessions? In religion it is one's own will and feelings which among all things are most highly prized and which therefore must certainly be entirely given up, because whatever man does against the will of his superior merits him absolutely nothing. Indeed, Saint Bernard says: "Nothing burns in hell except one's own will; let self-will cease and hell will no longer be." And note that if the hide would remain on the platter set before the King, he would pluck the eyes out or something like that. The Lord likewise will never receive such a thing at his banquet table. Therefore, by all means disobedience is to be avoided lest it happen to you as it did to Dathan and Abiron and all those with them. For when their superiors commanded them to come, they answered: *We will not come . . . wilt thou also pull out our eyes?* (Num. 16:12-14). And there follows: *Respect not their sacrifices* (Num. 16:15), and they were swallowed up with all their possessions. So God does not respect the sacrifices of such Religious, but they will be swallowed up in hell. Beware, therefore, not to keep any of the "hide" of your own will, and the Lord will give you *skin for skin* (Job 2:4), that is, His eternal Will for yours, as happened to Christ, Who said: *Not my will but thine be done* (Lk. 22:42).

Religious again, just like the animals in the kitchen, after the

are skinned, are cooked, roasted, fried, salted, peppered and the like. They are tried by infinite labors. To one this duty is given, to another that; now they are sent out for one task, now for another. It is good to bear these things patiently because the better you are prepared, the more delight the Lord takes in you. Moreover, now you are tried by God with infirmities and dryness of heart; by your superior through difficult obediences; by the Order through fasts, vigils, abstinences, silences, and the like; by the devil through various temptations; by the flesh through involuntary concupiscences; by the brethren through mockery, detractions, accusations and reproaches; and also through various other crosses. But bear all things patiently because this tribulation lasts but for a short time. *Now for a little while, if need be, you are made sorrowful by various trials* (I Pet. 1:6). Through such cookings you escape the roastings of hell; and these cookings may even be so many that you will escape the roastings of purgatory also. Each day bear the cooking or roasting of obedience, or else you will not escape cooking in purgatory. Therefore suffer gladly, and you will merit the joys of more than ten years and escape more than ten years of suffering. And because much glory is thus merited—*for our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure* (II Cor. 4:17)—therefore gladly permit yourselves to be well prepared, because when you are completely done, you will be set before the Lord. *And those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast* (Mtt. 25:10).

Many do not know whether they would be well prepared if God should summon them by His angels and death, as He does quickly; and if they should die, whether they would be presented to the Lord. There are three signs among others that show whether they are well prepared or not, and whether they have made any advance in religious perfection or not—the same signs that show whether the meat is well prepared and cooked to perfection: first, if the blood has been drained off properly; second, if the meat can be torn apart with the teeth or finger-nails; third, if the meat can be separated from the bones.

Now as to the first sign, that is, whether you have advanced to any perfection, and whether you would be presented directly to the Lord or be sent to another kitchen a hundred or a thousand times

hotter and crueller, note well that the blood has been drained out of the flesh and dried, the blood, that is, which signifies sin—the blood may be for an expiation of the soul (Lev. 17:11)—if a religious person does not love sin but thoroughly detests it. For thus, dried up from self-will in his love and his desires, I say not in temptation but in love, the blood of all pride, envy, rancour and the like will have been drained from his soul. For the flesh with blood is unclean to the Lord, as Moses said, because God is not like a dog or a wolf that he should enjoy blood.

The second sign is this: if the soul and heart are tender and ready for correction and reproof, we know that a Religious is thus prepared and perfectly cooked, that is, that he has made perfect progress in religion. *Patience has its perfect work* (Js. 1:4). And note what went before: tribulation *begets patience*. The person who has not been tried may seem to himself and others to be patient, but it can not be known for certain whether he is patient or not, because quiet, pleasures, and the like are not a real test. So trouble begets patience. For as much patience as a person has in tribulation, so much has he and no more. Patience is known in tribulation. Blessed Francis says: As much patience as a person has when his friends are a burden to him, only so much does he have." (See *Admonitions*, n. 13). The Psalmist experienced this when he said: *They have spoken against me with deceitful tongues; and they have compassed me about with words of hatred; and have fought against me without cause. Instead of making me a return of love, they detracted me; but I gave myself to prayer* (Ps. 108:3-4).

The hearts of some Religious are like the meat of an old setting hen. Yeal even like that of an old goose of the woods. They can hardly be cooked. Once, at our place someone caught a woods-goose which could not be made tender in any natural way, even after it was boiled for three days. It was so tough that it could not be cut with a knife, and even the beasts would not bother with it. Are you surprised that some people in religion, even you yourselves, have been cooked in a kitchen for nine years, or ten, or twelve, or thirteen, or thirty, and you are still as hard as ever; yes, so hard, so impatient, that it may be said of you: *You are the man* (II Kings 12:7). *The man that with a stiff neck despiseth him that reproveth him, shall suddenly be destroyed: and health shall not follow him* (Prov. 29:1). *A hard heart shall fear evil* (Ecclus. 3:27). You, however, according

to thy hardness and unrepentant heart, treasure up to yourself wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God (Rom. 2:5). *Your cruelty has reached up to heaven* (II Paral. 28:9). Those who are so impatient that they can not be bitten into with teeth, that is with words, or by finger nails, that is by some hard facts and deeds, cannot be presented to God but must be cooked a second time; and this second cooking will be much worse than the first, for it is that of purgatory. Such people indeed who will not bear correction have the sign of reprobation. *Consider the works of God, that no man can correct whom he hath despised* (Ecclus. 7:14). *The man that with a stiff neck despiseth him that reproveth him, shall suddenly be destroyed: and health shall not follow him* (Prov. 29:1). Therefore such people are stupid, although to themselves and to others they may seem otherwise. He that *hateth reproof is foolish* (Prov. 12:1) - And on the other hand it is said: *Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee* (Prov. 9:8). No matter how good a horse is, if it will in no way put up with anything, neither saddling, nor bridling, nor rubbing, nor feeding, nor spurring, nor anything else, it would be of little value. And so it is with an impatient Religious, no matter how much virtue he has. Because it is written in Hebrews 10, 36: *You have need of patience*. But you say: "I am naturally impatient. I can't overcome myself." I answer: "The fact is, that although you are perhaps tempted somewhat more than certain others, you can easily overcome it, if you will resist it." The Apostle says: *God will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength* (I Cor. 10:13), and in Genesis, *the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it* (Gen. 4:7), because to resist manfully is to conquer. *This is the victory that overcomes the world* (I Jn. 5:4), not to answer in kind to injuries heaped on you after the example of Sara, who (as we read in Tobias 3, 7) when she received a reproach from one of her father's servant maids, she went to God and commended herself to Him. And Chrysostom: "The best kind of victory is to be conquered in many things." It is better to conquer a vice than a person, because as the Lord says: *By your patience you will win your souls* (Lk. 21:19). Therefore, do not be like a dog who has an arrow in his thigh.¹ *At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing*

¹ In Ecclus. 19; 12, Berthold seems to have read *canis* for *carnis*.

forth of a child. As an arrow that sticketh in a dog's (man's) thigh so in a word in the heart of a fool (Ecclus. 19:11-12). You should not be like a dog that runs back and forth howling out; but you should be like a lamb which is always silent, even when it is bitten by wolves.

The third sign is when the meat is easily separated from the bones, that is, when a man has come to such perfection that he says with the Apostle: *I desire to depart and to be with Christ* (Phil. 1:23), namely, when he lives patiently and dies gladly; when groaning deeply within himself he says with David: *Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!* (Ps. 119:5).

Why do the perfect desire to depart? First, because in death they find him whom they have not ceased to desire in their whole life, that is, God. The second reason is because this world is full of dangers and troubles, but death is the end of all of these. *Better is death than a bitter life* (Ecclus. 30:17). Thus Bernard: "The small number of those who reach the goal and the multitude of those who perish gives proof of life's danger." And although there are many dangers on the sea, there are yet more on land. The third reason is the immortality that follows. As Cicero remarks: "One should not weep over death which is followed by immortality." *The day of death is better than the day of one's birth* (Eccles. 7:2). We have the example of the death of Christ: *Let us run with patience to the fight set before us; looking towards the author and finisher of faith, Jesus who for the joy set before him, endured a cross, despising shame* (Hebr. 12:1-2). So Augustine: "The fact that Christ went voluntarily to death is a most certain argument that the servants of God should not fear death." The fourth reason is that death is the door through which man leaves all evils and enters into all good. Therefore, Ecclesiastes says: *The day of death is better than the day of one's birth* (7:2), because on the latter we entered into many evils, but now we enter into many goods. Therefore the Apocalypse says: *Blessed are those who die in the Lord* (14:13); and the Psalms: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps. 115:5). Therefore they desire death as I have already stated. *Men will seek death* (Apoc. 9:6). They are like captives who await their liberation when they have a strong reason to hope for it. They always stand at the door of the prison. As a penned-up dog always stands whining at *A hard heart shall fear evil* (Ecclus. 3:27). You, however, according

the door, scratching with his claws and trying to get out, so it is with the just at death. But the lovers of the world, who fear that they will be led to a gibbet or to torture, seek for delays and leave unwillingly. Nor is it surprising if a sinner fears his release from prison, since he is branded for robbery. Such spiritual brands are the marks or stains of sin upon his gnawing conscience. Of them the Apostle says: *They have their consciences branded* (1 Tim. 4:2). *He is pricked as it were with a sword of conscience* (Prov. 12:18). *Whereas wickedness is fearful, it is given over to all condemnation: for a troubled conscience always forecasteth grievous things*: since (according to the Interlinear Gloss) it does not have tranquillity or serenity (Wisd. 17:10). *Their conscience bears witness to them* (Rom. 2:15). For people who go out of prison branded this way expect nothing except hanging or burning in hell. These people are to be advised that before they leave prison they should be on good terms with the judge, as Mardocheus did with the queen when he was to be hanged, not as some people do who in no way provide for themselves. Or they should be like Joseph who was on good terms with a friend of the king, and therefore, when he was brought out of prison and his clothes changed and face shaved he was presented to the king and greatly honored by him.

Therefore, strive always to come to this state, that you will desire to be freed from prison. O how well prepared was he who said: *Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. 7:24); and he who said: *Bring my soul out of prison* (Ps. 141:8). Therefore, O death, see how bitter you are to the evil and how sweet to the good! For a person shall find you just as you shall find him. If he finds you good, you will find him good; if he finds you bad, you will find him bad. Therefore, Ecclesiasticus says: *Have a familiarity with death* (9:20). He does not mean a familiarity with death only because it spares no one, but he means it as a man is said to be familiar who knows how to adjust himself to the manners of everyone, who is a merchant with merchants, a cleric with clerics, and the like. Such is the true familiarity with death. It is grievously evil to sinners because it finds them grievously evil: *The death of the wicked is very evil* (Ps. 33:22). But for the saints it is precious because it finds them precious: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps. 115:5). And this will lead us to

the heavenly festivity where there is always joy, brightness, and the like. And when you are thus prepared for the Lord you will be presented to him in glory and happiness by the angels whom the Lord shall send for you at death.

Let him who wishes to be cooked quickly, strive after the three points mentioned above. That this may happen very quickly and that a man may also very quickly come to perfection and may beat easily all difficulties as though they were very small, let him do as good cooks do: let him put thick glass next to the meat, that is, the clean Christ who suffered much hotter and more violent things for us. Further, let it be a clean and beautiful glass, that is, let him always have in mind the things of the spirit and the rewards of heaven. Let him always remember that for one day of tribulation we will have thousands of years of consolations; for one difficulty, infinite joys. *For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepare for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure* (II Cor 4:17). So John in the Apocalypse says that the heavenly fatherland is pure gold and pure glass and that its streets are the same: *The city itself was pure gold, like pure glass, and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were, transparent glass, and I saw no temple therein* (Apoc. 21:18, 21:22). Therefore he calls it glass because it is transparent. Metals are not transparent because in them there is too much earthiness, but in glass there is little although more in one than in another. Therefore one is clearer than another. Such is that glory, in which are none of the miseries and difficulties which are here on earth. No hunger, thirst, or any other affliction; and John also teaches that he who here has less earthiness will be more brilliant there: *And I saw no temple therein* (Apoc. 21:22). That is a place of petition and sacrifice—as the Gloss explains—which will have no place there. For there we shall not make petition, but everyone will receive what he wishes, and there we shall not offer sacrifice to God but He will offer to us everything that we wish, these and many other things as well. This is for us. Amen.

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THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

THE INCARNATION AND THE GRACE OF THE INCARNATION

I have meditated on what penance must mean for us, and we have discovered that it means loving ourselves that we may gain ourselves in the Lord. It also means, as a necessary consequence, that we must learn to regard the things of this world as valueless apart from God, and to make God our one and only value—our God and our all. This was the Gospel message that Saint Francis, in all simplicity, heard and lived. He found the exhortation in every word of the Good Tidings, for every word revealed to him the *Magnalia Dei*, the great things God has done for us. But he was overwhelmed by one of these Great Things above all others—the Incarnation of the divine Word, the truth that God became man, that the love of the Father gave us the Son as our brother. This overwhelming goodness of our Father and the utter humility of his Son irresistibly forced Francis to answer the call to penance with all the strength of his ardent young soul.

1. Christ Is the Incomprehensible Gift of Our Father

In his *Letter to All the Faithful*, our holy Father Francis wrote: "The Most High Father announced through his holy archangel Gabriel to the holy and glorious Virgin Mary that this Word of the Father, so worthy, so holy, so glorious, was coming from heaven; from her womb he received the true flesh of humanity and our frailty."

When Saint Francis experienced in his heart and mind the incredible mystery of the Incarnation, he did not think primarily of the lovely Infant lying in the arms of his Virginal Mother and surrounded by all the tender and jubilant poetry that adorns the Feast of the Nativity. These are but accidentals—and although Francis by no means despised them, neither did he center his devotion on them. What he really experienced, and what he wanted to see and hear and even to feel with his bodily senses, as one overwhelming fact, so simple yet so incomprehensible: God became man, God took upon himself the weakness of our flesh, was born a helpless child,