

calling for us? Even if reminded, do we merely turn outwardly to the chapel when obedience calls? And then, do we give no more than a kind of lip service, which cannot evoke a revelation of His true identity? If we must admit this, can we not strive to turn our soul to Him, in the hope that He will manifest Himself to our heart? May His constant calling to us not fall on deafened spiritual ears, but upon our awakened and opened inward senses. These, turned to Him, will cause Christ to manifest Himself openly to us: in faith and love, here; in vision and love, hereafter. When we effect this, by the help of His manifesting grace, let us call out our cry of true recognition: "Master"!

Fr. Owen Colligan, O.F.M.

### EASTER SONG

#### I.

between the talking fingers  
of the trees  
the light speaks clearly:

the far land near of promise  
is both there and here—

will you through moved leaves follow  
or still stay silent

while through rain and green  
the singing glistens?

ROBERT LAX

## THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

### FRANCISCAN PENANCE IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

To live the Franciscan life is to follow Christ in the way of Gospel perfection, in the way of Christian *metanoia*. And we must follow this way of life not for ourselves alone, but for the world as well. True penance cannot be a half-measure; it cannot mean that we begin to turn to Christ in heart and mind and action, and then lose courage half way and fail to complete the turn. Such cowardice would make us unworthy of Christ, unworthy even of the name Franciscan. For as Saint Francis wrote in his Rule, quoting Saint Luke (9:62), nobody putting his hand to the plow and looking backward is fit for the kingdom of God. There must be courage, a holy and youthful radicalism, in our penance, and it must be inspired by the deepest love and the uttermost trust in the grace of God. It is remarkable that the Apostles, *when they were now on their way going up to Jerusalem* and *Jesus was walking up in front of them*, were astonished and followed him in fear (Mk. 10:32). They could not understand why he went to his passion and death, and it is true that practically all of them left him in the hour of his greatest humiliation; but it is equally true that when they began their life of true penance, their apostolic life, they followed him to death without hesitation or fear, for having been sealed with the fire of the Holy Spirit, they realized the glory of being found worthy to suffer for the name of their Lord. Thus it is evident that Franciscan penance, the penance of the Gospel, must be lived under the shadow of the cross.

#### 1. Franciscan Meditation on the Cross

It was after his experience with the leper that Saint Francis died to himself and to the world. Then, shortly after that, the Crucified spoke to him from the cross at San Damiano and asked him to restore his Church. This was one of the greatest moments in the life of our holy Father. The Lord had told him what he wanted of him, and although Francis did not immediately grasp the full significance of the words coming from the cross, he did immediately realize that the message of his mission came from the cross. The Beloved had

spoken, and the Beloved was the Crucified. Suddenly the cross was no longer a mere symbol for Francis, no longer a pious picture for remembrance; it was a vivid reality for him, a reality that took form in his soul and melted it. "From now on," as Celano tells us, "I could not help but weep; with a loud voice he bewailed the sufferings of Christ which he had constantly before his eyes. . . Always he contemplated the countenance of the Man of Sorrows full of misery (II, 11 and 85).

There is hardly need to prove that the heart and mind of Francis were filled with the sufferings of our Lord, that he loved to meditate on the passion, that he responded to it with a burning desire to suffer with Christ, and that the love with which he surrendered himself to the embrace of the Crucified brought forth tears of contrition and gratitude. There is, however, a need to warn against possible misunderstanding of our Seraphic Father's meditation. Affective though it was, there was nothing sentimental about it. His tears were by no means the natural reaction of an emotional personality, nor was his compassion the mere outpouring of maudlin human sympathy. Neither were the tears of Francis the pitying and ineffectual tears of the women of Jerusalem that brought a gentle rebuke from the Lord; they were tears of true love, sealed and approved by Christ himself with the holy stigmata. The meditation of our Seraphic Father was deeply affective, but never emotional. It was stirred by the overwhelming love of the Son of God for us, who was given to us by his Father, and who in his love went so far as to let himself be put to death for us, to suffer all the tortures and humiliations of his passion and shameful crucifixion, for no other reason than because he loved us. It shook the depths of the heart of our holy Father to realize that the Love who loved us to the end died for us between robbers in public infamy. He did not need to, nor was he inclined to, conjecture all the cruelties that the innocent Lamb suffered or to use his imagination in picturing the various pains of the details of the crucifixion. His devotion was not the kind that finds satisfaction in counting the wounds of Christ and spinning out elaborate prayers to each wound. For Francis, the simple story of the passion as recounted by the Evangelists was quite sufficient. The immediacy and directness, the unadorned matter-of-factness of the

Gospel narrative was all he needed. Even the sign of the cross, or two sticks lying crosswise, was enough for him.

With that stark and simple immediacy so characteristic of our Seraphic Father, he meditated on the passion, grasping in an affective way the central religious idea in our Lord's sufferings. It was not so much the doctrine or the dogma, but the reality of our salvation and redemption, that he saw in this fire of passion. It overwhelmed him with pain and joy. He saw his Friend dying, his Brother, God, and the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, murdered by men but also a victim for men. For it was not alone the unworthy rulers of the Jewish people that caused the sufferings and death of Christ. It was all sinful humanity that arrested and bound him, that shared in his mock trial. We too scourged him and crowned him with thorns and laid the heavy cross of public infamy on his shoulders; the sins of all mankind helped to pierce his hands and feet with nails; our infamy murdered our God, our Friend, our Brother. And yet this same God-Man sheds his blood for us, his enemies; he redeems us and makes us children of his Father.

It was this simple and dogmatic meditation that drew tears of compassion from Saint Francis. And not tears of compassion alone, but tears of love and contrition, of gratitude and joy as well. Not only did Francis refuse to be comforted when he wept because Love is not loved; not only was he moved to tears when he saw a lamb brought to the market reminding him of the innocent Lamb of God sacrificed for us; he also rejoiced in the passion, and in overflowing gratitude composed a hymn of thanksgiving and praise which we know as the *Office of the Passion*—weaving together texts of the Psalms that culminate in the beautiful praises at the end:

O clasp your hands, you nations all, acclaim your God with a voice of exultation.

For the Lord is high and worthy of awe, the great King over all the earth.

For the most holy Father in heaven, our King, before time sent his beloved Son from on high and he has wrought salvation in the midst of the earth. (Vespers).

This is the way our Seraphic Father meditated on the Passion of our Lord, and this is the way we too should meditate. If we contemplate with our Seraphic Father the supreme love of him who has called us to follow him, then the cross will become a reality in our heart and mind as it was in his. The effect will be that true wisdom of the cross through which all things on earth will change their value for us, through which we will come to judge as loss what we once counted as gain. In other words, it will enable us to put on the mind of Christ. Here we may pause to ask ourselves how much we, the penitents of Assisi, are striving to fill our heart and mind with the passion of Christ, how much we are striving to crucify our thoughts and ambitions and desires. If we are truly sincere in our inquiry, we shall probably find that actually our mind and heart are quite empty of all that pertains to the shame and glory of the cross, and quite filled with the mundane trivia that crowd our life. As a practical detail, let us ask ourselves how much we really cherish the passion and cross of Christ, not only in our meditation, not only in the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, but in our actual daily living. The meditation that penetrates to the depths of the soul inevitably brings about that turn which is the *metanoia* of our Franciscan life. But how far have we succeeded in this? When we were received into the Order, we were given a crucifix, and with more fervor than understanding we repeated the words of Saint Paul: *Far be it from me to glory in anything save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* But what do we glory now? Around what do our thoughts and our loves revolve? Have we forgotten that we must follow Christ on his way to Calvary? There is a very fine test for proving whether Christ's passion is anything more to us than a touching story or a theme for holy pictures; the test is this: Have we found the answer to the religious life in meditating on the way of the cross? It is there and there alone that each and every religious must find the answer to his own personal life. All the frustration, all the seeming waste and fruitlessness, all the suffering and shame and apparent failure that sooner or later fall to the lot of all of us, can find significance and justification only in the shadow of Calvary. If we look for the answer to our life anywhere else, we may be very wise according to the world, but we will not be wise according to the wisdom of the cross. Only

the *via crucis* can we learn to know for ourselves the Truth and Humility that humbled Itself to death on the cross. Only there can we learn patience and mildness, charity and understanding, readiness for sacrifice, poverty, obedience, and the penetrating vision that discerns the loving hand of God guiding us through all the agony of life. Only there can we learn the secret of our Franciscan vocation.

## 2. *The Life of the Cross*

Once Saint Francis understood the meaning of the passion and death of his beloved Lord and Master, his meditation on the cross became his own *via crucis*. Christ had invited him to leave everything behind and to take up his cross daily and to share his life. With all the radical ardor of his intense personality he ran to the call. And he ran not only because his Master had invited him, but because his heart and mind impelled him to it. Filled as he was with the sufferings of our Lord, it was this tremendous love that transformed his life into that of the Crucified (*Legenda maior*, IX, 2). Love strains toward unity. Thus it was that Francis began his life of penance "in the footsteps of the Crucified;" thus it was that he became crucified to the world and the world to him. His life was changed so much that Celano could write: "The pleasures of the world became a cross to him" (II, 2.). The Crucified formed his humility, marked his poverty, sealed his obedience. His entire life was determined by the cross; he lived it under the shadow of the cross.

When we think seriously of the life of our holy Father, so completely determined by the life of Christ, we cannot fail to realize what a far cry our life is from his. Of course, it is easy to criticize others, and perhaps it is easy to criticize ourselves, too, for having fallen so short of the true Franciscan ideal. But criticism alone is not enough. If we are to profit from it, we must try daily to realize what we ought to do, and what we are failing to do, as followers of the Crucified. Let us not be dead stones in the edifice of our Order that do not even see their task, lifeless blocks that through negligence or despair or worldliness shirk the demands of their vocation. Let us rather be living stones who constantly push toward their ideal despite the weaknesses and failures that beset our poor humanity. Indeed, as Franciscans we have no other choice. Nothing less than the life

of the cross is demanded of us; in no other way can we fulfill our obligation to God, to the Church, and to the world. The world especially needs us.

If the thought of Calvary terrifies us, let us at least go to the Gethsemani. If we can go with Christ to the agony and accept with him whatever the Father wills for us, we are truly walking the *via crucis*. If we can steel ourselves to say to Christ: *Father, not my will but thine be done, God be with my willing heart and strengthen us to complete the journey to Calvary*. For us, the *via crucis* may mean many things. It may mean that we are willing to let ourselves be denied and betrayed by those we called our friends, forsaken and condemned by those we loved and helped. It may mean to let ourselves be bound by the fetters of charity, bearing the burden of the reasonable and unreasonable demands of others, or relinquishing our freedom to not offending the weak. It may mean that we are willing to accept injustice, calumnies, misjudgments, criticism from within our community and from without, from friends and enemies, from brothers and confreres. It may mean that we are willing to bear public infamy if the Lord demands it of us, and to carry the stones of the streets of our communities. We may be unjustly seduced—for thus they called Christ, too—*ille seductor*; we may be unjustly subjected to public punishments. But the *via crucis* also means that we are willing to struggle along in both directions—falling with Christ under the cross but always rising again, dragging the cross of all our imperfections toward the goal. At the mark, Christ fell three times under the cross, but he kept going toward Calvary; so for us every fall under the cross must be a fall more humble and more confident of our Master's help. The *via crucis* may also mean that we are willing to accept in all our suffering the kind of consolation that can be so sweet and so painful at the same time—the understanding love of one who shares our pain and is unable to relieve our pain. Or it may mean that we accept the unwilling help of those who by obedience or the love of God are bound to help us. What religious does not know the value of just permissions grudgingly granted, care or assistance tenderly rendered? And how many are the crosses hidden in the

of the hearts of misjudged and mistreated sick? Nevertheless, we must accept the cross as our lot, and promised to glory on earth. Whatever befalls us in our Franciscan life is our *via crucis* for us only if we have learned the wisdom of the cross. Let us not only meditate on the *via crucis*, but let us live it. As long as we keep trying, no matter how often we fall, we shall remain beneath the burden of the cross, we can be sure that we are the children of Saint Francis, true followers of Christ who seek glory through the shame of the cross.

### 3. The Perfection of the Cross

The Franciscan ideal goes far beyond the mere life of the cross. It soars aloft to mystic heights in the perfection of the cross. The children of the Seraphic Francis must follow Christ not only in the love, not only in humble and patient bearing of the cross, but in the footsteps of Christ; they must also climb all the way to Calvary and become one with the Crucified in that ultimate and intimate union where Calvary becomes Thabor as well. For those whom he foreknew he has also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29). We know where Saint Francis found his Calvary-Thabor. It was on the wind-swept heights of Alverna that the flame-winged Christ impressed into his hands and feet and side the stigmata as outward signs of that ecstatic love in which he surrendered in a flash of burning pain to the love of the Crucified, and he entered for a little while into the bliss of the ocean of joy. Are we only to admire our Seraphic Father in this? Are we not called to be conformed to the image of the Crucified? Saint Bonaventure has no doubt that here, in this ideal of ultimate union with the Crucified, in the rest of complete surrender, is the ideal of the Franciscan. We have no right to seek excuse in the fear of suffering; it is the sound teaching of theologians that precisely this union is the goal of every Christian life. The truth is that the enthusiasm and the courage that would bring about the renunciation from everything the old man cherished and the old man and hurl us into the burning embrace of the Crucified. The way to this Calvary-Thabor is none other than the way of the cross. *Infixi* as Saint Bonaventure reports, makes clear to

us. It is the *amor Crucifixi* that prepares us for the last stations of the Way of the Cross. It makes us able and willing to suffer the stripping of everything that is dear to us, even our good name; makes us able to rid ourselves of every covering of vanity and pride to have done with that selfish prudence and cautious calculation that so conveniently covers our cowardice and half-heartedness with respectable names. It makes us willing to be exposed in our naked weakness and misery, to appear in the sight of men just as we are in the sight of God. To use Saint Bonaventure's striking simile, it makes us like drunken men who do not care whether they are covered or not. The *amor Crucifixi* makes us willing to suffer these things, and that without trying to take matters in our own hands. A true lover of Christ Crucified is one who allows himself to be stretched out upon the cross and in radical obedience to be nailed through hands and feet and abandoned there. Not only the body but even the mind must be nailed to the cross; and there will the true lover remain, unable to make any move but what the cross and obedience allows. This is the ideal to which every Franciscan is called. When we have reached that goal, then, and only then, can we truly say that Christ lives in us and we in him. Then there will remain only that he lift us up on the cross with him, and that we there become one with him who in his supreme sacrifice surrendered himself to the Father. Completely "dead to the outside world, but experiencing, nevertheless, as far as possible in this present wayfarer's state, that which was said to the thief on the cross clinging to Christ: *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise*—this also was given to the blessed Francis to see, in the transport of contemplation on the mountain height. . . when the six-winged Seraph fastened to the cross appeared to him. . . Here he passed over into God in the transport of contemplation, and he was set forth as an example of perfect contemplation, just as he had been a model of the active life like a second Jacob-Israel. And thus rather by example than by word God would invite all truly spiritual men to this passing over and this transport of the soul." So wrote Saint Bonaventure at the end of *The Journey of the Soul to God*.

And now we understand why the desire for martyrdom is so in-

timately connected with the ideal of the penitents of Assisi, and perhaps we also understand why Saint Francis broke forth in jubilation and exultation when he heard of the martyrdom of his brethren in Morocco. They not only became one with Christ on the cross in final reality, they became the first true Friars Minor, true brothers of our Seraphic Father. With a cry of exultant joy he exclaimed: "Now truly I can say I have five brothers!" (Anal. III, 21).

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.

### MOTHER MARY ANGELA TRUSZKOWSKA FOUNDFRESS OF THE FELICIAN SISTERS'

(Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix)

(Continued from preceding issue)

In 1858, the Felician Sisters, under the leadership of Count Andrew Zamoyski, began to work among the peasants through the newly-formed Agricultural Society. This Society was a part of the general movement toward social regeneration. In addition to its specific aim of improving agricultural methods, the Society sought to better the lot of the masses through education, economic aid, and the eventual granting of citizenship and land proprietorship. In this manner the Society hoped to expiate the century-old sins of Polish nobles, who deliberately held the peasants in serfdom and ignorance.

The Felician Sisters were requested to conduct the social centers (*ochrony*) which the Society planned to organize in a number of rural districts of Russian Poland. Mother Angela readily heeded the plea, and in the span of four years (1859-1863) she sent sisters to staff twenty-seven such centers.

Three sisters were assigned to each center: an infirmarian, a teacher, and a sister for domestic work and general maintenance. A school building was made to serve a number of purposes. One room was used as a medical clinic where the infirmarian treated the minor ills of peasants, trying at the same time to cure them of their many superstitions. The teacher gathered her pupils in another room and instructed them in the rudiments of knowledge and catechism. Young children, brought in

for the day by mothers who worked in the fields were occupied with games, while those in their teens were taught handicrafts, gardening, and other useful skills.

In the evenings and on week-ends the building was transformed into a community center for youth and their elders. Religious instruction, spiritual reading, congregational singing of church hymns, the rosary stations, examination of conscience—these filled the hours varying with the liturgical seasons. Long deprived of such spiritual care and often removed from the parish church, the simple people crowded the school rooms to hear the word of God.

In their pristine zeal the sisters engaged in many activities that could arouse the people from their lethargy. They prepared children for the sacraments, organized pious societies, directed church choirs, served the peasants with advice, visited their homes, and often settled differences between neighbors.

Won by the self-forgetfulness and devotion of the sisters, whom the affectionately called "Little Mothers" (Matki), the peasants began to amend their ways. When the members of the Agricultural Society inspected the centers after one year's existence, they were astonished by the manifest improvement in morals and in mutual relations between the peasants and their lords.

In districts inhabited by Ruthenian Uniates, the sisters were preparing future martyrs. The continual efforts of the Russian government to draw the Uniat Catholics into the schismatic church were climaxed by violent persecution following the Insurrection of 1863. Many Ruthenians heroically preferred death to apostasy. The survivors later admitted with sincere gratitude: "If it weren't for our Little Mothers, maybe we wouldn't have persevered."

The disbanding of the Felician Sisters in 1864 and the closing of their institutions was apparently a death blow to the life work of the Foundress. However, this trial only served to extend Mother Angela's charitable mission to the southern provinces of Poland.

With the rebirth of the Congregation in Krakow in 1865, Mother Angela labored to instill in her daughters the spirit of loving reparation and active charity, which would determine their influence over souls. Her successor, Mother Mary Magdalen Borowka, was trained in the school of the Foundress as one of the first members. She preserved and strengthened that spirit during her forty-four years as superior and general of the Congregation (1871-1915).

During this half-century, the sisters ministered to all sections of Au-

trian Poland. They conducted urban and rural schools, nurseries, private academies, student resident homes, sewing centres, orphanages, asylums for the aged, and catechetical centers. As in former days, the sisters also organized and directed various religious societies, particularly sodalities, tertiary groups, the living rosary, and the apostleship of prayer. A rather unique work of mercy was inaugurated in 1872 in Krakow with the opening of "Caritas," a free kitchen for the poor and homeless. A special development of Caritas was a separate serving kitchen for students, which to the present time daily serves a free noon meal to hundreds of poor students attending local trade schools, secondary schools, and institutions of higher learning.

The outbreak of the first world war interrupted many of the activities of the Congregation. But as in the days of the 1863 uprising, the charity of the sisters found a new outlet in ministering to wounded soldiers in their own institutions or in neighboring hospitals.

With the creation of a free Poland after the war, the Felician Sisters resumed their social and educational work in those sections of the country formerly held by the Russians. The growing number of orphanages, nurseries, social and catechetical centers led to the formation of a separate Warsaw province in 1921 with the motherhouse located in suburban Wawer. Here a secondary school and a junior college (European gymnasium and liceum) were opened for resident and day students.

On the eve of the second world war, the Congregation numbered more than 800 sisters in the three provinces of Krakow (1865), Lwow (1910) and Warsaw (1921).

When the war clouds finally broke over the nation anew in 1939, the sisters again treaded the way of sorrow with their countrymen. Once more their institutions sheltered wounded soldiers and homeless refugees. Twelve sisters were confined in Nazi concentration camps, and the Lwow province was disbanded during the Soviet invasion.

Following the Allied victory in Europe, the sisters undertook their work with fresh vigor in war-torn Poland. The Lwow province was reorganized in Przemysl. A general chapter of the Congregation convened in Krakow in the fall of 1946 to elect a new general council. The new superior general, Mother Mary Sulpicita, an American, issued directives to all members of the Congregation, urging that the Community's spirit of reparation be renewed. Perhaps never before was the plea so timely.

The curtain of Communism soon fell on Poland and hid her fate from the eyes of the civilized world. The activities of the Congregation were gradually curtailed. The sisters were barred from schools with the

exception of their private institution in Wawer, by the apostolate in orphanages, nurseries, homes for the aged, for catechetical instruction and social work.

The future of the Felician Sisters in Poland was in jeopardy. The refusal of the Communist government to renew the charter of the congregation was followed by an order of dismissal from the congregation which affected the superior general and three members. This action resulted in the temporary transfer of the superior general and three members of the Felician Sisters to the United States, to Philadelphia, in the spring of 1950. Three years later, in May 1953, the Holy See, the Congregation of the Felician Sisters, transferred the generalate in the heart of Christendom—Rome—to the building selected for the new general motherhouse in Philadelphia. Very Rev. John Mickun, pastor of St. Mary's parish in Philadelphia.

The influence of Mother Angela, perpetual superior, was felt not only in Poland but also in America. Many of her countrymen took refuge in the mission.

Nevertheless, the impact was not entirely positive. Immigrants, bread and freedom they found here, but they found customs, and modes of thought were a disheartening contrast. There were few Polish parishes in the 1860's and 1870's, and the sisters ministering to the rapidly growing settlements. Many immigrants of God in their native tongue or to cleanse their souls. For peace, the immigrants stood in danger of relaxing their faith.

In this difficult period of adjustment, Mother Angela was to play a significant role under the leadership of Father Dabrowski, one of the early masterbuilders of the congregation.

Well educated and alert, Father Dabrowski recognized that one of the burning needs of the time was the establishment of Catholic schools for the children of immigrants. A religious community of Polish origin was equal to the task. "We do not understand the needs of the nation." The Congregation of the Felician Sisters was well suited for this mission. He had become a member of the congregation while visiting with his mother in Krakow, Poland. In 1874, after having organized his first school where he himself taught with the aid of Mother Angela, Dabrowski appealed for sisters to Mother Angela in Philadelphia. The Congregation.

Five sisters arrived in Polonia on November 20, 1874. They began their apostolate in this first American mission on the following day—the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which thus for the third time became a founding date in the history of the Congregation.

On December 3, 1874, two weeks after their arrival, the sisters began teaching in the two-room parish school with an initial enrollment of thirty children. Five days later the first candidate applied for admission to the Congregation, but being too young for the postulancy, she remained at the sisters' home to continue her schooling. Thus began the first juniorate, a preparatory school for young candidates of high school age. When several months later, an eighteen-month old orphan, Mary Kudla, was entrusted to the sisters, the Congregation initiated its child care history in America. April 16, 1875, marked the entrance of the first postulant, Valeria Reczek, who began the flow of vocations from Polish-American homes.

The increasing enrollment in the school and orphanage was paralleled by the steadily growing number of candidates to the juniorate and novitiate. Consequently, in 1876 permission was obtained to open a novitiate, and in the following year the first American province was formed in Polonia, with Mother Monica as provincial superior.

Remarkable in this development of the Congregation in the United States is the fact that it grew through native vocations, never recruiting teaching members from Poland beyond those in the pioneer band of five. On the contrary, the American provinces began sending sisters to Poland beginning with the year 1904 and in greater numbers after the formation of the new Warsaw province in 1921.

In America today, the Congregation numbers 3,620 sisters in seven provinces, engaged in educational and charitable activities in thirteen archdioceses and forty-three dioceses; in twenty-seven states and in the District of Columbia; in Ontario, Canada, and in Brazil, South America. The membership of the American provinces surpasses more than four times that of the mother community in Poland.

This growth of the Felician Sisters in America can be attributed mainly to the vigorous inner life fostered in the early Congregation by the pioneer sisters and their director, Father Dabrowski. Mother Monica, first provincial superior and mistress of novices, molded the religious life of the sisters in the spirit of Mother Angela, by whom she herself was schooled. Strict observance of the rule, love of poverty, a spirit of prayer, fortitude in the apostolic life, and childlike obedience—these were the traits she labored to form in the sisters.

In 1915, the opening of a ninth grade at St. Josaphat school in Detroit marked the entrance of the Felician Sisters into the field of parochial secondary education. A decade later they began to staff an increasing number of high schools.

The sisters had already been conducting a private academy and normal school at their motherhouse in Detroit since 1882. Incorporated as the Seminary of the Felician Sisters, the school was intended for the academic and professional education of candidates.

To provide educational training for its own members, the Congregation has secured charters for a number of higher institutions. In 1922 the Lodi province opened the Immaculate Conception Summer Normal School, which in 1941 was incorporated as a Junior College, offering two years of general education, with the addition of courses for teacher certification. The Detroit province, after having moved to the new motherhouse in Livonia (1936), twenty miles beyond the metropolitan area, organized Presentation Junior College in 1937. Ten years later this institution became the four-year liberal arts Madonna College for women, both religious and lay.

More recently two provinces have opened higher institutions of learning for their own members. In 1945 the Enfield province organized Our Lady of the Angels Teacher Training Institute, which in 1950 became a Junior College. The Chicago province opened the Felician Junior College, in June 1953.

Simultaneously with their educational apostolate in the United States, the Felician Sisters undertook numerous charitable works whose main object was the neglected or the underprivileged child. It was only fitting that they should serve the "least" of the little ones, since the Congregation had taken its origin from Mother Angela's mercy toward the street waifs of Warsaw.

When Mother Monica accepted the first orphan girl into the sisters' home in 1874 she gave the beginning to St. Clara Orphanage in Polonia. Within the next fifty years the Congregation undertook work in nine other orphanages.

To meet a special social need in the United States, the sisters also opened St. Rita Home for Mentally Deficient Children in Getzville, N.Y., in 1941. The only Catholic institution of its kind in the country, the home admits feeble-minded, idiot, and imbecile children under the age of five. Since its opening until 1949, the home provided care and special training for 166 children until they reached the age at which other institutions would accept them.

In September 1942, the sisters began operating a Psychological and Child Guidance Clinic in Buffalo, N.Y., for the diagnosis and treatment of children who show signs of emotional disturbances. The Clinic is under the direction of a sister specialist trained in psychometry and psychology.

Nursing was added to the sisters' apostolate in America, when in 1937 the Chicago province took charge of St. Mary's Hospital in Centralia, Ill. Today the Congregation conducts six additional hospitals.

Three continents, more than 4,400 Felician Sisters doing good among thousands of souls and spending a combined total of approximately 20,000 hours daily in prayer of adoration, petition, and atonement for the world—these are the fruits of the humble spirit of Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska.

In the perspective of a hundred years since the founding of the Congregation (1855-1955), it is possible to appraise more truly the influence of Mother Angela. Her Congregation has met definite needs both in Poland and in the two Americas. Her life, her virtue, her writings, and her ideals have served as a guide in the historical development of the Felician Sisters. As an abiding inspiration for their apostolate in the modern world, Mother Angela has bequeathed to her spiritual daughters the distinctively Felician ideal of Eucharistic reparation through the Immaculate Heart of Mary—an ideal permanently embodied in the motto of the Congregation: "All through the Heart of Mary in honor of the Most Blessed Sacrament."

*Sister Mary Tullia Donarr, C.S.S.F.*

## ENCYCLICAL LETTER

*(Continued from preceding issue)*

But this is not the only gift which the most blessed Virgin has conferred through the Vicar of her Son. Another appropriate gift has been bestowed during the Marian Year on the Franciscan Family; for

The rich Franciscan nursery  
Puts forth a tender blossom,  
Whose very pleasing odor  
Fills all the world with gladness.



Our Blessed and Immaculate Virgin has filled the hearts of all of us with the greatest happiness in the beatification of Sister M. Assunta Pallotta. That fruitful branch of the seraphic tree, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters who enjoy the protection and the name of Mary, has become most precious fruit.

You know, of course, that a most sweet odor diffusing itself throughout the cell of Maria Assunta following her death, and emanating from her grave, became the first extraordinary sign of her sanctity. Because of the presence of this lovely odor, rightly consider that the Lover of Virgins wished to extol the lily-whiteness of His humble handmaid with a most vivid commendation.

Perhaps some of you, most dear sons and daughters, weakened with continuous struggling, thwarted with arduous difficulties, and considering the heavy weight of perfect chastity, might dare to say: "Do you believe that we can do this?" Or with a weary mind, to lament: "Why were we not able to do it?" Here then, as a help, is Blessed Maria Assunta, from whose sweet and tender smile you learn the secret of virginal life; for what did this humble Franciscan Missionary Sister of Mary do? Our Holy Father Pius X revealed the secret to Sister Assunta: "Faithful observance of the Holy Rule; this is indeed true sanctity." Surely the way which leads to sanctity is hard and rough, abounds with thorns, but it is nevertheless easy as is shown by the "little way" which Assunta Pallotta followed.

Who would be afraid to imitate such an easy example of virtue, which progresses along the way of sanctity by the simple fulfilling of daily duty? Hiding our lives in Christ, chastising our bodies and bringing them into servitude, praying continuously that our body might be protected from loss and from the flames of hell, and that our hearts might be made immaculate, we also will be, as was Blessed Assunta, *the good odor of Christ* (II. Cor. 2:15).

What a very sweet odor is continuously diffused by the young boys growing like lilies in the fruitful gardens of our Seraphic Colleges, by the Novices in the secluded gardens, by the Brothers in their daily work, by the Clerics in their classrooms, by the Priests in their ministry, by the Sisters in the cloisters and their works of charity. This indeed is the precious fruit of the Marian Year and a most pleasing offering to the Patroness of our Order, the Immaculate Virgin, who during the space of that year has been daily contemplated by us as *entirely lovely and without spot*. We are continually encouraged to practice that beautiful virtue which makes us like unto the angels, by the saintly men and women whose children we are, for example, Anthony of Padua offering the

lily in his hand, Louis of Toulouse the Lily of Virginity, Bonaventure who appeared so pleasing in form that it seemed Adam's sin had not affected him,<sup>12</sup> and Clare the mirror unclouded by any shadow.

And what might we say about the exhortation of our Holy Father Saint Francis, who was so concerned about the purity and chastity of his children that in his Rule he openly recommends that there should be not even the occasion for suspicion so that there would be no grounds for scandal.<sup>13</sup> He was very exacting in the discipline he observed for his own protection, and took the greatest care for the purity which should be observed by both men and women. Consequently, at about the time of the first beginnings of his conversion, he would often plunge himself during the winter time into a pit full of ice in order to fully compel the enemy to be a servant for him, as well as to preserve his white cloak of purity from the fires of pleasure. He would say that it was incomparably more tolerable for a spiritual man to sustain freezing cold in the body than to perceive even the least warmth of carnal pleasure in the mind. Whenever he felt the breath of him whose breath makes coals burn, a great temptation of the flesh would seize Francis. But as soon as this lover of chastity would perceive it, he would take off his habit and begin very strongly to beat himself with a cord.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, our Seraphic Father used other helps which speak eloquently of his efforts to preserve purity, for example, the thorny rosebushes at the holy cave of Subiaco and at Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi, his cleverness in building himself a wife out of a mound of snow, his custody of the eyes in the presence of the very pious matron and her daughter. Nor should it be lightly passed over that Francis constantly refused the dignity of the priesthood after his vision of the angel who showed him in a jar of the most clear water a symbol of the cleanliness necessary in Priests.

Much, indeed, can be read here and there in the biographies of the saints about their constant watchfulness and continual toil against temptations, and about the diligent anxiety needed to preserve holy chastity. However, in our opinion, that very famous painting of Giotto's has very happily interpreted the mind of Saint Francis on this point. This painter has cleverly arranged the marvelous life of the Patriarch in brilliant colors on the walls of the richly decorated Basilica on the Hill of

<sup>12</sup>Salimbene, *Catalogus Generalium*, edit. O. Holder-Egger, in *M.G.H.*, Script Vol. XXXII, p. 664

<sup>13</sup>*Reg. FF. MM.*, Cap. XI

<sup>14</sup>S. Bonav., *Leg Maior*, V. 3, vol. VIII, 517

Paradise (in Colle Paradisi) at Assisi, so that the noble arts wonderful combine to exalt the humility of Saint Francis. There are four paintings decorating the space over the high altar of the Lower Basilica, signifying four allegories; the most famous allegory expresses the Triumph of Chastity in the life of our Father. The entire composition of the painting is at once expressive of lofty art and profound signification. The most conspicuous part of the picture is occupied by a glorious castle solidly constructed on all sides with decorated walls. At the corners, there are four imposing towers, but a still more lofty tower stands out in the center topped with a white banner, signifying the triumph of Chastity. Chastity is depicted as a woman of most beautiful features, living in the tower with her head veiled, her hands joined, and above her the inscription: Holy Chastity. Two angels with outspread wings offer her a crown and a palm. There are nine armed men who guard the Castle, at the walls of which is seen a contrite man receiving from an angel, at the baptismal font, the waters of purification on his head. To this penitent, Holy Cleanliness is giving a white banner, and Holy Fortitude offers a shield. On the left hand side of the painting, the meek and humble Francis extends his paternal hands to three persons (a Friar, a Poor Clare, and a layman) inviting and helping them to take refuge in the Castle. Over on the right side, angels in armor and an old man cowed and armed with a whip on which is inscribed Penance, make war on the winged demon named Love, who is equipped with a bow adorned with human hearts. Fleeing from the sight of Penance is depicted the demon Uncleanliness, and a skeleton called Death; but in the center dominating all the figures is Holy Chastity, secure in the tower of her noble castle.

Most dear sons and brothers, beloved Sisters, it is necessary to vanquish Death and to keep one's mind on the Triumph of Chastity; our beloved Father Francis extends his paternal hands and calls us to the safety of the defended Castle. Let us therefore go quickly to the fortified Castle. Let your intellect take refuge there, and your will, and your body with all its senses; make it an absolute and total giving of all to your Spouse, Christ. Our Immaculate Patroness, and Francis, will make all of us safe.

To this end, we earnestly, in the Lord, exhort Superiors, Masters, Professors, Educators, to zealously take care that nothing harmful be acquired or contained in the religious houses, as regards books, magazines, pictures, moving-pictures, or even meetings or outside traveling. Let them take precautions concerning talk which can corrupt good morals, always keeping before their eyes the warning of the Apostle Paul: *Ab-*

*uncleanness or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becomes saints* (Eph. 5:34). Each one of us should have as though written on his forehead: "We are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit." (Cf. I Cor. 6:15-19). Listen to how the Seraphic Doctor opportunely warns us: "A man should love cleanliness because of himself, because of his neighbor, because of his God, and because it is his duty."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, our Holy Father the Pope warns that everyone according to his ability, ought to reproduce the features of his Mother's face in himself, so that the light of her face might shine upon her sons.

But someone will say: "I am afflicted above my powers, and I know that this fact does not escape you." Listen to what Saint Francis says to you: "Believe me, my son, for that very reason, I consider you to be a greater servant of God, and the more you are tempted, just that much more know that you are loved by me; but I say to you that no one should consider himself a servant of God, except insofar as he has passed through temptations and tribulations; do not be afraid, because not what you do, but what is done to you, will bring you to the crown."<sup>16</sup>

And another may object: "We cannot remain safe in that well-fortified Castle because our holy Founder himself urges us to daily go forth into the world and preach goodness and peace." Rest assured, my sons, that there is a most imposing battle-line to help you obtain the Triumph of Chastity. There are certainly many faces and hands raised in zealous supplication to God for you, and by reason of Our office We have always been solicitous in seeking spiritual contributions from the auxiliary Franciscan battle-line. Therefore, on this memorable occasion, just as Saint Francis commended his Order to Sister Clare whenever he needed help, We earnestly beseech you, most dear Daughters, Poor Clares, Missionary Sisters, and all Franciscan Sisters, who day and night spend many sweet hours in the presence of your Spouse in the Most Holy Sacrament, praying, contemplating, and loving; do not rejoice in an egotistical manner that the many delights experienced in the enclosed gardens of your oratories, your houses, and your cloisters protect you from the allurement and flatterings, the temptations and dangers of the world. Remember that the Priests, on the other hand, are surrounded by those things and by all the others mentioned by Saint Paul (Cf. II Cor. 11: 26-28). Remember how Peter, even when he was bound with chains, enjoyed true liberty through the help of the prayers which the Church offered to God

<sup>15</sup>St. Bonav., *Col. in Ioan.*, XIII, 51, vol. V, p. 10

<sup>16</sup>Celan., *Vita II*, pars II, c LXXXIII et LXXXIV, II in *Anal. Franc.*, Vol. X, p. 200

without ceasing. (Cf. Acts 12:5). Do not enjoy for yourselves alone the best part which you have chosen, like Mary at the feet of Jesus in Bethany. Hasten to the assistance of the Friars warring against enemies who press them hard; call upon your Eucharistic Spouse in behalf of the Friars; lift up your hands in zealous supplication, that He might grant them aid and bring them help; pray for them continually, not that He might take them from the world, but that He might preserve them from evil. (Cf. John. 17:15).

Most dear Daughters and Sisters, we write to you on this solemn day of December 8, 1954, in the sight of the Woman clothed with the sun crowned with the stars and with the moon at her feet. The thought of her comes to mind, as she appeared on the joyous December 8, 1854, not one hundred years ago, the day on which she conferred such great joy on the entire world. There comes to my mind also, the vision of our blessed predecessor offering a mystic lily to the Vicar of Christ. Last year when we announced the beginning of the Marian Year, we expressed the desire of renewing that well-chosen obligation by offering to Christ our whole Order, enduring as it is, flourishing and increasing and diffusing like a white lily the most sweet odor of virtues. Most dear Daughters help us to happily realize our fond expectation.

It is a source of great pleasure to us to bring these things to the attention of our Sons and Daughters, and to display publicly the fruit of that affluent vine, which with our Virginal Patroness giving the increase flourished so abundantly in the Franciscan vineyard during this Marian Year which we conclude today, and which set the Mother of God before us to be watchfully heeded as a shining example for our imitation. "For the life of Mary was such that it can serve as a model of all lives. Therefore, for each of you, let the life of Mary be virginity depicted in a likeness which mirrors in a most glowing manner the beautiful form of chastity and the lovely appearance of virtue."<sup>17</sup>

Yet the great happiness which touches the heart of your Father, seeing his sons returning joyfully and carrying the sheaves of the abundant harvest, does not release Us from the obligation to render heartfelt thanks to one and all, both superiors and subjects, who in any way contributed to the various manifestations of the Marian Year, as regards piety or doctrine or art, or as regards preparing for, or addressing or a

<sup>17</sup>St. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, lib. II, c. 2; *PL* XVI, 208, 210

sisting in pilgrimages or gatherings, missions or processions, or any one of the manifold demonstrations of love and regard for the Mother of God. May the Lord bless you, and may the Immaculate Virgin protect you. With the desire of augmenting our gratitude and our blessing even more, we freely grant to the Religious of our Order who enjoy the dignity of the priesthood on this last day of the Marian Year, the faculty of blessing the Franciscan Crown of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As the joyful festivity of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ approaches, we pray that the Immaculate Mother will deign to show you the blessed fruit of her womb, her Son Whom she placed in the manger. May the year 1955, under the loving patronage of the Infant Jesus and his most pure Mother, be a happy and prosperous one for you; may it preserve and increase what "you have both learned and received and heard and seen" in the Marian Year; may it also preserve and increase "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame. (Phil. 4:8-9.)

Most dear Sons and Daughters, these are the wishes and desires of your Minister and Servant, Who in the name and with the heart of your Father Saint Francis, bestows permanently the Seraphic Benediction on one and all.

Given at Rome, at the convent of Blessed Mary the Mediatrix, on the solemnity of the Immaculate Virgin, glorious patroness of our Order December 8, 1954, the last day of the Marian Year.

*Fr. Augustine Sepinski,  
Minister General, O.F.M.*

## SCRIPTURE READING WITH SAINT BONAVENTURE

(Comment. in Joannem, ch. XX, *Omnia Opera*, Tom. VI, pp. 511ff)

*When it was late that same day, the first of the week, though the doors where the disciples gathered had been closed for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be to you!" And when He had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore rejoiced at the sight of the Lord. He therefore said to them again, "Peace be to you! As the Father has*

sent me, I also send you." When he had said this, he breathed upon them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John 20, 19-25).

In our Gospel reading, we notice a definite order in Christ's manifestation. The *gathering* of the disciples sets the scene: the *apparition* of Christ centers the focus of all eyes upon Him; His *speech* alerts their ears to His message of Peace: and His palpable manifestation to Thomas (elsewhere noted) confirms their faith. First, He appeared to the gathered disciples. Not only must this have assured them, but His Presence should also reassure us. But, like them, we must perseveringly pray in unison to Him. Even as for the disciples so for us, Christ was confirming His own admonition: "For where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18, 20). Secondly, He appeared to them as the central Figure. His Presence in their midst means that He is the living Intercessor for all; *For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus* (I Tim. 2, 5). Enlightened by a working belief in Him, we can also behold Christ present in our midst. May His apparition not be presented to eyes blinded by lack of faith and works. The Baptist's words to those who had closed their eyes to Him should be a stern warning to us: "In the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know." (Jn. 1, 26). Therefore, fixing our eyes on Christ, let us invoke the mediation of *Him always living to make intercession for us* (Heb. 7, 25).

Thirdly, His kindly speech surely was a source of comfort to the disciples: "Peace be to you" (II. 19-21). Chrysostom maintains that His living voice stilled their troubled minds. They may have been reminded, appropriately, of His stilling the waves on the sea. At an earlier occasion, again offering them His Peace, He had counselled them: "Do not let your heart be troubled, or be afraid" (Jn. 14, 27). When we have harmonized our daily thoughts, words, and actions so that they constantly call attention to His Presence in our midst, then we make a pact with His subscribed by His words: "Peace be to you" (v. 19). But the tranquillity of order, denoting His peace, is no easy task. Not only must we compose the outward man with the befitting bearing of religious dignity, but we must order our soul to harmonize with His Will. Without this essential order of doing the Divine

Will, every other personal sacrifice is meaningless: *Sacrifice and oblation thou didst not desire. . . Burnt offering and sin offering thou didst not require: then said I, Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will: O my God, I have desired it, and thy law in the midst of my heart* (Ps. 39, 7-9; Heb. 10, 6f). His Peace rewards such an ordered soul.

Finally, showing them His hands and side (later touched by Thomas), He gave an evidence of a palpable manifestation to the disciples. Christ did not appear to them in Spirit, but His was the selfsame Body which had suffered and died—although now glorified. Where the wounds were, the marks remained. He had identified Himself for our sake as well as for theirs. Surely He has given all of His followers ample certification of His risen Person. We have no excuse for failing to recognize Him. But, perhaps, we should emphasize another recognition. As Priests and Religious, do others recognize His marks in us by our fidelity to the three vows? Like His wounds, does our observance of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience mark us out, as if by signs of identification with Christ? Even if some should fail to see Him in us, must we still face the greater fear that we may arise from the tomb on the last day—unmarked by avowed signs for His recognition? In the sermon on the Mount, Christ forewarned such Religious: "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Matt. 7, 23).

Our last point is like a consequent to his manifestation; it is the mission of the disciples: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you." (v. 21). The Seraphic Doctor suggests that Christ prepared them in three ways: He made them *suitable* for the task; He gave them *authority*; and, lastly, He clothed them with *power*. In making them *suitable*, or fit, for the work, once more He bestowed upon them His peace: "Peace be to you" (v. 21). Unless the Apostle possesses this tranquillity of order, he is not suitably equipped for his mission, much less ready for possible persecutions. As Chrysostom remarks, the peace of Christ's commission is comparable to the consequent conflict. Without the order the missionary is hardly ready for the other. Next, He gave *authority*: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (v. 21). Here Christ indicated that even His own authority was not given by Himself, but by the Father. Like the Master, missionaries receive *authority* from the proper Source.

This is contained in the Apostolic meaning of the word 'mission': *How are men to preach unless they be sent* (Rom. 10:15)? This sending connotes the proper authorization of the one sent. Whether priest or religious suffice it to say that we should question that zeal—in ourselves or others—which acts on its own authority.

Finally, Christ gave the Apostles *power: He breathed upon them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit"* (v. 22). Saint Augustine remarks that His act of breathing signified that the power came from the Father, as well as from Himself. Moreover, when He said "Receive the Holy Spirit," He was here specifically referring to the priestly power of the keys. It was the true power of valid absolution: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (v. 23). He was now bestowing upon all of them the power He had previously promised to Peter: "And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16, 19). In transferring the power of God to these men, the God-Man was corroborating His assertion when He had cured the paralytic (to prove His right to that power): "That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" (Matt. 9, 6). His own confident authority and power now became that of His Apostles. Every properly-approved priest bears this authority and power with confidence.

But, what is also of great importance, every sincere penitent should be awesomely convinced of this power. To believe in it and humbly to make use of it, is a heritage given by Him, reassuring us of His peace. But to *appreciate* (in the finest sense of the word) this power, is almost beyond us. Probably, as religious, we could evaluate best the privilege of Confession by a negative approach. We might simply ask ourselves: 'What would our life be like, without the words of Christ through the mouth of the priest? Appraising it positively, we should confidently prize His pardon of Peace in the Confessional as a supreme treasure. Because we know that the "Confide, fili," addressed by Christ to the paralytic, now applies authoritatively to us: "Take courage, son, thy sins are forgiven thee" (Matt. 9, 2).

Fr. Owen Colligan, O.F.M.

## EXHORTATION TO DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

By Fray Melchor de Cetina, O.F.M. (1618)

Fray Melchor de Cetina was one of the early apostles of the devotion known as the Slavery of Mary. The following sermon was the first of a series preached to the Conceptionist nuns of the Convent of Santa Ursula in Alcala in the year 1618, explaining the principles of the *Esclavitud Mariana* and guiding them in the practice of the devotion.

### I. On the Excellence of the Mother of God and of Her Power to Draw All Hearts to Herself

The excellences and the prerogatives of the Mother of God and of men are so far above any human understanding that the loftiest geniuses cannot reach that height. The sum of all our capacities would still fall short of such grandeur, and he who thinks he can explain this mystery with his human intelligence will surely fall far short of it. Thus Cardinal Peter Damian, in a sermon on Our Lady, confesses: *Nullus humanus sermo, in laude Virginis invenitur idoneus, et impar est illi omne humanae laudis praeconium.*<sup>1</sup> No speech of man is sufficiently eloquent to be fit for the praise of the Virgin, nor can any enhancement of the human language be equal to her grandeur. And in the second sermon for the same feast, the Cardinal says further: *Quid mirum si haec ineffabilis Virgo, suis laudibus modum humanae vocis exsuperet, cum ipsam humani generis naturam, excellentium meritorum dignitate transcendat?* What wonder if this ineffable Virgin surpasses in praise the manner of human speech, since by the dignity of her excellent merits she transcends human nature itself? Neither the eloquence and facility of the rhetorician, nor the subtle arguments of the logician, nor the acute ingeniousness of the philosopher can suffice to utter her praises. Such, in part, are the words of the Cardinal with which he declares the inability of human genius to render fitting praise to the Queen of Heaven. And the glorious Father Saint John Damascene makes the following observation in his discourse on the Assumption: *Nec si omnes toto orbe dispersae linguae in unum coeant, eius laudes oratione consequi possent.*<sup>2</sup> Not only the tongue of any man alone would be insufficient, but even the tongues of all men in the world gathered together as one would be insufficient to praise Our Lady worthily. Not even the angels offer fitting

<sup>1</sup>De Nativit. B.V., serm. 2.

<sup>2</sup>De Assumpt. Mariae, orat. 2.

praise to her, as Saint Bernard says: *Quenam poterit lingua etiam angelica sit, dignis extollere laudibus, Virginem Matrem, et Matrem non cuiuscumque, sed Dei?*<sup>3</sup> What tongue, even though it be an angel's, can extol with worthy praise the Virgin who merited to be a Mother, and Mother not of just anyone, but of God Himself? And considering this to be impossible, Bernard addresses the Virgin as ineffable and unutterable, because there are no words that are equal to the praise befitting her dignity.

The powerful Hand of God was so liberal and generous in bestowing graces upon His mother, giving her privileges and concessions above all other creatures, that the glorious Father Saint Bernard, repeating the words of the Angel Gabriel: *Et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi* (and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee), doubted whether the Virgin herself could understand the glory of the favor God was granting her. But if Bernard had doubts, Saint Augustine had none at all. Thus he says in his *Exposition on the Magnificat*: "I dare say that even the Virgin herself was not able to explain completely all the great things she was able to receive. *Audacter dico, quod neque ipsa Virgo plene explicare potuit quod capere potuit.* Thus neither men nor angels, not even Our Lady herself, can explain the praise that is due to her; only God Himself can do that. As Andrew of Crete says in a prayer to Our Lady: *Quam Dei tantum est, laudare pro dignitate.*<sup>4</sup> It belongs to God alone to praise her because of her dignity. And the reason is clear. We cannot praise worthily what we do not know fully; and therefore I say that no mere creature, not even the highest among the Seraphim, will be able to praise the Virgin in proportion to her dignity, because to do this would mean to comprehend God, Who is incomprehensible. The dignity of the Mother ends in God—that dignity which she enjoys through the singular mercy of God. Wherefore it follows that only God, Who alone knows Himself and the grandeur of His Mother, can praise her fittingly. *Quam Dei tantum est laudare pro dignitate.*

From this arose the reverential fear of Saint Bernard when he had to preach or write about the grandeur of Our Lady, and this is why he said in the above-mentioned sermon on the Assumption: "There is nothing that give me more pleasure than speaking about the Virgin and praising her, yet there is nothing that makes me more fearful and troubled." (*Nihil est quod magis delectet; sed neque quod magis terreat, quam de gloria Virginis habere sermonem.*) In the saintly Doctor there was a

<sup>3</sup>Serm. 4 de Assumptione.

<sup>4</sup>De dormitione B. M. Beatæ Mariæ, orat. 1.

struggle between the love and the fear that he felt for Our Lady; the love that he had for her delighted him when he praised her, and like David, he would say to her: *Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua, super mel ori meo.*

But on the other hand, the reverential fear that he felt made him pause and give expression to his feeling by saying that the combined voices of all men and angels would not be sufficient to praise her worthily.

But although it is true that all the saints confess the inadequacy of human genius in relation to the worthy praise of the Virgin, they have not for that reason ceased praising and loving her. They have said all they felt, while still realizing and humbly accepting their poverty compared with the lofty grandeur of the Heavenly Princess. For her dignities are so many and of such a kind that only God Who gave her these dignities can know them fully and adequately esteem them. Saint Anselm, meditating on the loftiness of being the Mother of God, confessed that this is the highest glory imaginable, after the glory of God Himself. But for all that, Anselm advises us never to cease contemplating Mary and to address ourselves to her as much as we can; and if we are unable to comprehend her because of her greatness, it is not therefore denied us to think about her and to gather from her greatness whatever we in our littleness can discover. "*Nam tametsi comprehendere non sit datum, ruminare non est negatum.*"<sup>5</sup> This has encouraged me to discuss here the devotion we should have toward Our Lady, and to speak to you about the excellence of her sanctity. For although I realize that my knowledge of this subject is insufficient and that I have not learned all that the sage Doctors, aided by the grace of God, have said in praise of Our Lady, nevertheless I will try to say, in some way or another, a few of the many great things that could be said of the exalted Sovereign, our Heavenly Queen.

The source and beginning of all the graces that God bestowed on Our Lady, the summit in which are gathered all the prerogatives and favors that she received from His powerful Hand, and that placed her above angels and men, is this, that God, from all eternity, chose her to be His Mother. This is the reason for the lofty sanctity, the inviolable virginity, the fullness of grace and the immeasurable glory and all the other privileges that the Virgin has—that she could deserve to be the Mother of God. The Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas, in speaking about the dignity of the Mother of God, said: *Hic titulus, ut admirabilis est, ita admirabilis sanctimonie universae virtutis postulat.*"<sup>6</sup> Thus, as this

<sup>5</sup>De excel. Virgin. c. 2

title of Mother of God is admirable, so it requires all the riches of sanctity. Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, commenting on the words of Saint Matthew, Chapter 1, *De qua natus est Jesus, qui vocatur Christus*, said: "From these words there follows a principle of faith that the Virgin is the Mother of Jesus Who is called the Christ, and consequently she is the Mother of God, because Jesus Christ is God."<sup>7</sup> And from this principle we can derive another, that the Virgin, being the Mother of God, must be so pure, as Saint Anselm says, that under God there could not be a purer being imaginable. "*Decuit Virginem ea puritate nitere, qua maior sub Deo nequit intelligi.*"<sup>8</sup> From these two principles, as Gerson says, as from a most fertile seed-bed, we can gather praises to the Virgin. For there is no grace, no favor, no privilege granted to any creature that is not found in an eminent degree in the Virgin, the Mother of God, in whom God perfected all that is good in the nature and in the gifts He has given us; all that is good in angels and in men is found in the Virgin, but more fully and more perfectly.

The theologians agree that the most excellent gifts of humanity are in Christ. It was fitting that the Sacred Humanity of Christ, of this Man Who is the Son of God, should be adorned with all celestial and divine gifts above every creature. Now the title *Theotocos*, Mother of God, which in the Council of Nicea\* the Fathers of the Church gave to the Virgin, Our Lady, against the impiety of Nestorius, is the highest and most glorious title after that of God. In view of this we cannot but agree that Mary must be adorned with the loftiest divine graces after Christ her Son Himself, as befits the dignity bestowed upon the creature who is Mother of God. Dionysius the Carthusian says: "After those most holy gifts of grace that were bestowed upon the Sacred Humanity of Christ, the highest quality of excellence is found in those that were bestowed upon His Mother. And thus in the gifts of grace *gratis data* as well as in those gifts, habits, and works of grace *gratum faciente*, she holds first place after her Son."<sup>9</sup> Dionysius says that from this we gather that she who is so close to God that she shares in His gifts and holds first place after His Son, she who has these gifts in such abundance and in an heroic

<sup>6</sup>Q. 27, a. 1 ad. 1

<sup>7</sup>*Serm. de nativitate Mariæ.*

<sup>8</sup>lib. *De conceptu virginali* c. 18.

\*The Author is mistaken: it was not the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) which condemned Nestorius and declared the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, but the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431).—Ed.

<sup>9</sup>lib. I *De laudibus Virginis.*

degree, is a sea of grace, as the interpretation of her name suggests. For Mary (*Mar*) means sea, and as the sea is a mighty gathering of waters and rivers, so Mary is a mighty gathering of graces and a sea of such depth that no human power can exceed her.

Saint Thomas, in the first part of the *Summa*,<sup>10</sup> confirms this, saying that the humanity of Christ, by being united to God, and beatitude, by being the enjoyment of God, and the blessed Virgin, by being the Mother of God, all have a certain infinite dignity which proceeds from the infinite Good that is God. And for this reason nothing can be better than any of these three, because nothing can be better than God. This is what Saint Thomas says. And Saint Bonaventure in his book entitled *The Mirror of the Virgin*,<sup>11</sup> speaking of the dignity of the Mother of God, affirms that the Virgin was such a mother that God could not have made a better. Although God could have made a better heaven and a better world, He could not have made a better mother than the Mother of God. And the Saint says this of the Virgin not that as a particular person, but that as Mother of God she could not be more perfect, because her maternity looks to her Son, and she is like Him; and as God could not have made a better Son, neither could He have made a better Mother. Such, then, is the dignity and excellence of the Mother of God that in regard to grace and natural gifts she holds first place after her Son, and the dignity of the Mother of God is such that the divine Omnipotence could not extend Itself to make her more perfect.

From the same principle of her being the Mother of God it also follows that she is the person most intimately united with the person of the Savior Who is the author of grace and glory and the Just Dispenser of all good; and consequently, she partakes of all these more fully than anyone else. For as he who is closer to the sun receives more of its light, and he who is closer to the fire receives more of its warmth, so the most holy Mother receives more of the gifts of Christ because she is so united and joined to Him that the two cannot be separated or considered apart from one another. Nature created a strong tie between the body and the soul, but death loosens that tie sending the body to the grave and the soul to the Judgment of God, where it receives punishment or glory, according to its merits. But even before death comes, love can have the same effect on body and soul, for, as Aristotle says, the soul sometimes leaves the body to which she gives life, so that she can go to the one she

<sup>10</sup>I, q. 25, a. 6 ad 4.

<sup>11</sup>*Speculum B.V.M.* lect. 10. This work is not by Saint Bonaventure but by Conrad of Saxony.



loves and enjoy him: *Amantis anima plus est, ubi amat, quam ubi animal*. Whence Solomon came to say that *love is strong as death*, because both have the same effect of separating the soul from the body, no matter how closely united they may be. The union of the Word with His Sacred Humanity was so intimate that although the Savior's soul left His body when He died, His Divinity remained united to both His soul and His body. But there is no theologian who denies that if the Word had used His absolute power, He could have loosened the tie and dissolved the union. Nevertheless, the union between the divine essence and its attributes is so close that, as the dictum of the schools expresses it, *in divinis omnia sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio*. Among the Divine Persons, then, there is a difference only because their relation to one another is different. In nothing else is there any difference; there is only unity, peace, and harmony. But in spite of this, our understanding can make a distinction so fine that it sees a difference and says that although in essence all that is in God is God, nevertheless, formally justice is not mercy, nor is knowledge volition, and that the actions of each are different, for the Father engenders with knowledge and not with volition and He inspires with volition and not with knowledge; and although in the highest unity and real identity there is nothing greater than that of the essence with the divine Persons and attributes, nevertheless, for all that, reason can make a distinction and consider one without the other. Ultimately, there is no union so intimate that nature or at least reason cannot make a distinction and a division. We will find that only the union between mother and child, between maternity and sonship and the likenesses in their relationship, are so intimate and close that not even the finest distinction can separate them, for they are mutually dependent. The child depends on its mother, and the mother depends on her child, so that the one cannot be without the other. The mother will not be a mother if she has no child, and the child will not be a child if it has no mother. There is such a strong union between mother and child that nothing can destroy it. From this principle we can deduce something of the excellence of the Virgin above all creatures; for if the Mother of God is closer to her Son than anything else, so close that she cannot be separated from Him even by a process of reasoning, and as the Son is the fountain of all godness and holiness and the origin of grace and glory, it follows that after the Son, the Virgin is the one who most fully enjoys these gifts, she who is most blessed, holiest, and fullest in grace; she who enjoys immeasurable glory and prerogatives that set her far above angels and men. From what has been said we can now under-

stand the reason for loving the Virgin and for placing our devotion in her; for if the object of volition is the good, and if it is not lured with this bait truly or at least apparently, never will the beloved object fall into the arms of the lover; whence in Mary there is the highest good imaginable after God Himself, the reason being that after God she is the most beloved one. Because God is the Supreme Good. He is to be loved above all things; but after God, the goodness of His Mother is the greatest, and therefore is to be loved above all after God. This is the power that the Virgin, Our Lady, possesses of drawing hearts by the lure of her supreme goodness. For as the magnet draws iron, so the Virgin, like a divine magnet, draws to herself the hearts of men, no matter how erring they may be. Even when they are hard as steel, the sweetness of the most loving Virgin softens them like wax and presses into them fervent desires of serving God and herself. And why would she not attract the hearts of men when the first one to love her was God Himself, Who says of her in the *Canticle* that she has wounded His heart? *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea sponsa, in uno oculorum tuorum et in uno crine colli tui* (Cant. 8). God addresses His Mother with the titles of sister and spouse to make us understand, as Saint Jerome says, the purity of His love for her, that it is spiritual and not carnal. The love of God for His spouse is not in the order of our carnal nuptials; it is a pure love, chaste and limpid, something like the love between brother and sister; and it is this love that the Celestial Bridegroom describes when he says that it has wounded Him: *Vulnerasti cor meum*. And giving the reason, He says that one of her eyes cast darts at Him and wounded His heart, and with a lock of hair that fell about her neck she bound Him and drew Him into her womb to make Him man. *In uno oculorum tuorum*, by which Saint Cyril of Alexandria<sup>12</sup> understands the singular faith of the Virgin, according to the words of Saint Elizabeth at the Visitation: *Beata, quae credidisti, etc.* The faith of the Virgin was the arrow that pierced the heart of God. *Vulnerasti cor meum*. And *in uno crine colli tui*, by which the holy Doctor understands the humility of Our Lady, which drew God down to her level. And the common opinion of learned men is that at the very moment that Our Lady spoke those words of such great humility, *ecce ancilla Domini*—at that moment the Divine Word became incarnate in her womb. The Heavenly Bridegroom was wounded by those virtues of Our Lady, her faith and her humility. *Vulnerasti cor meum*, or, as Symmachus translated it: *Excitasti me cor*. The merits of the Virgin stirred the bowels of the Divine Mother so that He took upon Himself

<sup>12</sup>Super Ioan. 1. II. c.9.



the flesh of our humanity. Thus as Zachary says: *Per viscera misericordiae Dei nostri in quibus visitavit nos* (Lk. 1: 78). And thus theology teaches that as the Incarnation is such a tremendous grace that it is beyond all possible meriting, nevertheless in the Saints of the Old Testament and especially in the merits of His Mother, God found such worthiness that it drew Him to become man and to hasten the moment of the Incarnation. He was wounded by love for this Celestial Princess. *Venerasti cor meum*. And this drew Him to become man. We can find support for this thought in the translation of the Seventy (Septuagint) which reads: *Abstraxisti a nobis cor, soror mea sponsa, rapuisti nobis cor, uno oculorum tuorum, et in uno ornamento colli tui*. There are the words of the Most Holy Trinity addressed to the Virgin. "Thou hast stolen our Heart, conquered by thy singular virtue." According to Saint Clement of Alexandria, the Eternal Word is the Heart. For as the heart is the principle of corporal life, so is Christ the principle of spiritual life. *In ipso vita erat, etc.* (Jn. 1:4). And this Heart, as God says, the Virgin stole on the day that the Word came from heaven to take flesh in her womb. Now, to return to my original theme, if the merits of the Virgin robbed God of His Heart, who would be so rebellious as to deny her her own heart? Who would not place his love and devotion in her? For she is the beginning of all our good, and through her intercession we are made able to enjoy the merits of Jesus Christ. We must declare that we are defeated by the love of this sovereign Queen, confessing to her the words of the angel to Jacob: *Si contra Deum fortis fuisti, quanto magis contra homines praevaleris* (Gen. 32)? If thou hast vanquished God, what can we do but declare ourselves vanquished also? And moved by this among other reasons that I hope to discuss later, I say that devotion to the Mother of God is a sure sign of predestination for heaven.

Maria A. Laughlin (transl)

<sup>18</sup>Sum. Theol. 3, q. 2, a. 2.

## THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

### THE HOLY EUCHARIST AND FRANCISCAN PENANCE

Our Seraphic Father's radical turning to God in a life of penance was his answer to the humility and love of the Incarnate Word, a humility and love that climaxed in the sombre spectacle on Calvary where the Love that loved us without end died in utter shame and dereliction. But this love of the Incarnate Word was not to be limited in space and time; before our Lord entered upon the agony of his supreme sacrifice of love, he perpetuated his bloody immolation on the altar of the cross by the living memorial of the Holy Eucharist. It was natural, therefore, that Saint Francis, whose heart was filled with the words and deeds of the Incarnate Word and who refused to think of anything but of him who spoke to him from the Cross, should center his religious life upon the Holy Eucharist. Let us, therefore, turn to the meaning of the Holy Eucharist for a further understanding of the Franciscan life in penance.

#### 1. *The Living Remembrance of the Lord's Passion*

It is hardly adequate to say that our holy Father Francis had a great devotion to the Eucharistic Christ. This could easily create the impression that Francis had only a great veneration for the Blessed Sacrament—which in any case is true—but that he was primarily overwhelmed by the fact that Christ is present on our altars, dwells in our tabernacles, and lives in our midst under the species of bread and wine, and consequently adored him and offered him continual praise and thanksgiving, surrounded him with all exterior splendor, with lights, flowers, and incense, and offered him private and public adoration in many forms. There is no doubt that Francis urged this veneration of the Blessed Sacrament; indeed, he entreated his brethren and all the faithful to have a great reverence and a most tender respect for the Body of our Lord. He himself cleaned neglected churches, and in his *Testament* he made clear to his children what he expected of them: "And I want these most Holy Mysteries above all else to be honored and venerated and kept in choice places." But this does not give us the *reason* for his love