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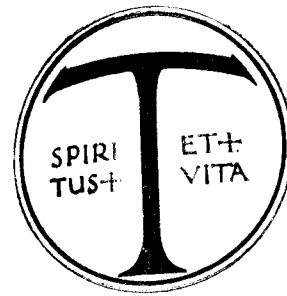
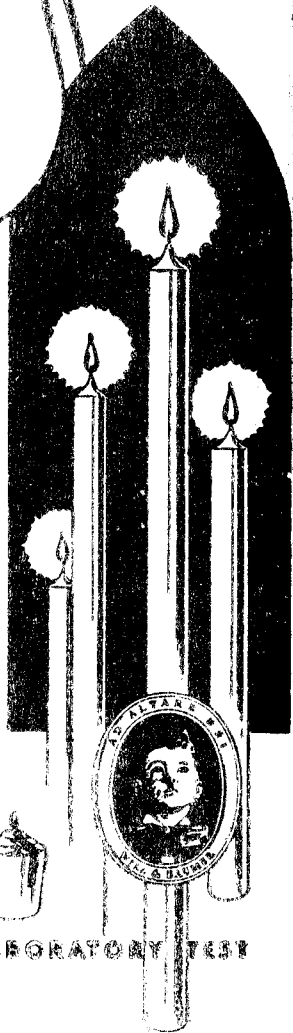
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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



VOL. VIII., NO. 3, MARCH, 1958

the CORD

A monthly magazine specifically devoted to Franciscan spirituality is published under the sponsorship of the Franciscan Educational Conference by the Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure P. O., New York. Editor: Eligius Buytaert, O.F.M. Assistant Editor: Sister Mary Frances, S.M.I.C. Managing Editor: Innocent Daam, O.F.M. Editorial Board: Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., Columba Duffy, O.F.M., Allan Wolter, O.F.M. Annual subscription. \$2.00.

Entered as second class matter on November 25, 1950, at St. Bonaventure University, New York, under Act of March 3, 1879. All communications, whether of a business or a literary nature, should be addressed to The CORD, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure P. O., New York. *Cum permissu superiorum.*

CONTENTS

VOL. VIII, NO. 3, MARCH, 1958

THE LIVING FAITH.....

Fr. Geoffrey G. Bridges, O.F.M.

MUHAMMAD AND ST. FRANCIS.....

Fr. Giulio Basetti-Sani, O.F.M.

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST.....

Saint Bonaventure

THE RED CROSS SAINT.....

Fr. William C. Johnston, O.S. Cam.

POEMS:

The Blessings of a Priest by Fr. Anacleto Yonick, O.F.M.....

Popule Meus by Roy M. Gasnicki, O.F.M.....

Waiting Room by Fra. Pacificus F. Waywood, O.F.M.....

MONTHLY CONFERENCE

THE LIVING FAITH

Fr. Geoffrey G. Bridges, O.F.M.

"Faith . . . unless it has works is dead," (Ja. 2,18) the Apostle James tells us. St. Paul has informed us that faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things unseen, and that faith is essential for salvation. St. James now tells us in a practical way that *having* faith is not enough; we must go on to put it into action.

God did not give us this gift to be wrapped in a handkerchief and buried in a field. He didn't give it to us to be kept in our place in chapel to be used at stated times during the day. Faith is a virtue and should be a habit which informs every act of our day.

We can see the difference between simply having faith and really living it in the life of St. Francis. As a young man he certainly believed in the Gospels; no doubt he admired the high ideals advocated by Jesus Christ. But look at the transformation in his life when he stopped admiring these ideals and began to live them. Through study, and prayer and action he came to a personal realization of the meaning of "putting on the mind of Christ." He came to see life as Christ saw it; to judge situations as Christ would judge them; to value the things of this world as Christ valued them.

We are the disciples of St. Francis. Are we imitating that part of his life which fell before his conversion, or the Christ-like part that came after? Or, what is worse, are we living a natural life despite our baptism? Do we prefer to operate on the natural plane most of the day, eating, sleeping, working, recreating for predominantly natural and selfish motives? If so, then our faith will gradually shrivel within our soul. True, we cannot lose our faith except by a direct denial of Christ and the truths he taught. But we can have a sterile, death-like faith which rarely bears fruit. Like an arm long in a sling, such faith accomplishes little.

Increasing the Intensity of Faith

Faith, remember, is not an exhibit piece but a virtue, a habit that must be strengthened and developed. Faith is life; and growth is essential to life. Now we can grow in the intensity of our faith and we

can grow in the practice of our faith. By intensity of faith I do mean an emotional reaction, a glowing of heart, during an act of faith. I mean the power and inclination to believe and to put belief into action. The more we increase the initial gift of faith that we receive in baptism, the more we will be inclined to live that faith. And on the other hand, the very living of our faith will increase the initial gift. As St. James argued, "By works the faith [of Abraham] was made perfect." (Ja. 2,22)

There are several means by which we can directly increase our initial gift of faith. Again our appreciation and gratitude are stimulated by the overflowing generosity of Jesus Christ. For we can grow in faith simply for the asking. All we need do is pray with the Apostle, "Lord, increase our faith," (Lk. 17,5) and our desire will infallibly be fulfilled. There is no equality here between the prayer and the increase of our supernatural gift. The merits of Christ and Mary fill the

Again, and quite simply, we may gain an increase through the sacraments. The Mass that you offered this morning, the Communion you received, your last Confession gave you an increase of faith, whether you realized it or not. But, if you did realize it and intensely desire it, then you received an even greater increase. The sacraments are fountains of life; not only of grace and love life, but of faith and intellectual life.

A third way is through specific acts of faith. I mean more than formulas bearing the caption: An Act of Faith. Rather I am thinking of little bursts of prayer. I am afraid many of us are negligent in this regard. There are so many opportunities during the day for inspirations of faith; for instance, in the Trinity as we make the sign of the cross, in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, in the mercy and goodness of God, in the Fatherhood of God and our childhood in the wisdom of the Gospel life we are living, in the universal mediation of grace and prayer by Mary. But the daily God-given occasion for the highest acts of faith is the Mystery of Faith, the Mass, with the resulting Communion and Divine Presence on our altars. Here the amount of glory that we are able to give to God and the blessings we will receive in return depend on the amount of faith, hope and charity we put into our Mass and Communion. These mysteries demand faith; they increase faith, and we benefit from them in proportion to our faith. So morning Mass and Communion should be the time of your most intense effort to believe and grow in faith.

Finally, study and contemplation also play their part in increasing

our faith. They strengthen our convictions and appreciation. As St. Augustine says, study and contemplation strengthen the faith in those who are weak; it gives to the strong joy in believing. We are moved to desire closer union with God through faith in time of meditation.—By these four means especially we can increase the intensity of our faith.

Faith in Action

When we come to our opportunities for increasing faith by action, we are dealing directly with the "works" which St. James says give life to our faith. If our gift of faith does not overflow into action, when it is dead, or at least dying.

Now, you can tell a religious that he or she is not humble enough, not charitable enough, not devout enough at Mass, not recollected enough; but never will he take the offense he does if you tell him his faith is weak. Why? Because all too often we are inclined to look at only one side of faith. We feel that as long as we are ready to give intellectual assent to all the truths that Jesus has revealed we have a firm and strong faith. But St. James would not agree. For him only that faith is firm and strong which shows itself in our actions, which inspires virtuous acts all during the day. As we go briefly through the many opportunities each day presents to us for living our faith, you can be examining yourselves, objectively, on the depth and effectiveness of your faith.

Let us look at the sacraments again for a moment. We believe that the Mass is Calvary re-presented, that Jesus Christ enters into us corporally in Communion, that in Confession we are brought into most intimate contact with the saving merits and sufferings of Christ. Now the amount and fervor of preparation for these Sacraments, our attention and our actions during them, are an expression and an indication of the depth of our faith. Fr. Mateo Crawley tells of a personal experience in this regard. For years he and his mother had been working and praying for the conversion of his father. One day they succeeded in getting him to go to Mass. But he came home highly indignant. How could a priest, who believes what Catholics say they do about the Mass, rush and mumble his way through the ceremony as he had?—If we have firm faith, it will show in our actions.

Another source of opportunities for deepening our faith through practice is living with our fellow men. One of the hardest things to remember (and often our neighbor makes it all the more difficult by his actions), one of the hardest things to believe, is that my neighbor

is to be loved no matter what he does. It is hard to see and remember that he is made in the image of God just as I, that he has been redeemed by Christ just as I, that he is an actual or potential member of the Mystical Body, that he is destined to share the same vision of God. Yet we must think and believe this, if we are to practice the second great commandment of love. And when we have learned to have a reaction toward our neighbors in religion, then we must learn to apply these truths also to God's other children and our neighbors: the negroes, the Jews, the orientals, to sinners, our enemies, to the ignorant and the stubborn and the malicious. How many of us sin against faith and charity in this regard! Actually all of these are as it were sacramental signs. They are like phosphorescent rocks, which when seen under ordinary light are dull and unattractive but when seen under ultra-violet light show unsuspected beauties. Faith sees Christ behind the varied exteriors of our neighbors.

Discipline of Divine Providence

Closely allied to this seeing of Christ in our neighbor is seeing the will of God in all that Divine Providence presents. To see and accept God's will in all that our neighbor does and says, for that matter, in all that happens during the day due to human or natural causes, belongs to the perfection of faith in action. When we reflect upon it, yes, we believe that all good is willed by God, and that all evil is permitted by God for our good. But is our faith efficacious? If it is, then we will not resist or resent the commands of our superiors; we will not be discouraged by failure or disappointment; we will see the stamp of God's will on heat and cold, rebuke or permission, ingratitude or praise, accidents or good fortune.

Right here I would like to warn you that even we religious must beware of letting an emotional block blind us to the will of God. If you tell the average lay man or woman that rain on a picnic day is actually willed and permitted by God and has a good purpose, after thinking it over for a minute they will concede the point. But tell them that the death of a young father of a family, or the crippling of a child by polio, or their dismissal from a religious community, or the triumphs of Khrushchev and Communism are allowed by God and serve a good purpose in the long run, and they will argue with you. The stark tragedy or the vast evil of the situation has so stirred them emotionally that the principles of faith no longer seem to register. And so it is at times with religious. In the first dark moment

of an unexpected change of station, or of a failure, or a public reprimand, they let emotion choke out their faith and fall into sins of rebellion and disobedience. In these moments we must remind ourselves that God is good, all good, the source of all good, and all that he does is good. We must remember that God never wills or permits anything to happen to us that cannot be a source of blessing and grace to us. True, we cannot always see what God has in mind. We would be guilty of the sin of Eve if we aspired to know all that God knows. Thus there are many things which we simply must take on faith. Perhaps that very act of faith and submission is the good that God is intending. This much we know for certain: we will know true peace of soul only when we have learned to recognize the stamp of God's will on every up and down of the day. This sets a high demand on us. But that demand can be met. We need only acquire the habit of saying "Thy will be done" each time some little evil or discomfort crops up during the day. Thus gradually our faith in Divine Providence will grow to a stature big enough to cope with the greatest crosses.

Living the Gospel

The rest of our opportunities for practicing faith can be summed up in the effort to put on the mind of Christ, the effort to live according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This field is close to the Franciscan heart. For no group of Christians has bound itself as we have to live the Gospel life. And here the importance of faith is evident. Unless we have accepted the entire Gospel as the revealed word of God; unless through intense faith we have become convinced of the wisdom and perfection of all the teachings of the Gospel, we will pick and choose and alter the Gospel to suit ourselves. Precisely here we are most likely to find the weak point in a religious as regards the practice of faith. Theoretically a religious will not deny the teachings of Christ or of his disciples. But in practice his actions may give the lie to his profession of faith. In the face of such commands as "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and "Forgive . . . seventy times seven times," how many religious have enemies with whom they will not speak unless necessary? To say, I forgive him but I won't speak to him, is a lie. You do not forgive. You are simply trying to bridge the gap between your act of faith and your action by a deceit; you are just trying to salve your conscience. "Seventy times seven times" whether he cooperates or not, is what God asks of you. It takes real faith to believe that and to do that.

And so as we go through the day the Gospel whispers to us "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" "blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you." (Mt. 5:3, 9, 11) "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Mt. 5,39) How many of us do that? "If thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." (Mt. 18,3) We know what this means in principle, but do we thus rid ourselves of occasions of sin and imperfection? "Unless you turn and become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18,3) How many of us are really childlike? "If, therefore, I the Lord and Master have washed your feet, you ought also to wash the feet of one another." (Jn. 13,14) Do we serve others in this spirit? And especially when we feel that now we are doing enough, now we can coast a while, the Gospel prods us with our ideal that demands constant effort, unending progress: "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5,48) And so we could go on. Some of these are commands, some counsels, some attitudes; all are to be practiced according to our state in life if we are truly to have the mind of Christ, a truly Christian spirit. All demand faith; all express faith; all in the expression increase our faith.

This is how we grow in faith and put it to work. Prayer of petition, the sacraments, specific acts of faith in the mysteries of God, study and contemplation all combine to increase the intensity of our faith. And this faith comes to life on our words and actions in the sacraments, toward our neighbor, toward God's loving Divine Providence, and in living the whole Gospel.

The Franciscan Approach

Let us conclude by emphasizing the Franciscan approach to the virtues. The emphasis among our spiritual writers is always on growth. It is a practical approach that has produced a galaxy of Saints and Blesseds. Specifically as regards faith, the Franciscan attitude and tendency is to make it practical to turn it always into prayer and action, at the same time directing the prayer and action to charity. The true Franciscan not only believes and appreciates the excellence of the Gospel teachings; he embraces them as his norm of daily life. He is poor, holy, pure, long-suffering, mortified and patient for Gospel motives. But all is ultimately an expression of love. For in love faith finds its perfection. "Faith crowned and manifested by love is

the goal of the Franciscan."

In our quest for a model of living faith we cannot turn to Christ as we do in most virtues. For Jesus had constantly before His eyes the true vision of God. What is more natural, then, than to turn to the saint who more than any other person, Mary excepted of course, merited the title, "Other Christ," our holy Father St. Francis? In him we see both the strong, deep belief and appreciation of revealed truths, and the actions springing from it. From his intense faith in the Eucharist flowed his sermons and exhortations begging for reverence for the Sacrament and for all persons and things connected with it; from it flowed his labors in cleaning churches and his distribution of linens and host-irons. From his faith in the Gospels, to take just one other example, flowed his poverty, his peacemaking, his childlikeness, his love of all mankind, his death to the world and sin—in a word, his zeal in the living of the whole spirit of the Gospels, counsels and attitudes as well as commands. And all this he used to express his seraphic spirit of love. To him, therefore, let us address the prayer: Holy Father Francis, obtain for us the desire and the grace to follow in your footsteps and thus to grow in living, loving faith.

WAITING ROOM ✓

When work is done, I hurry home,
Where supper waits for me,
And many things I like to do,
And folks I like to see.

And on my way I pass a place
A dozen times or more.
Tonight, before I pass again,
I'll step inside the door.

The place is dark: to find a seat
Takes several seconds' search—
For me two-thousand years this Christ
Has waited here in church.

Fra. Pacificus F. Waywood, O.F.M.

Muhammad And St. Francis

For a More Christian Understanding of Our Brethren the Muslims

Fr. Giulio, Basetti-Sani, O.F.M.

When we look at the geographical map revealing the diffusion of Islam, we cannot remain indifferent to the disturbing problem raised by the mysterious presence of a phenomenon so important for the history of Christianity and of humanity. It is our most cherished longing to create in the Christian conscience an interest in these millions of people.

Too often one hears repeated by the very persons who live in the lands of Islam: "There is nothing that can be done!" How many times, in the course of seventeen years spent in Muslim territory, have I heard my own confreres enunciate this sad conclusion as the final lesson of their partial experience. However, the more I meditate, the more the verdict strikes me as unacceptable. It appears to me that the contrary must be said: "There is everything that can be done with Muslims." Without contesting the merit and the honor due to those who in the past, at the price of their lives, have preached the Gospel to our Muslim brothers, we must realize that, from the failure of so many attempts, it is not to be concluded that grace has been denied to so many people who likewise are called to salvation.

We are, therefore, convinced that to arrive at a more Christian understanding of our brothers in Islam, it is important for us to adopt the attitude adopted by St. Francis of Assisi and meditate on a phase of his life which has perhaps escaped a number of biographers and admirers, namely the mysterious bonds which united the Poverello to the founder of Islam, the Arab prophet Muhammad.

The Prophetic Mission of St. Francis of Assisi

No one disputes that in the 13th century Divine Providence sent St. Francis to His Church to bring the world back to fidelity to the Gospel. The vision of Innocent III expressed that mission of the Poor Man, who, as a prophet, spoke to the people the language of God.

We shall especially discover that St. Francis approached Islam with an entirely new spirit, with spiritual attitudes completely unknown to medieval Christendom. In this we are once again led to think that St. Francis received the prophetic mission to bring the

Christian conscience back to a more just and more evangelical understanding of its relations with Muslims.

For the medieval conscience, Muslims were the "unbelieving profaners of the Holy Places." The papal documents themselves designate them in terms which could not fail to create a strong impression on the imagination of the faithful: "enemies of the Cross of Christ," "dogs," "the most wicked lot of warriors," "a wicked people", and so forth. Islam was presented not only as a politico-military power against which it was necessary to defend oneself, but above all as the most diabolically anti-Christian force. The Popes and Bishops many a time stirred the zeal of the faithful by the ideal of the Crusade.

It is in this environment of anti-Muslim reaction that St. Francis appeared, as the inspired prophet, sent by God to His Church in order that Christians might regard the followers of Islam with a more evangelical outlook. Continual meditation on the Passion of Christ made St. Francis understand that God brought about the salvation of man through annihilation and affliction, through the death of His Divine Son, and not through violence and the deployment of material power. The Christian attitude towards Islam ought to conform itself to that evangelical outlook.

Consequently Francis discovered in Muslims not the terrible enemies against whom it had to be a question of taking up swords, because they themselves took up the sword, but alienated brothers who had to be led to their Father's house through kindness and goodness. Jesus treated men with love and saved them by giving Himself on the Cross. The Church, which is His Mystical Body, cannot pursue another way; she must treat Muslims with charity and understanding and save them by prayer and suffering.

In the redaction of his first rule, St. Francis gave to his friars,— "those who wish to go among the Saracens,"—a program so far removed from the mentality of that time, that it could not have been impressed upon his mind without an inspiration from above. It was impossible for him to look upon Muslims as "enemies of the Cross of Christ," profaners of the Holy Sepulchre. He sees in them only brothers of God; redeemed by the blood of Jesus; called to share in the Kingdom of God; more precious than the mounds of earth covered with the blood of the Son and still more precious than the stone of the Sepulchre.

But let us hear St. Francis as he proposed his program of apostolic conquest. He divided it into two periods. The first period (which,

we add, could eventually last for centuries, since in the eyes of God a thousand years are as yesterday already passed), is that in which the evangelical message is announced in the land of Islam by the practice of Christian virtues. The brothers (who go among the Saracens) must not take action against them, nor cause disputes, but must submit themselves to all (and therefore even to the Muslim authorities). It was considered to be humanly impossible to live in the Orient without taking such action: in the light of this the value of the attitude prescribed by the Franciscan precept is more clearly apparent. After an assiduous practice had shown that humility, poverty, and gentleness were the superior spiritual values, the ground would be well prepared. It would be easier for Islam to accept and understand the humiliation of the Son of God.

If the testimony which they tried for centuries to render to Christ in the lands of Islam has not produced the expected result, that derived precisely from being preoccupied in looking for immediate results.

The second period, that of external manifestation and preaching, is determined by the choice of God. In this respect we should heed the words of Jesus to His Apostles: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority." (Acts 1,7).

The hour for action is determined by Divine mercy. The Apostle must be ready to execute that second part of his mission. To announce the word of God pre-supposes, besides the spiritual preparation required for the first period, a serious intellectual preparation: the Lord is in no way bound to give to all messengers of His Word the gift of tongues. On the other hand, no one can pretend to announce the Gospel to a people, without first knowing the language and the mentality of that people in order to be able, according to the teaching of St. Paul, to become all things to all men—a Jew among Jews, a Greek among Greeks, and so an Arab among the Arabs, in order to draw all to Christ. No one before St. Francis understood the apostolate among Muslims in this way. He remained unique among his contemporaries, the rest of whom viewed the problem of Islam in a pessimistic light.

It is necessary here to underline an important eventual consequence of the attitude encouraged for the first period of the apostolic mission: the testimony of blood realized in union with the sacrifice of the Savior for the redemption of our brothers the Muslims. That supreme expression of Charity taught by Christ will manifest to the world that we consider Muslims as true brothers. St. Francis affirmed

in his rule that it is precisely because Muslims make us suffer and because they inflict suffering and death upon us, that they must be considered as our dearest friends. In these words is embodied the answer to be given to all those who invoke the malice of the Saracens and their obstinacy in refusing the teachings of the Gospel. Nothing can belittle for St. Francis the value of the words of Christ which He repeated to His sons: "Behold I send you as sheep among wolves."

It was in that spirit that he was able to see in Muslims his own brothers. He would not have dared to consider himself a friend of Christ if he had not felt himself animated with zeal for the salvation of all those whose brother Christ had become before the Father. For St. Francis and for whoever wishes to remain faithful to the Seraphic spirit, Muslims must be the object of a constant love, even if in return they hate us. Did not Christ go even further, He who loved Judas?

St. Francis, by a special illumination which conferred upon him a prophetic mission, understood that Islam could not be won over by contempt, still less by threats and violence. One of his most ardent preoccupations had been to make the Gospel known to Muslims. He devoted his life to that ideal; he offered it to God as living sacrifice for his Muslim brethren in union with the dying Christ, in order to redeem humanity. To this end, he set out three times to seek martyrdom among them.

The prophetic character of the mission of St. Francis for Islam was confirmed by the connection — evident to us—between certain events in the history of Muhammad and two events in the life of the Seraphic Father. By relating them we are able to acquire a full understanding of these. In so doing, we discover the particular vocation of the Franciscan apostolate in Islam. It is only with the heart and spirit of a Francis of Assisi or of a Charles de Foucauld that one can understand the mind of Muslims and draw near to them.

Muhammad and the Christians of Najran

It is impossible to understand the profound and supernatural meaning of the apostolate of St. Francis at Damietta, the reaction of the Sultan Malik-al-Kamil and the Muslim doctors of the proposition of the saint, if one does not compare the happening at Damietta with that which occurred at Medina, in the tenth year of Hijrah.

At that time Muhammad had practically extended his authority over all of Arabia: numbers of tribes had spontaneously submitted. Although he was still far from knowing the true Christianity, Muhammad manifested more sympathy for the Christian than for the Jews.

The official meeting with a delegation of the Christians of Najran and their conduct strongly modified his personal judgment on Christianity, and, afterwards, the personal judgment of all Muslims who saw in the conduct of Muhammad the rule to be observed before every Christian desirous of engaging in a religious discussion.

The Christian delegation was led by the Bishop Abu-l-Harith ibn Aqamah. Muhammad summoned the delegation to the burialground at Medina; and there, in the presence of the dead, after a discussion of the Passion of Jesus, asked the Christians to prove the truth of the Incarnation, inviting them to invoke together with him and his five companions of malediction of God on those who would be wrong, by means of the *mubalah* or ordeal, consisting of passing through fire.

These Christians did not accept the challenge and did not wish to recognize the prophetic mission. However, they declared themselves ready to negotiate a compromise with Muhammad who then conceded the first "capitulation of Islam." The faithful of the two Abrahamic monotheisms, Jews and Christians, because of their holy books (the Bible), should have the right to refuse to embrace Islam, by paying a tribute (the *jizyah*), by which means their life, property and entire communal autonomy would be guaranteed them.

This event is very important for many reasons. In the first place it is a manifestation of the complete faith of Muhammad in his mission; it likewise shows that the prophet did not admit the manifestation of God in His creation except by thunder which strikes the guilty, as previously on Mt. Carmel in the presence of Elijah (II Kings I, 10-12, St. Luke ix, 54).

In addition, this event truly reveals a particular attitude of Muhammad and of Islam toward the mystery of the Incarnation. Perhaps the refusal of the Christians to give him that which he demanded in all sincerity of faith, namely, the proof of the Divinity of Jesus Christ, barred the prophet's way to the Christian faith.

In this first and solemn meeting of Islam and the Christians, the latter incurred a heavy responsibility in lacking courage to bear witness to the truth and to the sincerity of their faith, in failing in charity, by their contempt of that non-baptized person who pretended "foolishly" to make himself recognized as messenger of Allah, while they themselves judged him excluded from the privileged participation: the adoration of the Son of God. That pusillanimity and, at the same time, that pride of believing themselves the only privileged ones scandalized Muhammad who, having retired to pray, should have been

strengthened by the word of God: the desired answer was remitted to the day of last judgment. And Islam still waits!

The ordeal asked for in vain by Muhammad was proposed by St. Francis at Damietta, since he had wished to repair and to make up for the unfortunate behavior of the Christians of Najran.

The action of St. Francis, brought closer and placed in direct relation with the happenings at Medina, takes on a profound meaning which biographers have habitually failed to perceive. While it gives an estimation of the greatness of the soul of St. Francis, it announces at the same time the new attitude which the Lord demands of Christians toward Islam: reparation in a suffering which, in life and death, bears witness to the faith: Christian charity which condemns no one, leaves the judgment of intention to God, knows how to discover and recognize in all, even in the greatest sinners, the gifts of God and incites the apostle to love the brother in whom he sees the image and likeness of Christ, even as far as immolating himself for his salvation and substituting himself from him before the Savior.

Muhammad, animated with a deep and sincere faith in the living God of Abraham, believed in the original equality of the three Abrahamic religions: Israel, Christianity and Islam, and knew that, referring all to the same God the Creator, God-Truth, the pure souls (*tahirat*) of the Jews or of the Christians could also be for him the instrument through which God communicated truth to him.

The refusal of the Christians of Najran to bear witness to Christ, while scandalizing Muhammad, demanded for many centuries a reparation on the part of the Christians: St. Francis of Assisi gave it, providentially, in the name of true Christianity.

The Mubalah of St. Francis at Damietta

In July of 1219, St. Francis landed in Egypt. It was the third time that he had resolved to go among the Saracens, driven by the ardent desire of sacrificing his life for them.

The sincerity with which St. Francis presented himself to the Sultan Malik-al-Kamil to announce to him his mission as the envoy of God, could not but elicit and win sympathy and respect. The religious conscience of Malik-al-Kamil, a just and pious man, did not refuse *a priori* the testimony of any member of the "people of the Book," bringing to him the words of God. A frank, humble and courageous affirmation of the Christian faith, without any offense to the Muslim conscience, is respectfully heard in the Muslim circle. According to the biographers of the saint, it seems that the Sultan was personally

aware of the fervor of spirit and of the sanctity of Francis, who bore no word of contempt for Muhammad, nor for the Islamic faith, he only professed himself ready to remain among Muslims for the love of Christ, prepared to preclude their every hesitation by means of an ordeal of fire.

The ordeal—like the *Mubahalah* which Muhammad had asked the Christians of Najran—would have to show the intervention of God. Who would declare which is the truest and holiest faith.

In conformity with the rule of action prescribed by the Qur'an the Muslims refused the challenge. St. Francis then declared himself ready to enter the fire alone. Humbly he forewarned them that if the Lord did not assist him, those present should attribute that to his sins, and not to consider it as a Divine condemnation of Christianity. If, on the contrary, the power of God should be miraculously manifested, by leaving him unharmed in the midst of the flames, he asked the Sultan and his people to hear the message of God.

The conduct of the Sultan and the attitude of the doctors of the Qur'an who, upon declining the first proposition, had backed out, must be interpreted in the light of psychology and the Muslim law. After the incident which occurred between Muhammad and the Christians of Najran, especially after the answer which the prophet received from the Lord (Surah iii, 48/55), the Muslim was not able to accept anticipating the judgment which God had reserved to Himself to give to the angels and to men in the presence of Jesus Christ, when on the last day, He will judge both angels and men.

Taking into account these characteristics of the Muslim conscience, we must, of necessity, evaluate both the response of the Sultan as well as the conduct of the doctors differently. The refusal did not signify contempt, neither of St. Francis nor of the Christian religion. On the contrary, the Sultan, in conformity with his faith, professed publicly the Divine origin of Christianity: "I believe that your Faith is good and true."

Islam at Damietta did not accept the proof that St. Francis, in order to make reparation for the refusal of the Christian of Najran, desired to give of the belief in the Divinity of Christ and in the Trinity. It would appear that at Damietta, Islam refused the absolute gift of love which St. Francis was ready to make, in exposing his life in the hope of martyrdom. But this interior disposition of sublime charity toward his Muslim brothers did not diminish in the heart of the Seraphic Father; on the contrary, the attitude of the Sultan, one that

was most generous and courteous, incited in his soul the great suffering of the Apostolate; it verified the difficulties which men oppose to the triumph of grace. Then St. Francis returned to Italy.

The hour of God had not yet arrived. A long maturing of suffering and of immolation impelled by the love of Christ was necessary, the presence of which he recognized even in his distant brothers.

We do not believe that St. Francis, after that experience, was convinced that there was nothing that could be done with Muslims. On the contrary, that direct and personal experience made him understand more clearly with the aid of grace, that Islam is a mystery. Even more than before, that thought became one of the profoundest themes of his interior life. Henceforth, those distant brothers could no longer be excluded from his prayers: they, who continued to be looked upon as enemies, remained for him true friends. The first Rule, redacted after that first apostolic experience, is the best proof of all that is said. Now, more than ever, St. Francis substituted himself for thousands of Muslim souls. That supreme immolation, which continued during the years, received the answer and the seal on Mt. Alverna. Thus, the stigmata of St. Francis were intimately related to the mystery of Islam and in particular with an important event in the religious experience of the prophet Muhammad.

The "Nocturnal Ascension" of Muhammad

Prompted and guided by a deep sense of the Divine transcendence, Muhammad gathered in his "conversion" the spiritual and personal character of his relation with the living God of Abraham, understood as the sovereign freedom and absolute will, to Whom we must respond by the total abandonment of self. (*Islam*, Surah iii. 77.)

The fact of the nocturnal ascension of Muhammad or ecstasy to which the Qur'an alludes twice, was in his calling a central event which ruled the entire legislative activity of Medina. It was to this that for centuries fervent Muslims, preoccupied in finding once again, for the purpose of reviving them, the dispositions of the heart of Muhammad in his search for God, gave their concentrated thought.

When the angel to whom the prophet was entrusted had transported him from Mecca first on to the esplanade of the Temple of the destroyed Jerusalem, then from there to the inaccessible Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, where the glory of God resides, Muhammad reached beyond the "supreme horizon," up to the "lotus of delay" close to where was found the garden of eternal sojourn, while a host of angels covered the tree. (Surah iii. 14-16.) Behind that mystical tree

at an interval of two bowshots God was hidden. Muhammad desired and attempted to reach God through the mystery, but his angelic guide was unable to introduce him into the embracing union, for the completely naked angelic nature, which his guide had assumed, did not normally represent the type of intimate union with God which is only possible through the crucified humanity of Christ.

Ignorant of the true meaning and purpose of the mystery of the Incarnation, Muhammad remained excluded from the Divine union reserved to the adoration of sons. In all sincerity he asked the Divine to manifest Himself to him, at least under the appearance of an angel, but under the features of the angel who guided him, he could not discover and proclaim the inaccessibility of the Divine essence. Thus he remained on the threshold, and did not try to advance into the eternity of Divine fire, thus renouncing the knowledge "ab intra" of the personal life of God through the only Mediator, Christ, Who would have sanctified him.

There was in that outpouring of the faith of Muhammad the expression of a desperate desire which he kept during his whole life "to contemplate God, at least under the form of an angel." This desire will remain during the centuries unsatisfied. The complete sacrifice of himself made by St. Francis at Damietta for the salvation of all Muslims will bring about, thanks to his merits, the most unexpected answer to the prayer and desire of Muhammad. It was not Israel (where Jesus was crucified), but Islam, which occasioned the appearance of stigmatization in the Church.

The Miracle of Alverna and Muhammad

The unfolding event which took place on Alverna towards the middle of September 1224 is well-known. Franciscan tradition, from the very beginning, has meditated on the mystery of the stigmata of St. Francis, confining itself to the consideration of what it signified for the person of the saint, but it seems to us that it has neglected the problems raised by the mysterious significance of the apparition of the Crucified under the features of a seraph. St. Francis himself had been left confused. All the biographers of St. Francis see in the stigmata the answer to that desire or martyrdom which had driven St. Francis on to offer himself in the land of Islam. St. Bonaventura, in particular, established the relation between the two events: the preaching before the Sultan from whom he awaited martyrdom and the stigmatization.

The offering of self, made by the saint at Damietta, for the salvation of the Muslims, had been accepted by the Lord, but the martyrdom which he desired to undergo in the land of Islam had to receive a new and deeper meaning. While it was St. Francis' desire to make atonement by his courage and charity for the refusal on the part of the Christians of Najran to Muhammad, the Lord reserved for him a more extraordinary martyrdom on Mt. Alverna.

That generous offer of intercession and of substitution for the Muslims echoed in the heart of God. St. Francis, therefore, was recognized by God as the greatest aspirant for the salvation of Islam. Thanks to him, the expression "brothers and friends" is found in the Church, an expression to which Muslims have a right. But it was especially in the person of St. Francis that the Lord willed to satisfy Muhammad's sincere and ardent desire to see God manifested under the form of an angel. In the miracle of Mt. Alverna, the stigmata of St. Francis, uniting in some way the angelic nature to the crucifixion, appear precisely as a supernatural compensation for that which was wanting in Muhammad.

The Arab race, excluded in Ishmael its father from the offering of Abraham, remains to this day in an almost invincible ignorance of the crucifixion and its sad reality. For Muhammad and Islam, Jesus Christ the Holy One of God, could not suffer in such an ignominious manner; the "Judge" could not submit to a condemnation inflicted by men, because all that appeared as a defeat inflicted upon God.

To that protestation of earthly wisdom, scandalized by the foolishness of the Cross, namely, the annihilation of a God, St. Francis himself was the answer: he offered himself at Damietta to bear witness to the sufferings of Christ and his Divinity, and obtained on Mt. Alverna, for the descendants of Ishmael, the visible sign of Divine mercy.

While all Christianity was wont to see in Muslims the worst enemies of the Cross of Christ, St. Francis, through his love for them, was permitted by the Lord to be the first to suffer visibly with the Crucified. Thus was the prophetic mission accomplished by him in the same way authenticated and consecrated when he showed what the evangelical attitude should be toward Islam and condemned by his own action the bellicose violence of the crusades. Through the five wounds imprinted on the body of Francis in fulfillment of his desire to offer the offering of his life for Islam, Islam will be able one day to recognize the value of the five wounds of Christ, the only source of Redemption.

For a more Christian understanding of our Muslim brothers more imperative and more urgent than ever—it remains for us to meditate upon the example left by St. Francis and to enter into his spirit.

When Christians, especially those who live in direct contact with Muslims, nurture on their part such a love that they can even desire to immolate themselves for them in spirit of substitution, then will Islam perceive the call to grace.

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THE BLESSING OF A PRIEST ✓

When evil seems to live our life
In every moment, fire and strife—
What greater hope our life will find
In the blessing of a priest!

If shadows plague a love-sick soul
To try to hide the glowing coal—
What streams of light will steadily flow
From the blessing of a priest!

When sorrows press upon the heart
To crush each joy, and gloom impart—
What soothing balm the soul will find
In the blessing of a priest!

Ah! take great care, O Christian Soul!
That often in your short parole
To have the gifts which can be had
From the blessing of a priest!

Fr. Anacleto Yonick, O.F.M.

SAINT BONAVENTURE:

The Seven Gifts Of The Holy Ghost

THE THIRD CONFERENCE

The Gift of Piety ✓

1. "Train thyself in godliness. For bodily training is of little profit, while godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come." (I Tim. iv, 7) By this text of the second epistle to Timothy, the Apostle points out that two kinds of exercise are becoming to man; one, physical, the other, spiritual. He calls attention to the fact that spiritual training is to be preferred to corporal since it is more noble and useful. Physical exercise has little value, as the Apostle indicates, "Bodily training is of little profit"; while spiritual training is to be preferred to corporal in the degree that the spiritual is preferrable to the physical, the eternal to the temporal, and the invisible to the visible. Hence a wise man should aim more for spiritual exercise than physical because "bodily training is of little profit," being, as it is, beneficial for the body. However, very often it is the cause and occasion of just the opposite. Someone thinks he is going to a game, but goes to war; he seeks happiness, but finds sorrow. As Seneca says, "I have found many who exercise their bodies, but few who discipline their talents." (Epist. 80) Foolish would that man be who could dig for gold but wants to dig for clay; more than gold surpasses clay does spiritual training exceed physical. We must speak of this spiritual training in as far as it is ordered to piety. For after fear we should discuss piety.—Without the help of the Holy Spirit we cannot explain in words nor practice this most holy training. Therefore, at the beginning we will invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit and will ask God to grant to say something for His honor and the good of our souls.

2. "Train thyself in godliness etc." The Apostle Paul as a good teacher arouses the solicitude of our talents and minds for a beneficial use of this divine gift. Presupposing the presence of piety, he urges us to practice it, describing its benefits. If you have received this favor from

God, "exercise thyself in godliness" lest you lose it. If you do not possess it, "exercise thyself in godliness" to obtain it. His reason for this he adds, is that "godliness is profitable in all respects etc." He points out three aspects of piety for our consideration; its exercise, advantage, and original source. If piety is a gift, then we should know how it is given if a noble gift, we should know how to perfect and discipline ourselves in it; if useful, we should see how advantageous it will prove to us. Notice, my entire purpose is that you grasp the gift of godliness with your soul, learning what it is to be pious.

3. Let us begin with the exercise of piety which consists in a threefold act; namely, reverence for the worship of God, protection of our internal sanctification, and a superabundant internal merit. The first two ways of practising piety are more basic than the third.

4. In the first place, I say the exercise of piety consists in reverence for the worship of God. Ecclesiasticus relates of Josias that, "he took away the abominations of wickedness. And he directed his heart toward the Lord, and in the days of sinners he strengthened godliness." (Eccli. xlix, 3-4) Very definitely the worship of God did not flourish except among the Israelites before the coming of Christ, it did not thrive among the entire race; for at the time of Jeroboam the ten tribes adored idols, a golden calf. Neither did the two tribes practice the worship of God faithfully all the time. After David, an excellent worshipper of God, Manasses, the worst, came into rule and forced idolatry on the people. Then Josias took over in his eighth year began his rule; he took away all idolatry and in the days of sinners he strengthened godliness," that is the worship of God.

5. Job tells us that piety is the worship of God, "Behold," he says, "godliness, that is wisdom." (Job xxviii, 28) Another translation has, "Behold fear, that is wisdom." But in the Septuagint translation it reads, "Behold godliness, that is wisdom." And Augustine says that godliness in Greek is the same as "*theosebia*" which is the same as the worship of God. The worship of God consists mainly in reverence for God, which is not had without fear. For in reverence and fear the worshipper of God must have the highest and holiest esteem for Him.—Should you, for instance, consider God unable to create all things from nothing, you regard as little the power of God; that is, you do not esteem Him most highly. Likewise, should you believe that God cannot penetrate the most intimate things, you regard as little Divine Wisdom and do not have the highest esteem for God. Just as we have

evidence that light not only enlightens itself, but also many other objects, so God sees all things and illuminates all because He himself is Light. If you believe the power and wisdom of God are incapable of changing bodies for the better or for the worse, then you think unwilfully of God and do not regard Him most highly. Likewise, if you do not believe in the condescensions and mercies of God, by which He fills with pardon and happiness the creature serving Him, then you do not worship God.—I say, therefore, that godliness is nothing else than a holy understanding of, a holy love and service for the first, greatest and godly Origin. Without piety the Supreme Goodness cannot be possessed nor worshipped. Everything naturally tends to its origin; the stone to the ground; fire upward; rivers flow to the sea; a tree is joined to its roots; and other things have a continual union with their source. A rational creature is godlike and can return to his source by means of his memory, intellect and will. But if he does not refer himself back to his origin, he is not pious. Hence, I say that piety is nothing other than a holy understanding of, a holy love and service for our first, greatest and godly Source.—Hence, the first exercise of piety consists in reverence for the worship of God.

6. The second exercise of the gift of piety consists in the guarding of our interior holiness. Of this the Apostle says, "I urge therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men. . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and worthy behavior." (I Tim. ii, 1) You must realize that the summit of Christianity consists in godliness and purity. For without peace man cannot piously dispose himself. Christianity consists in these two things. There is no serenity of peace except in tranquility of conscience; and no conscience is holy if it is not good and godly, that is, it prefers the life of virtue and grace to the life of nature.—That you may see this more clearly—suppose a man should value his shoe more highly than his foot, he would, then, not care for his foot very much. If he should expose himself to hanging for the sake of a trifle would not love his life very much. Yet, isn't it necessary for man to preserve his soul in sanctity? Definitely! But the man who does not avoid sin exposes his soul to confusion.

7. O how few there are who protect the piety of religion! But the Lord trieth the wicked." (Ps. x, 6) We read in Ecclesiasticus, "Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God, and contain thyself; and set up thy heart in his holiness." (Eccli. xxx, 24)—"Have pity on thy own soul," that is, have piety in your soul; "pleasing God,"

striving to please God. How? "Contain thyself and gather up heart in holiness."—Some are content to have exterior holiness of word, gesture, and external mode of living. But this is to adorn self with an exterior holiness like the man who decorated himself with white make-up; but he produced a "white sepulchre." (Matt. 23:27ff.) For just as "feigned virtue is not virtue, but a double evil" (August. Enarrat. in Ps. 63.n.14) so feigned holiness is not holiness but rather wickedness. Against such people the Apostle says, "In the last days men will be loving pleasure, having a semblance indeed of piety, but disowning its power." (II Tim. iii, 1,2,4-5) "Having a semblance indeed of piety," that is, of religion," a gloss reads. The "having a semblance of piety" are hypocrites. Such is a "son of perdition." (Jn. xvii, 12) Of this type we read, "With the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked," (Is. xi, 4) that is, the one having the greatest semblance of piety.—Hence, we practice the gift of piety in the second manner by guarding our internal holiness.—But there are some who do not have pity on their soul; moreover, they treat their soul as miserably as they can. They despise their soul so much that they cannot treat it worse than they do since they follow every suggestion of the devil. "Have pity on your soul!" Then there are some, under the pretext of piety, undertake what is contrary to the good of their souls. They say, "I will go to this foulness under the pretext of piety." What piety is in this? Absolutely none!

8. The third exercise of piety consists in an abundance of exterior mercy. We read of this in Ecclesiasticus, "These were men of mercy, whose godly deeds have not failed; good things continue to their seed." (Eccli. xlv, 10ff.)—Dearly beloved! Look over the lives of the holy Fathers, and you will see that they were men of mercy. Noe, Abraham, Moses, Joseph and Samuel. What was the piety of Noe! He did nothing for one hundred years but build the ark in order to save the human race. How great was the piety of the most righteous Abraham! God came down to strike the cities where abominations and sin were rampant. But Abraham interceded to the Lord for them and received the offer that if he found ten holy men in the cities, the Lord would spare them. How great was the piety of Joseph! He was sold by his brothers; indeed, they wanted to kill him. But he was protected, ruled and enriched his brothers and their sons. He also used the piety to preserve the entire world by gathering and saving grain. How great the piety of Moses! He loved his people and when they angered the Lord, he besought God for them: "I beseech thee:

people hath sinned a heinous sin: either forgive them this trespass, or if thou do not; strike me out of the book that thou hast written." (Exod. xxxii, 31) Bernard gives us an example of a woman outside a house with her small child. If she were told, "Leave your child outside and you come inside," she would not want to enter while her child would remain outside. So Moses wanted God to forgive the people their sin or strike him from the book of the living. Samuel did the same thing when the people sought a king. Afterwards, the people, realizing that Samuel had ruled them very well, feared that Samuel would not want to beseech the Lord for them after they had sinned. But when the people entreated him, Samuel said, "Far from me be this that I should cease to pray for you." (I Kings xxii, 23) How great the piety of David, king of Israel! Saul desired his death, but David had Saul in his hands. David could have slain Saul; God did not prevent him, for He told David, "I will deliver him into your hands." (I Kings xxiv, 5) Held back neither by man nor law, he could have slain Saul; but still David spared him and his house. So, "these were men of mercy, whose godly deeds have not failed."

9. Blessed Peter, the other Apostle, invites us to this piety in his second canonical epistle, "Supply your faith with virtue, your virtue with knowledge, your knowledge with self-control, your self-control with patience, your patience with piety, your piety with fraternal love, your fraternal love with charity." (II Peter i, 5-7) What does he want to say? He puts piety in the middle of two things, patience and charity. Piety, he tells us, is a purple garment; patience and charity, a royal garment. The man wishing to be pious toward his neighbor must bear with him patiently and love him with charity. David dealt patiently and charitably with his enemy; in such a way must man deal with his neighbor.—Where is piety today? There is no medium because God has taken away the two extremes. Cruelty is so great today that man cannot have enough revenge. He rules with impatience and anger, and judges evilly. Even if a man doesn't offend me, I will, despite the fact, think evil of him. And why is this? Certainly because I do not have charity. Blessed Peter knew well how to explain the way I can have charity; for if I have patience on one side and charity on the other, lo, then I have the practice of piety.

10. Perhaps you may say, brother, "I do not have this gift." Because it is necessary for me to explain for you the original source of piety. But you may answer, "You should have started with the source; whereas you started with its practice." No, brother, I could not lead

you to the source of piety except through the act and the exercise of piety. The gift of piety has its origin primarily in the Uncreated Trinity, secondly in the Incarnate Wisdom and thirdly in Holy Mother Church, sanctified through the Spirit.

11. Take note that the gift of piety arises primarily from the Uncreated Trinity, that is, from God the Father. Although God has the noblest properties, nevertheless, He is most excellent in this property of piety. So we read in the prayer, "O God, whose property is always to have mercy and to spare. . ." (PL v. 78, c197) And Ecclesiasticus, "For God is compassionate and merciful, and will spare sins in the day of tribulation: and he is a protector to all that call upon him in truth." (Eccli. ii, 13) "Compassionate and merciful" because He spares and protects. The Lord says, "As a father hath compassion on his children, so am I to you." (Ps. cii, 13) —Look at all the works of God from the first to the last. You will always find the works of His mercy great, greater and greatest. The great works of divine mercy are the works of nature; the greater works are the operations of grace; but the greatest are the works of glory. Hear! You are the image of God! An "image" means to say, as it were, "I imitate." Hence if you are the image of God, you must conform yourself to God in piety. The Ecclesiasticus, "In judging, be merciful to the fatherless as a father is to his children, as a husband to their mother. And thou shalt be as the obedient son of the most High, and He will have mercy on thee." (Eccli. iv, 1) "In judging," that is, in carrying out the law; "be merciful to the fatherless," so that you may truly be a "son of the most High." Seeing that the glorious God has compassion on the suffering, why do you not pity Him? If there were a spring which would cause dried-up plants to grow again, it would be highly valued. A soul without piety has dried-up plants. A stream of divine mercy pours itself out abundantly, giving new life to the dead plants. Should you not bring that stream into your soul? But that is impossible without piety. So, the original influence of piety is from the Uncreated Trinity.

12. The second source of this piety is the Incarnate Wisdom. As the Apostle writes to Timothy, "Obviously great is the mystery of godliness: Which was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the world, appeared to angels, was preached to Gentiles, believed in the world, taken up in glory." (I Tim. iii, 16) The mystery of the redemption of mankind, accomplished through the Incarnate and Crucified Word, "the great mystery of godliness." The Apostle says, "Which was manifested in the flesh," through the Incarnation; "was justified in

the world," on the gibbet of the cross; "appeared to Angels," in his glorification; "was preached to Gentiles," in the sending of the Holy Spirit; "believed in the world," through the spread of the Faith; "taken up in glory," through the trial of the final judgment. I say that the Incarnate Son of God took on our poverty. Why did He do this? Piety is certainly the answer. "Wherefore it was right that he should in all things be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people." (Hebr. ii, 17) Because of piety He took on a human body; ascended the cross, arose from the dead; sent the Holy Spirit to the world; established the Church for Himself; and through piety freed from their misery all those who were worthy. The Apostle writes to the Romans, "Or dost thou despise the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering? Dost thou not know that the goodness of God is meant to lead thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness and unrepentant heart, thou dost treasure up to thyself wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of just judgment of God." (Romans ii, 4-5) The Son of God offered Himself up as a holocaust for us. This is the "great mystery of godliness."—This mystery is daily repeated on the altar. That you may be mindful of the mystery of godliness and put on a heart of piety were the reasons urging Him to bequeath to us the Sacrament of the Altar. Cruel is the heart that is not touched by these.

13. The third source whence the gift of piety arises is Holy Mother the Church who is sanctified by the Holy Spirit and has His pledge. Holy Mother Church has enjoined piety on all. Those born from the same mother and the same father love one another more than do children who have only a father or a mother in common. The Holy Spirit makes us children of the same father and the same mother and members of the same body. The Apostle says, "For the grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men, instructing us, in order that, rejecting ungodliness and worldly lusts, we may live temperately and justly and piously in this world." (Tit. ii, 11-12) Dearly beloved! Examine whether your piety is that of a blood brother toward a blood brother! Who is our father? Certainly God! Who is our mother? The Church who begot us in her womb by the Holy Spirit and will give birth to us when we will be led into the eternal light. Do you not realize that as one member suffers with another member, in such a manner that we to have compassion for one another? We are all members of the same body; we eat one food; are brought forth from the same womb; are destined for the same inheritance. And our inheritance will be increased as we increase; it will not be lessened. We are members of one

body; we should be piously disposed toward one another. Come; the father or the mother will receive you. If holy M Father stretches out her helping hand, the most shameful sinners Church to return. Hence we must always have compassion one forced ther.

14. A description of this is given in the Psalm, "Behold and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in good and like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the head of Aaron." (Ps. cxxxii, 1-2) We have one Father, one the be- ne Sacrament, one reward. "Like the precious ointment fice, or etc." The ointment of piety is first on the head.—Primarily head e- and religious superiors of the Church should possess piet ates an- ly the people. "Which ran down to the skirt of his garment second- (Ps. cxxxii, 2) We read a story referring to this oil of piety fourth- book of Kings. A certain woman came to Eliseus and said: "My husband wanted to take her sons, adding, "My husband was credited- ared God." (IV Kings iv, 1) Eliseus said that she should who fe- vases of her neighbors and pour that oil into each one of all the- vases were filled. Why did he order her to get the vases of all the- ighbors? Could he not increase the oil and fill the jar, and the ne- e woman work so hard? I say that the woman was a type who fe- ve and that Eliseus was the type of Christ. When the Church Church in merits and must needs pay dividends, how will she do so needy- ill the vases of her neighbors. Do you wish the piety of M must f- a to descend on you? Fill the casks of your neighbors. Every Church- ave this oil of godliness. So we read in the Canticle of must v- Thy name is as oil poured out." (Cant. i, 2) des,

15. Piety must especially be in the hearts of bishops. Bishops are anointed on the head, so that after the anointing Bishop- urify all the people. We read in the book of Machabees, must v- ly city was inhabited with all peace, and the laws as yet the ho- ell kept, because of the godliness of Onias the high priest very w- tred his soul had of evil, it came to pass that even the ho- the h- lves, and the princes esteemed the place worthy of the l- them- f, and glorified the temple with very great gifts." (II Machabees 1-2) A- afterwards, Menelaus and his retinue entered the temple and l-2) A- defiled it. I believe the stumbling block lay in this, the tiochi- spirit was not in the people because there was in impedim Holy- epherd.—Blessed Gregory was noble and rich. He founded the sh- ed seven monasteries and in the seventh, at Rome, he became rich

bank. Afterwards he became Cardinal and finally Pope. Blessed Gregory, as Pope, had the custom of having twelve beggars eat before him. On a certain day there was one with the twelve who sometimes appeared to be a young man and, at other times, to be a venerable old person. After the banquet Blessed Gregory arose and led him to his room and asked him who he was. The man answered, "I was shipwrecked and you showed mercy to me at the port. I told you my ship was damaged and asked for an alms for the necessaries of life. You gave me fifty gold pieces and, afterwards, all the little silver trays that were in your house. Then I knew that the eternal God prepared you for this honor and that you came to this dignity to be a dispenser, to give much for God." Blessed Gregory said, "Who are you?" When the man answered, "I am His angel," Blessed Gregory was terrified because he saw an Angel; but he was also consoled, for works of piety please God very much. Because Martin and Nicolas were men of mercy, from their tombs emanates an oil. —And so the exercise of piety and the source from whence it arises are sufficiently explained.

16. What is the advantage of the gift of piety? It says, "Godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come." (I Tim. iv, 8) I do now know what else I can add. Do you have temporal goods? Piety is profitable for all those; and, likewise, for all spiritual goods. Those who have suffered falls of the flesh, have been liberated sometimes by piety and afterwards receive mercy. For "godliness is profitable in all respects." It is profitable to know the truth, to shun evil and to obtain all good.

17. In the first place, I say that piety is profitable to know truth, that is salutary truth. Hence we read in Ecclesiasticus, "But the Lord hath made all things, and to the godly he hath given wisdom." (Eccl. xliii, 37) God bestows his gifts upon every creature; but He gives knowledge of truth only to the godly. How can one reach the tributary who does not arrive at the origin of truth? How would one, inimical to the origin of truth, know this origin? The Apostle says to Timothy, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about controversies and disputes of words." (I Tim. vi, 3-4) Man must necessarily give assent to teaching which is in accord with piety. In Daniel we read, "The wicked shall deal wickedly." (Dan xii, 9) Revelation shall be kept from the wicked. If you wish to be true scholars, you must have piety.

18. Secondly, godliness is useful in avoiding all evil. So **B** Peter writes, "The Lord knows how to deliver the God-fearing temptation and to reserve the wicked for torment on the day of ment." (II Peter ii, 9) The impious do not recognize divine "The wicked man," however "when he is come into the depth of contemneth." (Prov, xviii, 3) The ungodly man is he who defend own impiety; that is, his sin. The Psalm says of such a one, "throat is an open sepulchre: they dealt deceitfully with their tongue judge them, O God. Let them fall from their devices: according multitude of their wickednesses cast them out: for they have provoked thee, O Lord." (Ps. v, 11) Do you want to be free of evil? Listen David who says, "I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin." (Ps. xxi, 1) Praise God and be angry with your sin. But do not defend yourself because to defend sin is a double sin. It is noteworthy that a man reads, (Ps. i, 1) "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly," by consenting to sin; "nor stood in the assembly of sinners," by remaining in sin; "nor sat in the chair of pestilence defending his sin.

19. The third advantage of the gift of piety is that it helps us to obtain every good. Hence we read in the book of Macabees that those who are considered, "that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had their grace laid up for them," (II Maca. xii, 5) which may He deign to bestow on us, who with the Father, etc.



THE RED CROSS SAINT

Fr. William C. Johnston, O.S. Cam. ✓

In a country where the emblem of the Red Cross has become the chief symbol of organized charity, of help in every emergency, of comfort and aid to the poor and homeless, few know of the man who first introduced this insignia as one of charity long before the establishment of the International Red Cross. This man was Camillus de Lellis, now honored by the Church as the patron saint of the sick, of hospitals, and of nurses. In 1586, two years after forming his hospital Order, he conceived the idea and received papal permission to wear a red cross on the habit adopted by himself and his followers; not as a mark of distinction for them or for their work, but as a constant reminder to all who saw it of Christ's Cross covered with His Precious Blood.

It seems Camillus was also the first to use on a large scale the sixteenth century equivalent of ambulance service on the field of battle. Not only in time of war, but in every disaster, epidemic, or plague, the men in black with the red cross would be found quietly going about their duties of caring for the sick and dying, with the same loving devotion as their leader.

The life story of this remarkable saint is a most colorful one. Camillus de Lellis was born in Bucchianico, Italy, on May 25, 1550—that particular era of history which produced great saints and great sinners. It is significant that Camillus' life was a combination of both. At the age of thirteen, deprived of his mother by death and his father by war, he was left to himself—since he was the only child—but amazingly not to his dismay. His mother, a very holy woman, was loved by the villagers of Bucchianico, "Lady Elizabeth," since as St. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, she was advanced in years when she finally gave birth to her son, being over sixty at the time. His father was a professional soldier, often away from home. On his return Camillus soon found reckless companions in the back alleys of his native town. As time went on, he became inflamed more and more with the desire for adventure. At last, he enlisted in the army of emperor Charles V., and saw battle against the Turks. Whenever the army camped, cards and dice were at his side, for gambling was his

daily 'food'. So irresistible was this passion that when he had everything else, he even staked his outer shirt as prize—and lost too. Yet, through the grace of God, he turned to a life of self-denial and charity towards his fellowmen.

Shortly after this turning point in his life Camillus asked admittance into the Capuchin Order. He was invested as a choir novice and received the name 'Christopher' because of his striking resemblance to this great saint. He, like Christopher, was a giant of a man. Having only been with the Capuchins a few months, an old arrow wound—received while in the army and which was also the reason for his discharge from the service—developed in infection. It became so bad that Camillus had to be dismissed.

He went to the hospital of St. James in Rome where he had his leg treated once before. After four years he was readmitted into the Capuchins, but his stay was short lived because the wound again came infected. When he left the Order this time, he knew that there would be no hope of returning.

He made his way back to Rome for further medical treatment. While in the hospital he became more and more aware of the carelessness and indifference of the authorities towards the sick. Nourishment was sparingly given; medications were administered haphazardly; ventilation was poor; the beds were filthy. It was inevitable and prudent that these conditions should stir Camillus to action. He was further inspired by a vision of Our Lord. The Savior declared that it was "His work" to correct the existing abuses by means of a religious society of men who would vow themselves to the service of the afflicted, even those stricken with a contagious disease. This was the beginning of the Servants of the Sick, as the Camillians are officially called. This new community of Priests and Brothers, first founded in 1584, gradually drew other self-sacrificing men and was approved within the short space of seven years by the Church as a religious Order.

Camillus studied for the priesthood at the then recently established Jesuit college in Rome. Since he began his elementary seminary course later in life than usual, he had to attend basic classes with the youths of the college. Camillus' physical stature even made him more conspicuous. He was finally ordained at the age of thirty-four.

This ex-soldier was a veritable prodigy of charity. When he was occupied with a patient, he was so intensely absorbed in his task that all else was forgotten. No desire or request of the sick, no matter how thoughtless or arduous, went unanswered. His secret of sanctity

was found in the fact that in each patient he saw the figure of the crucified Christ. During the forty years of his life—from the time of his turning to God to the time of his death—the sustaining force and incentive of all his work was the love of his Creator which urged and drove him. Goodness and kindness were diffused wherever he went, even though he himself suffered intense pain throughout all those years because of his incurable and ulcerous foot.

The red cross of St. Camillus and his followers was always found where most needed. These heroic men joyfully embraced every opportunity to serve God by caring for His creatures, not only in hospitals and private homes, but also on the fields of battle.

It was during the battle of Canizza, in 1601, that a miraculous event occurred and almighty God gave His approval to the Camillian red cross. While the religious were busily occupied with the wounded, the tent in which they had all their equipment and supplies was burnt. Everything in the tent was destroyed except the red cross of a habit which the fire respected. One of the witnesses, a high-ranking army officer, asked to have the cross, and wore it as an impenetrable breastplate. Other miraculous facts gradually gave rise to the devotion of the faithful to the little red crosses that the Camillians made and distributed so as to satisfy the many requests they received. The Church inserted in the Roman Ritual a special blessing for these little red crosses, and since then they have been propagated by the thousands throughout the world, procuring benefits of resignation, conversion, and recovery for the sick.

For almost 400 years the sons of St. Camillus have kept alive and spread their founder's spirit of Christ-like charity towards the sick and helpless. The tremendous task Camillus began is being carried on today by the Fathers and Brothers in eighteen different countries, even though at one point during the many epidemics that arose the Order was on the verge of becoming extinct as a result of the death toll of the Camillian martyrs of charity. Unknown to them they were building for the future—the future of the Order around the world. A future which included America. The foundation for the continuation of "His work" in this country was begun only thirty-three years ago. Besides the institutions for the care of the sick, centers of training for the priesthood and brotherhood have been erected—from which will go forth the future Camillians carrying on the work of their founder at the bedside of the sick.

POPULE MEUS

O My people, have I done you wrong?
Did I offend you in some way?
Give Me your answer! I am displeased
And I have many things to say:

I led you out from the land of dross;
In return you lead Me to the Cross.
I took you away from pagan feasts;
You take Me now to the Jewish priests.

O Holy God, O Holy God,
O Holy, Mighty One.
O Holy and Immortal God,
We have betrayed Your Son.

I led you and fed you for forty years
In the desert amidst your joys and fears;
So you scourge My back with whips for this,
And betray Me with a friendly kiss.
I opened the sea you crossed by chance;
You have opened My side with a lance.
I gave you water when at death's brink;
Vinegar you offer Me now to drink.
I smote your enemies and their seed;
And you have smitten Me with a reed.

O Holy God, O Holy God,
O Holy, Mighty One.
O Holy and Immortal God,
We have betrayed Your Son.

I granted you royal staves and horns;
Upon My head you place a crown of thorns.
I lifted you up from pangs of dross;
And you have hung Me upon the Cross.

O My people, I have done no wrong,
I have offended in no way.
You sentence Me, put Me to death
That I may rise on Easter Day!
Roy M. Gasnick, O.F.M.

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