

St. Francis in the Piety and Mystical Experience of St. Veronica Giuliani, Based on Her Diary

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*San Francesco nella pietà e nell'esperienza
di santa Veronica Giuliani, secondo il 'Diario'*

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Comprehensive understanding of a person, whether that person be a scholar, artist, architect, soldier — or, in this case, a saint — requires critical biographies. But that point is reached only after countless partial studies have highlighted the essential traits of the person as seen from various points of view.

That is why I believe this study is useful. I intend to examine the “intellectual” (Veronica often uses this word) and spiritual relationship between St. Veronica Giuliani and St. Francis of Assisi. His Christocentric spirituality permeates every fiber of her being, and she in turn transmits this in her extensive Diary. Although she never cites authors, philosophies or theological schools, hers is a true practical theology. It allows her to live the mystery of Christ concretely in body and soul like her father Francis, day by day, minute by minute, until the final sacrifice. Among the many saints mentioned by Veronica on various occasions, none occupies so special a place as Francis of Assisi.

1. St. Veronica encounters St. Francis of Assisi

Veronica's encounter with St. Francis was not as sudden as might appear from the entry in her Diary for September 17, 1693 (V, 200). She certainly knew his life, at least from the *summa capita*, even though (as I seem to recall)

she never speaks of specific episodes except the stigmata — and she never mentions the name of the mountain, LaVerna. In the entry for September 17, we read how the Lord made her understand that, if she wished to be united with Him, “she must completely renounce herself, like her seraphic father St. Francis” (V, 202). If, as she says, the Lord was giving her St. Francis as a model, it is reasonable to assume she already knew him from readings, conferences, meditations and other sources. Such things had always been used in the Order to acquaint the young members with their founder.

Veronica always speaks of Francis with great affection: “my seraphic father” (I, 368), “the holy father” (I, 369; II, 241, 251), “my seraphic one” (II, 251), “my father St. Francis” (II, 23), “our St. Francis” (III, 1012). She is extremely delighted whenever he appears along with the great heavenly figures in a “globe of light,”¹ and when she sees him “resplendent” as a sun (II, 518) and admires “his five sacred wounds, like five precious jewels” (III, 1142).

When her sufferings became too much for her to bear, Veronica would wander through the monastery corridors and into the garden, repeating the familiar couplet from a courtly song used by Francis to attract the attention of the crowd in the square of St. Leo, May 8, 1213:

*So great the good I have in sight
that every pain is my delight.*²

My God, who are You and who am I?³

My God and my all!

As we shall see, every year on October 4, and especially on September 17, Veronica experienced again the reception of the stigmata Francis had received on LaVerna. Sometimes this also happened on August 2, the feast of the Great Pardon of Assisi. Veronica’s observance of these feasts was marked by intense personal participation. Her fasting and penance caused her to suffer in soul and body, even to the point of blood.

Veronica began her diary on December 13, 1693; she wrote its final entry thirty-four years later on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1727. In it she mentions St. Francis at least 110 times: 12 times in the first volume; 41

¹I, 657. Brother Leo saw Francis “raised so high in the air and surrounded by such radiance that he could hardly see him” (Fioretti, *Second Consideration on the Stigmata*).

²Fioretti, *First Consideration on the Stigmata*.

³II, 334, 972. Fioretti, *Third Consideration on the Stigmata*, reads: “Who are You, my dearest God? And what am I, your vilest little worm and useless little servant?” Some books, however, repeat the expression in the form of a simple couplet.

times in the second; 28 times in the third, 24 times in the fourth; 5 times in the fifth.⁴ This shows the depth of her intellectual and spiritual familiarity with the man from Assisi.⁵ But to help us understand better the impact Francis had on her, I present the following documentary evidence.

2. Daughter of Francis and Clare

Veronica was a strong and decisive person. It was not enough for her merely to know and love St. Francis. To love him completely she had to imitate him. Realizing this, she wanted to be his "worthy daughter," just as she wanted to be a "worthy daughter" of St. Clare. This concept enjoyed wide currency in the *Lives* of the saints and in formation programs. Thus Veronica could not help but make it her own. She questioned herself repeatedly on this matter, even years later, when everything would suggest that by then her virtue was well established.

A few examples will suffice. At the age of thirty-four, after receiving the gift of a tiny cross from Jesus Himself (I, 201), after experiencing a renewal of the pain of the crown of thorns and cross in her heart (I, 211), she vomited blood, saying: *My God, I give You blood for blood for the conversion of poor sinners* (I, 221). On January 29, 1694, she wrote:

While I was praying one night...it seemed that the Lord appeared to me, all in glory and on a magnificent throne. All at once He showed me our community, very lax and showing scarcely any sign of the primitive observance.

Meanwhile I seemed to see our father St. Francis and our mother St. Clare appear. Both were looking directly at all us sisters. I thought I could see everyone clearly, but no one seemed to have the habit⁶ we've professed. Some lacked this, some lacked that. In fact, it seemed that the two founders did not recognize us as their daughters.

Oh, what pain all this caused me! (I, 223f).

She writes in the same vein eighteen years later, June 12, 1712, having had many experiences and having reached a certain spiritual maturity:

⁴I: 147, 224, 368, 429, 463f, 472, 736, 807, 818, 868, 873, 878; II: 8, 31, 32, 34, 40, 44, 57, 61, 64, 143, 164, 237, 241, 251, 262f, 325, 331, 335, 348, 365, 455, 479, 516, 517f, 618, 652, 747, 835, 950, 963f, 972f, 1098, 1175f, 1253, 1284; III: 194, 259, 391, 424, 428f, 806f, 869, 1-12, 1026, 1037, 1142f, 1160, 1167, 1267; IV: 43, 127f, 191, 210, 291, 300f, 303f, 365, 524, 527, 629, 679, 682f, 686, 750, 572f, 786f, 804, 875, 887; V: 119, 200f, 206, 231.

⁵In the *Proceedings of the Symposium* of 1978, Father Mariano d'Alatri stated that St. Veronica did not know St. Francis very well and thus could not know his spirituality (see *Santa Veronica Giuliani, dottore della Chiesa?*..., Città di Castello 1979, p. 82). I hope in the course of this study to give a more positive response in this regard.

⁶Here "habit" refers to the behavior characteristic of a perfect religious.

It seemed that I was led to the feet of our holy father and our holy mother St. Clare. They didn't recognize me as their daughter because of my failure to observe the Rule, my unfaithfulness to God and creatures... (III, 576).

Again, two years later, June 22, 1714:

All at once...it seemed to me that Mary most holy called to her side our father St. Francis and our mother St. Clare. She brought me before them so they could judge and see whether I had been their daughter. Neither one seemed to recognize me as such; in fact, it seemed to me they wanted to remove my habit because I wasn't worthy of such a grace. But St. Philip Benizi and Blessed Pellegrino [Laziosi] kept commending me to Mary most holy and the other saints. Between them all, they saw to it that our father St. Francis and our mother St. Clare were appeased... (III, 806).

3. St. Francis, Veronica's "advocate" he calls her "my daughter"

Confident that Francis was her spiritual father and reassured that she was truly a "worthy daughter," Veronica wished to have an advocate or defender before God.⁷ She found one in St. Francis. Finally he calls her "my daughter" and offers to God through her the merits of the wounds of Christ. The night of May 9-10, 1697, she writes:

Tonight after Matins, while I was praying for sinners [another constant concern of hers], all at once I became recollected with a vision of Jesus crucified, along with the three saints who are specially dear to me.

The three saints were Francis, Dominic and Philip Neri.

I said to the Lord: Here I am, my God, ready to do Your will. But You see that I can do nothing; there's nothing in me but ingratitude. I offer You Your own wounds; let them be my voice in Your divine presence, to thank You and bless You, and to do all that I am supposed to do.

Suddenly I seemed to see our father St. Francis prostrate at the feet of Jesus crucified. He was saying: On behalf of this daughter of mine, Your bride, to satisfy for what she ought to do but cannot—for she can do nothing, she has nothing—I offer You on her behalf Your holy passion and all Your merits.

While he was saying this, the Lord was giving me light and making me understand the many ways He was helping me.

⁷The concept of advocate also figures largely in Christian piety, for example in the prayer *Salve Regina*. Veronica's originality lies perhaps in the fact that she calls upon St. Francis, rather than our Lady, to be her advocate. According to Celano, Francis wished to have the Mother of Jesus as his advocate before God: "He made her the advocate of the order and placed under her wings his sons...that she might cherish them and protect them to the end" (2Cel 198). For the same reason, it is he who now becomes Veronica's advocate.

This gesture was repeated by St. Philip Neri and St. Dominic. Immediately after this there was another manifestation:

I saw a brightness emerge from the side of the Crucified and come toward me. As it approached my heart, I saw that it was no longer brightness but rather like a burning flame. In its midst was an object like a lance,⁸ which passed through my heart from one side to the other. O God! What pain! But it was a pain that made me languish for love.... I felt the pain in my hands and feet. I seemed to find myself crucified, too.

[Then] my father St. Francis took all the rosaries I had around my neck, touched them to the feet of Jesus and returned them to me. At that point everything disappeared (II, 22-24).

4. The stigmata

Veronica seems most like Francis in her imitation of Christ crucified. It was a bodily likeness that extended even to the stigmata. "Crucified with the Crucified," she wrote (I, 532), as if to express her highest aspiration. Often, as if beside herself, she would wander around the monastery repeating the words of St. Paul (in the feminine), *Christo confixa sum cruci* (V, 223). She signed herself Daughter of the Crucified (I, 603).

Both Francis and Veronica underwent a long spiritual preparation prior to receiving the stigmata. The manner, form and expressions, needless to say, were completely different. The only similarity, if we can put it that way, lies in the fact that the Lord chose them for Himself from their youth and made them "instruments of His love" until their death. I have noticed that in both cases the steps that led up to the stigmata were like one continuous crescendo. However, Francis lived to be only forty-four. His stigmata lasted about two years, from September 14, 1244, until his death the evening of October 3, 1226. Veronica, on the other hand, lived to be sixty-seven. Her stigmata lasted thirty years, from Good Friday, April 5, 1677, until her death on July 9, 1727.

All my efforts to find parallels in the experiences of the two saints ended up a waste of time. I did not realize that the Lord has a way of not repeating Himself in any of His saints.⁹ What happened to Francis after his conversion and what took place on the heights of LaVerna are known to all, even though Francis left no written record (which would have been priceless). We can read the mystical pages of the Fioretti, especially the chapters entitled The Consid-

⁸The image of the lance or sword, whose tip becomes a flame, recurs several times.

⁹To the extent that I have studied the question, I have never come across a case where the same phenomena were repeated in any stigmatic, ancient or modern.

erations on the Holy Stigmata, and the other sources as well. What happened to Veronica can be inferred from her Diary, the Accounts (*Relazioni*) and various Appendices. These allow us to follow her spiritual journey as it unfolds, based on firsthand data and documents.

Francis wandered throughout Italy, France, Spain, Egypt and the Holy Land. He sang to the created universe and ascended from creation to its Creator. Veronica, on the other hand, always remained within the monastery and lived there completely enclosed for the sake of her Lord. In that world of hers, she went about scattering the heavens with the luminous pearls of her pain, sufferings, and anguish of soul and body. She discovered the outdoors, filling the air with scraps of her poems that fluttered in the breeze.

But the greatest poem she wrote was within herself. On the day of her investiture, October 28, 1677, when she was seventeen years old, she received her first visit from the Lord. She writes that "He gave me a great welcome" and was saying to everyone: "This one is ours now!" Then He said: "I have chosen you for great things, but you will have to suffer much for love of me" (V, 74-76). On November 1, 1678, her intense interior experiences ended with the "loving embrace" of the Crucified (I, 36f).

Several years passed and on Good Friday, April 4, 1681, Jesus placed on her head a crown of thorns. Its pain would be renewed many times.¹⁰ This was followed by a heavy cross, which eventually left her right shoulder permanently stooped.¹¹ A cross was placed within her heart.¹² The desire to suffer grew in her (I, 911) to the point that "the name of Jesus was engraved on my heart with a penknife."¹³

Years of profound spiritual experiences followed. She was appointed director of novices for three years (1688-91). By now her growth could not be stopped. Whenever she thought of the love of God, she felt as if she were "beside herself." She would go about constantly repeating, *Christo confixa sum cruci!...tua sum ego, Domine...!* (V, 223), and other such expressions.

In 1693 she was ordered by the confessor to write her diary. On April 3, of the following year she had a vision of "pure suffering" (I, 278-83), in other words, transcendence or sublimation of pain for the sake of Christ. The

¹⁰Accounts of 1693 and 1700: I, 45-50; III, 843; V, 246-49.

¹¹Account of 1700: I, 51f, 117-19.

¹²Account of 1693: V, 250f.

¹³Account of 1700: I, 53-55.

mystical marriage she had always longed for took place on April 11 (I, 246f). On May 3, she had a vision of the bitter cup (I, 326).

On Christmas of 1696, Jesus wounded her heart with an arrow; blood often gushed from the wound (I, 735, 897). This was followed by a long and painful process, which culminated on March 29, 1697. Jesus showed her St. Francis as a model of perfect freedom from the world and from self. Veronica was so impressed that she could not keep silent about the experience. She writes:

The Lord...made me understand that until now I've been a religious in name only; now I must begin to get serious. And to understand...what it means to be a religious, I must go to the school of His wounds.¹⁴ There I'll understand everything... He placed me before our father St. Francis and our mother St. Clare.... I must deny my own self and everything else...crucified with Jesus (I, 868).

Two days later, March 31, 1697, the same experiences were repeated:

I received an intimate communication on the purity of love.... [The Lord] made me understand the sort of denial required of one who really wants to give herself completely to God.... He made me see that I must learn from my father St. Francis... (I, 878).

She mentions various saints, including Bonaventure, Anthony and Bernardine of Siena. There is a moving vision of St. Francis, who shows her his wounds, placing his right hand on her heart, allowing her to feel and see the thickness of the nail. He confirms all that God has done in her:

I saw him [St. Francis] as he was during his lifetime when he received the sacred stigmata. I saw those wounds of his, resplendent, with the nails in them. He placed his right hand on my heart, and the nail seemed to penetrate the wound there. I felt intense pain...

He said to me: *Confirmo hoc quod Deus operatus est in te, et quod operaretur in te* [I confirm what God has done in you and what He was doing in you] (I, 878).¹⁵

But her greatest day, her true Pentecost took place on Good Friday, April 5, 1697. It was then that the Lord imprinted her with His seal, the sacred

¹⁴Veronica could say that she must return to the school of His wounds because it was there that her spiritual life had begun. When Veronica's mother, Benedetta Mancini, realized that her days were numbered, she summoned her five living daughters (two had died) to her bedside. She gave them her maternal counsel and then entrusted them to the five wounds of our Lord, assigning one to each. Ursula, as Veronica was known before she entered the monastery, chose for herself the wound in His side (Gaetano V. Moroni, *Dizionario de erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, vol. 95, Venice 1840, p. 50).

¹⁵Reading *operaretur* for *operabitur*. An accommodated use of Ps 67:29.

stigmata. The episode deserves to be quoted in its entirety. It was the night of Good Friday, April 4-5, 1697:

I spent most of tonight in recollection.... I took the crucifix in my hands, I was anxious to suffer...I replied: *My Spouse, my love....*

In an instant I saw five shining rays issuing from His wounds and coming toward me. I watched as they turned into little flames. Four of them contained the nails, and in one of them there was the lance, golden and all aflame, and it pierced my heart. And the nails pierced my hands and feet.

I felt great pain...I felt myself completely transformed into God.

As soon as I was wounded, those flames returned again as dazzling rays, and I saw them come to rest in the hands, feet and side of the Crucified.

The Lord confirmed me as His spouse; He entrusted me to His mother... Then He said to me: *I am everything for you...*

All of a sudden everything disappeared.

I came to my senses and found myself with arms extended, all numb, and with a great pain in my hands, feet and heart. The wound in my heart seemed to be open and blood and water were flowing from it. I wanted to write but couldn't hold the pen in my hand. I traced some of Jesus's names with the blood...then I stopped writing. I picked up my crucifix and kept saying: My Lord, pains with pains, thorns with thorns, wounds with wounds.... I am all yours.... *Christo confixa sum cruci....* I kept sighing and weeping.... (I, 894f).

It was her greatest day of grace. Not much more than thirty-six years old, she seems to have burned all her bridges and reached her supreme desire: to be the "crucified bride of the crucified Bridegroom" (I, 414f). She had outrun her father St. Francis, who did not receive this gift until the age of forty-two. At this point, all commentary is superfluous!

The Lord had chosen her as His spouse. She, by reason of this sublime marriage, would follow the Bridegroom in all things forever. Filled with the spirit of God and His will (II, 1103-05), filled with the "martyrdom of love" (II, 868f), free with the "freedom of God" (IV, 796f), confirmed "in sanctifying grace" (IV, 797),¹⁶ though her body was failing (IV, 815), strengthened with the strength of God and "joined to God by God" (IV, 576), "daughter of Mary most holy" (IV, 860), in a "torrent of double graces" (IV, 862), heaven was already at hand. Nothing was left except to realize her longing, which was that

¹⁶This expression is not surprising, since in the language of mysticism it has a non-technical sense. See St. John of the Cross, Canticum 22, 3; J. Gummersbach, Confirmation en grâce, in Dict. de Spirit, II, 1422-42.

of St. Paul: *Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ* (Phil 1:23) in order to share in the great resurrection (which she experienced the following Sunday, April 7) and sing her festive *Te Deum*.

After this, the chronicle of her life may perhaps no longer interest us. But to finish the topic I began, I will list those subsequent events that link her to St. Francis, who played such an important part in her spirituality. If the year 1697 seems particularly full of mystical experiences, the future would be no less so.

About twenty years after receiving the stigmata, May 12, she was the subject of a mystical game in which her "wounded heart" was exchanged for a "loving heart" (II, 381). This exchange, as Father Iriarte writes, "would for a long time fill some of the most vivid pages of her Diary."¹⁷

The following July 12, Jesus told her to prepare for a "great suffering" (II, 178f).¹⁸ On August 16, He allowed her to taste the liquid flowing from His side (II, 218) as He placed a tiny cross in her heart (II, 217f). On September 17, after she had been in what seemed to be "a very dark prison," Jesus showed her St. Francis "transformed just as he was when he received the stigmata." He asked her the same triple question He had asked Peter: *Do you love Me?* Feeling once more the pain of the stigmata, she answered Him with a voice of blood. The account continues:

I returned to my cell and again fell into rapture with a vision of our Lord crucified and our father St. Francis.

The Lord said to me: *Tell me, do you love Me with all your heart, like my seraph here?* As He said this, suddenly our father St. Francis was standing there before the Crucified.

With the radiance that was coming from the two of them, I couldn't see anything but light.

All at once, I seemed to see five dazzling rays of light leave the wounds of Jesus and come to rest in the hands, feet and heart of St. Francis. The reflection was so great I couldn't recognize either of them any more. Our holy father was totally transformed into Jesus. He seemed to be a new Christ. Little by little, the rays

¹⁷Lázaro Iriarte, *S. Veronica Giuliani: Esperienza e dottrina mistica — Pagine scelte*, Rome 1981, p. 71.

¹⁸This was shortly after the decision by the Holy Office to keep her sequestered for fifty days (see II, 536f). The same measure was repeated in 1700 and again in 1703, despite the fact that she had been reinstated as director of novices. In 1714 the confessor and the bishop made her submit to tests that were so unpleasant she thought she was going to die. However, she speaks of "death of the spirit" (II, 1003-05), as she was made to understand by enlightenment from above.

returned to the wounds of Jesus, and once again I saw our holy father standing in prayer before the Crucified.

Then the Lord...made me understand that He had shown me our holy father transformed just as he was when he received the sacred stigmata.... At the very moment our holy father was doing all this, five dazzling rays of light left the Crucified. One came to rest in my heart, the others in my hands and feet. Suddenly I seemed to feel my heart pierced by a lance, and my hands and feet by sharp nails. The pain was excruciating.

As the rays returned to the wounds of Jesus, I saw the tip of the nails and lance within.

Again I saw our holy father prostrate at the feet of Jesus, who was telling him...to give me his blessing. As our holy father was blessing me, a stream of blood issued from the side of the Crucified. It was flowing into the wounded heart of our holy father, and from the heart of Jesus and our holy father it was flowing into my own wounded heart. From there it gushed forth like a fountain and came to rest in the side of the Crucified.

I could see blood with blood and wounds with wounds.

Lost in a furnace of love, I fainted....

After Communion I fell into rapture with the vision of our Lord. He was in glory and had a cross in His hand, adorned with all the instruments of His blessed passion.

He said to me: *Tell me, what do you long for?*

I replied: *You alone, my Lord.*

- *What do you want?*

- *Only Your will, nothing else.*

- *What are you asking for?*

- *I ask for Your love, to love You and be all Yours.*

- *What is Your request?*

- *The salvation of my soul and the conversion of sinners.*

Then He showed me His holy side and said: *Come here to the fountain of all grace.*

He laid the cross on the ground, took my wounded heart and placed it in the middle of the cross, where the crown of thorns was.

He lifted up the cross and said to me: *Do you love Me?*

Yes, I said.

Again he looked at the wounded heart and again He asked me: *Do you love Me?*

Turning to the wounded heart, I said: *You speak, O wounds that were made by the same love!*

As I said this, blood began to flow from all five wounds (II, 250f).

Another day of intense experiences was October 4, of that same year, 1697. It was the feast of St. Francis. From the long account in Veronica's Diary, I will quote only the most important part. The protagonists are Jesus, Francis and Veronica:

Tonight I had a rapture in which the Lord let me know that in a little while He wished to come and renew my wound. And so, while I was in my cell, I kept calling upon the Lord. All at once I fell into rapture with the vision of Jesus crucified and our father St. Francis. Both were all love.

Our father St. Francis was motioning me to go to the wounds of Jesus, and was pointing to His holy side.... While I was watching him [Francis] prostrate before the Crucified, the Crucified became like a shining light. Coming from His hands and feet and side were rays that...were falling on me — my hands, feet and heart.... I found that the wound in my heart had opened, and those in my hands and feet...were also renewed. The more pain I felt, the more suffering I asked for....

The Lord showed me His side and said to me: *Whoever loves Me, remains here within.*

That whole day I seemed to be beside myself.... Everything is as nothing when it is for love of Him! (II, 263f).

5. Presence of St. Francis in the mystical experiences of Veronica the stigmatic

One detail worth keeping in mind is the manner in which Veronica prepared for the two feasts of St. Francis, October 4 and September 17. A beautiful example is her vision of October 2 and 4, 1699:

While I was praying at night...there seemed to be the vision of Jesus crucified, our father St. Francis, other saints and the Blessed Virgin.... All at once I seemed to see rays of light coming from the wounds of Jesus. They came to rest in the hands, feet and heart of St. Francis. Meanwhile our holy father had become so beautiful and resplendent that our sun would be like darkness compared to that light.... The Lord seemed to draw our holy father to Himself and united him to Himself as if he they were one.

Our holy father was so transformed and united to Jesus that to look at him was to look at Jesus Himself.

She concludes: *"In these things...it's best to keep silent"* (II, 517).

Her stigmata were renewed on the third anniversary of their reception, April 3, 1700. Jesus removed the crustlike scabs from her hands and feet. On September 17, her sufferings became so intense that she wrote: "I thought I would die from the pain I felt in my heart" (II, 518). But it was especially on October 4, the Feast of St. Francis, that she experienced their renewal. The devil appeared to her: "He made such a great racket that I thought he wanted

to tear down my cell.... He struck me very hard on one shoulder [and] left such a stench that I thought I'd pass out" (II, 745). During the recitation of Matins, when she heard the words, *I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body* (Gal 6:17) applied to St. Francis, she wrote: "I thought I would die" (II, 746).

The pain of the stigmata in her heart, hands and feet was renewed again on August 12, 1701, the feast of St. Clare (II, 948). The Lord made her understand that she would have to face other hardships:

For the feast of the stigmata of our holy father I would have to begin that hidden and crucified life with pain and great suffering.... I desire nothing but His holy will.... (II, 950).

Such willingness opened up for her new vistas. She wrote: "It seems to me that God gave me a new way of life."

What followed, in fact, was an extremely demanding program of asceticism: The will of God in all things...never sin again...desire true sorrow for her faults. But then there is a passage that analyzes clearly the work of God in her:

I can't begin to describe with my pen what God was doing in my soul. He was lifting me up from myself and, all at once, I could feel everything else lift from me. God alone remained with absolute dominion in my soul.... They were His communications about the things of our heavenly homeland. I could almost feel in my soul an anticipation of Paradise.... Great things were communicated to me.... (II, 963).

The expression He was lifting me up from myself is of extreme importance from an ascetical point of view. All of this was followed by a renewal of the pain of the stigmata:

But the sorrow I felt for my sins surpassed every other pain...it seems to me that God...was changing me into someone else... More than that I can't say (II, 964f).

And then:

The more I speak, the less I say; I'll say everything by keeping silent. It is something very great... (II, 967).

We are witnessing a growth that is extraordinary — unique, I would say, since the hardships of the ascent definitely made themselves felt!

Another year of extraordinary phenomena passed. In September 1702, according to schedule, she felt again a "renewal of the pain." She says that her wound opened and remained thus for five hours. The Lord made her understand that at the end of her life "the marks in my hands and feet would shrink..." She also mentions the difficulties of community life: "...that cross which I understood to be the burden of religious life. Again He confirmed it for me. There were more things on this subject, but I don't care to describe

them. I'll tell them [to you] orally..." (II, 155f).¹⁹ The last days of September and the first days of October were like Calvary. She does not mention St. Francis but writes instead that she was "resigned to the will of God" like Jesus in Gethsemani: *Not what I will but what You will* (Mk 14:36). She was absorbed "in the love of God" (II, 1175f).

On February 6, 1703, she felt the instruments of the passion placed within her heart (III, 7).²⁰ On September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, her stigmata were renewed:

I became recollected with the vision of Jesus crucified and those five dazzling rays that came to rest on me. I seemed to see in them the nails and lance, and I felt a special pain, greater than when I received this grace the first time.²¹ At the same time it wounded my heart, hands and feet.... I felt faint on account of the pain...I thought my heart would break... (III, 181f).

All of this was repeated four days later on the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis. Feeling more and more wrapped in a mystery, she wrote: "I feel love at work within me, but I can't find a way to explain it" (III, 183f).

On June 11, 1705, the feast of Corpus Christi, she fell into rapture after Communion. She saw the Lord, the Blessed Virgin, St. Francis and St. Philip:

The Lord showed me His side and indicated to me that my own heart was supposed to go there.... My heart felt as if it had been captured by a loving magnet... (III, 159).

On October 9, 1711, Veronica was subjected to a sort of spiritual judicial process:

The holy Virgin and all the company of saints were occupying this soul. It had nowhere to appeal...it could find no excuse in the presence of the all-just Judge. At the end, the devils also came with their accusations, and it seemed as if they wished to snatch this soul away... (III, 423f).

Finally St. Francis and St. Clare offered their merits to the Lord through Mary, and so she came out victorious. On October 29, of the same year, she had a vision of Jesus, St. Francis and St. Clare. They led her before the Blessed Virgin:

¹⁹More than once Veronica mentions the difficulties of community life, though always with restraint and sensitivity.

²⁰The autopsy confirmed the existence of a visible impression of the instruments of the passion on her heart.

²¹That is, on April 5, 1697 (V, 9f).

She took me by the hand and offered me her Son. At that moment the tiny cross seemed to embed itself in my heart... Then Jesus and Mary placed a ring on my finger and renewed the marriage between my soul and God (III, 429f).

On October 4, St. Francis pointed out to her a large cross. She saw an assembly of angels and saints approaching it. They venerated it but did not touch it. Then our Lady said to Veronica:

This cross is the one I've given you in exchange for sickness and death. Now you will have to suffer every day and night; your life will be full of pain, but it will be hidden. Leave nothing as usual...greater temptations, troubles and mortal afflictions will be added...you will be abandoned in all things, stretched to the limit of your strength. It will be like this until the Feast of All Saints. This will serve to prepare you for more crosses; it will be for you a new way of suffering so that from it you may learn to suffer (III, 706f).

These are hard sayings, coming from our Lady! Note that the new cross is given to Veronica in exchange for certain illnesses she would have had to suffer, and even death. That is why the number of her sufferings, temptations and troubles will increase. She will even undergo the bitter and painful sense of abandonment — a mystical experience that is very common in the spiritual life. And despite everything that has gone before, it is from these painful experiences that she will learn to suffer!

On May 8, 1714, during a mystical bath of tears and blood she sees herself become "clear as crystal." The Blessed Virgin Mary entrusts her to five saints: "To our father St. Francis, to St. Anthony of Padua, to St. Philip Benizi, to St. Philip Neri and to Blessed Pellegrino" (III, 783). She would have a similar vision on January 27, 1720, but with the additional element of suffering for the souls in purgatory (IV, 191). Thus far we have seen her constant solicitude for the conversion of sinners; now there is a burning desire to atone for the poor souls by taking upon herself their sufferings. This gives rise to a new way of suffering, which she calls "the suffering of all sufferings." But it is also "a new way of loving." In fact, in June 1705, she had already had an experience of purgatory that was supposed to strip her "of all imperfection" (III, 264).

Another vision, December 10, 1714, may be an example of bilocation. She writes:

I seemed to be in Perugia, in the church of St. Dominic. I had no idea where the body of Blessed Colomba was....²² After that I was transported to Assisi and seemed to be in the great church of our Lady. There I seemed to see another

²²Blessed Colomba of Rieti, a Dominican.

smaller church inside the bigger one. I saw our father St. Francis pictured in many places, but I don't know how.²³ All at once I was in Tolentino inside a large church. I was brought by two angels to a long container. It was shining like the clearest crystal. I thought I could see there the arms of St. Nicholas, from which blood was flowing, but only a little.²⁴ Suddenly everything disappeared, and once that happened, I can't say anything (III, 869).

The year 1716, when Veronica turned fifty-six, can be considered the beginning of the final period of her life. But although she was worn out from physical and spiritual sufferings, she had lost none of the energy that always kept her very active. In view of her profound spiritual experiences, people might have taken her to be a woman out of touch with reality. On the contrary, she seems to have been incredibly gifted as a counselor and person of practical common sense. In fact, as soon as the Holy Office restored her active and passive voice, the sisters elected her superior. Her election led to a series of new building projects to modernize the monastery. But her greatest successes were her guidance of the nuns and the surprising increase in vocations. She attributed it all to the Virgin Mary. It was in her name that Veronica, "her daughter and professed," lived the will of God each day, carrying off "the victory of love."

Even after performing all her monastic duties, she still had time to pursue her mystical journey, just as Mary had told her. There would be no lessening of its rhythms. Even during this period of great activity, she never forgot her "holy father." From the evening of September 16, 1717, and all the next day, the feast of the Stigmata, she experienced four full hours of "the renewal of all the sufferings of His holy passion," including also "the renewal of the sorrows of Mary most holy." She felt that they were preparing for her "more crosses and more sufferings" (III, 1336).

On October 4, the Feast of St. Francis, she had another extraordinary vision:

Last night I was in constant pain, and this morning in confession there was the grace of suffering.²⁵

At Mass...after Communion I became recollected with the vision of Mary most holy and many saints. Our holy father, in particular, was standing next to the

²³She is describing the basilica of Our Lady of the Angels. In the Appendices to volume V, 341 there is the addition: "...only that, as I stood before [the image of] Mary most holy, she bowed her head to me and said: Have faith, my daughter!"

²⁴This was the Basilica of St. Nicholas of Tolentino.

²⁵She calls suffering a "grace."

Blessed Virgin who said to me: *Daughter, look here.* Then she pointed toward him. He was as if beside himself, totally transformed into God. As Mary most holy had me perform the adoration of the Holy Trinity, three shining rays went out toward him. At that moment I received the grace to see his sacred wounds. They were like five precious jewels. Coming toward me were five rays that seemed to join my senses — that is, my hands, feet and side — with his, alike yet different.²⁶

I could also see and understand, through communication, the grace received from his holy stigmata....

This is followed by a eulogy of her “holy father:”

All at once he was given a share in the Lord’s holy wounds, and suddenly he became a new Christ, totally of God, with God, for God — and always of God....

His life was like that of Jesus Christ, identical in virtues and sufferings, because he clothed himself in the divine will and always lived by it, even as he does now in paradise...(III, 1142).

Another three years pass, and the name of St. Francis occurs several times. He is mentioned briefly on his feasts, when Veronica experiences a renewal of the pain of the stigmata. On September 17, 1720, there was a renewal of the wound in her heart, not with a lance but with a dart of love. On October 4, she felt the pain of the wounds in her heart, hands and feet. The pain was so great that the pen fell from her hand. She “no longer knew what to write” (IV, 313). Then she asked the Blessed Virgin to graciously help her remember everything so that she “could obey the command to write” (IV, 314). At that point she felt renewed within her “a new manner of divine love,” which brought to her lips an ardent and lofty prayer (IV, 314-16). From that time on, Mary took Veronica’s place when she tried to think; in the future Veronica would write everything at Mary’s dictation (IV, 116).

The renewal of the stigmata took place again on September 17, 1721. The Blessed Virgin reminded her that she would have to suffer twofold for the souls in purgatory. She was to be a “go-between” (*mezzana*) or mediator between God and sinners (IV, 514). In the dialogue of September 17, 1725, Veronica protested that she desired to live only by a love that suffers. She wished to die of love. Then she experienced again the renewal of all her sufferings “through the hand of love and through the intercession of our holy father” (IV, 786). On October 28, 1725, the Blessed Virgin reminded her again

²⁶She sees the stigmata as different not in form, but in brightness.

that she had been confirmed "in sanctifying grace in a divine manner" (IV, 797).

On April 5, 1726, she observed the twenty-ninth anniversary of the grace of the stigmata. Her pains were renewed. So indescribable were the sufferings that she seemed to be nothing but one great wound. The three nights before Good Friday (April 16, 17, and 18) there was a discouraging sense of abandonment. Her pain became an agony. On Good Friday, April 19, she experienced the crucifixion three times. But on Easter Sunday, April 21, she was flooded with indescribable grace. Already she was living in the atmosphere of the resurrection!

In this spiritual atmosphere and in spite of her responsibilities in the monastery, she was able to maintain a spirit of total union with God. What happened during the next months is not easy to describe. We need to imagine it and listen with understanding, in company with the Blessed Virgin herself, who spoke to Veronica and said: "Daughter, write... Remember, remember, remember..." (IV, 839-49). She reminds her of St. Francis and says:

Remember that on the seventeenth of this month holy obedience sent you to me. [You asked me], if it was God's will, to renew in you the pain in your hands, feet and heart, since it was the feast of your seraphic father, the day he received the sacred stigmata.... Your seraphic father was standing beside me in the presence of many saints...five rays of light darted from him and touched you. At that moment the pain in your hands, feet and side was renewed; you felt a special pain and participated in love.... The wounds in your hands and feet bled more...the wound in your heart did not open externally, but you felt intense pain within, which lasted for three days. That day you received many graces... (IV, 875).

The life story of Veronica was coming to an end. Recognized twice more as "worthy daughter" (IV, 886, 892), she continues her Diary despite physical hardships. Everything is dictated by our Lady, who gradually and completely takes the place of our Lord. These are pages full of tender emotion. When she reaches the end of her daily entry, many times our Lady tells her: "Call a halt."

We would think that all is finished. But no, she returns immediately with new ideas and motifs. The final entry is dated March 25, 1727, the feast of the Annunciation, when she wrote her last words. It is Mary who speaks:

You knew nothing of all these things, and yet you consented to everything according to the will of God and remained in your nothingness. Call a halt (IV, 910).

Veronica was to live another four months and continue her "pure suffering" as a victim, fulfilling her mission of suffering until her final breath. Her threefold Yes, yes, yes! and More, more and still more (IV 674) stretched the power of her love to its limits. In the thirty-three days before her death this

love continued to express itself with indescribable variations, until at last it found concrete expression in her final words to her sisters: *Love has let Himself be found! This is the cause of my suffering. Tell it to everyone, tell it to everyone!*²⁷

²⁷L. Iriarte, *Esperienza*, p. 75.