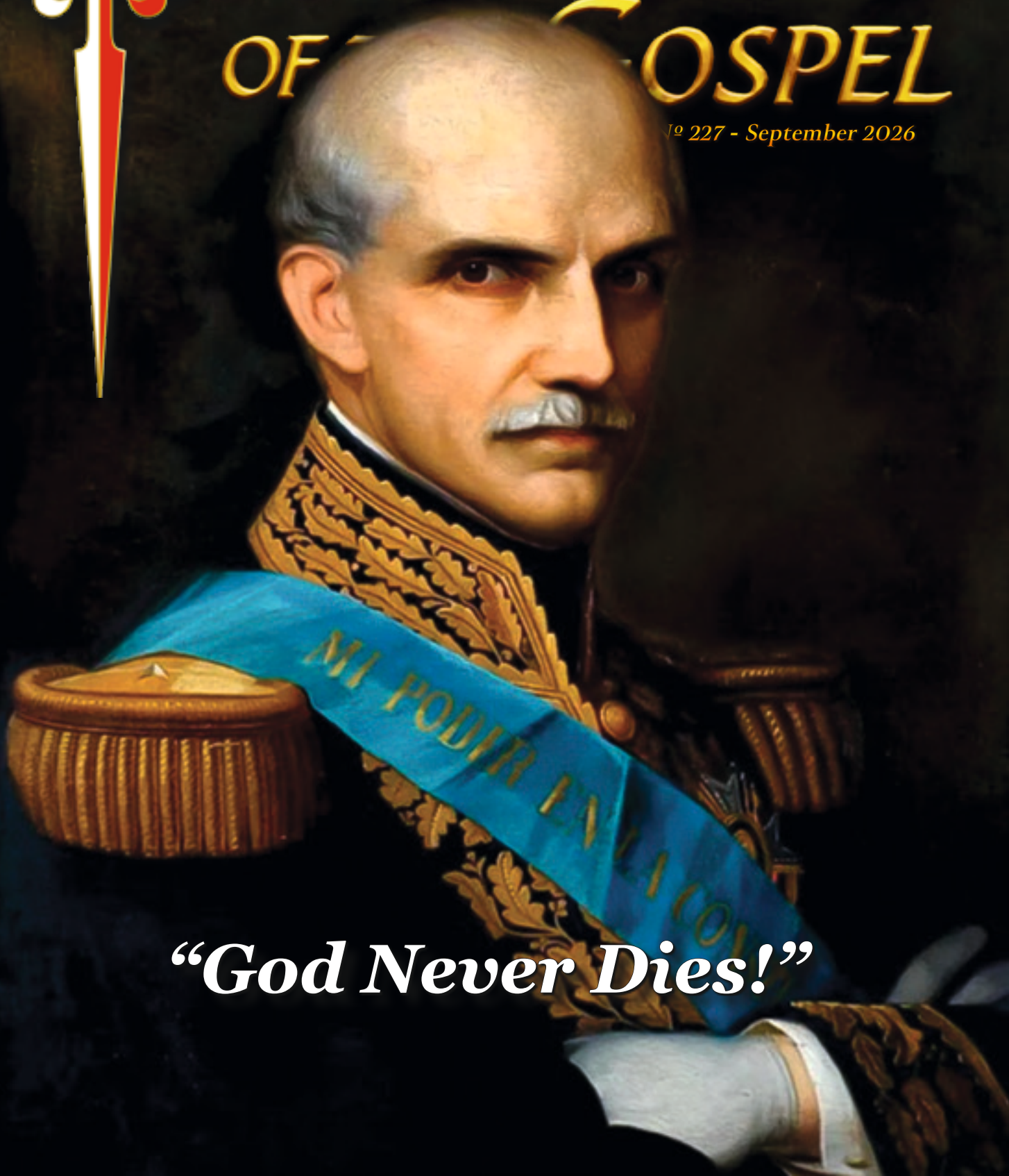




HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

№ 227 - September 2026



“God Never Dies!”

To the Impatient

The impatient and the patient must be admonished in different ways.

The impatient must be told that, by refusing to rein in their own impetuosity, they will find themselves dragged into many abysses of iniquity which they would not have sought out, for fury drives the soul to places it would not wish to go, and the soul, perturbed, acts without knowing what it is doing, only lamenting once it realizes what it has done. It must also be said to the impatient that, by rushing headlong under the impulse of their passions, they act as if they were beside themselves, and so find it difficult to realize the harm done. When they offer no resistance whatsoever to that which disturbs them, they even mar the good they had accomplished with a calm spirit, and in a sudden impulse destroy everything they had built up with great effort over a long period of time. [...]

On the other hand, the patient must be urged not to complain inwardly about what they endure outwardly. Outwardly, they offer a perfect sacrifice of great value; inwardly, they must not allow the poison of evil to corrupt it. Men may not realize it, but the divine gaze discerns sin, and such complaining would be all the more serious a fault because, in the eyes of others, it takes on the appearance of virtue. It is therefore necessary to tell patient men to strive to love those they must endure; lest love fail to accompany patience, and thus the virtue they display be transformed into a worse sin: that of hatred.

ST GREGORY THE GREAT.

Pastoral Rule. Part III, Ch.9



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CONTENTS

➤ OUR READERS ASK.....	4
➤ EDITORIAL	
God Is Invincible!.....	5
➤ THE VOICE OF THE POPES	
Martyrs of Yesterday, Today and Every Age....	6
➤ THE SUNDAY LITURGY	
Fraternal Correction: a Refined Degree of Love	8
Forgiveness: God's "Weakness"	9
It Is Always the Time for Conversion!	10
Divine Pedagogy in Correcting	11
➤ TREASURES OF MSGR. JOÃO	
The Expiatory Victim	12
➤ THEME OF THE MONTH – MARTYRDOM	
Witness, Holocaust, and Glory!	16
Blood of the Martyrs, Seed of Christians ...	19
➤ A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES	
Graces of the Early Church.....	22
➤ ST. THOMAS EXPLAINS	
The Most Perfect of Human Acts?	25
➤ HISTORY – LIFE'S TEACHER	
Gabriel García Moreno – The Promise Vanquished the Volcano	26
➤ CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY	
St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus – Martyr of Love	30
➤ LIVES OF THE SAINTS	
St. Peter Claver – Priest, Apostle and... Slave!.....	34
➤ WHAT DOES THE CATECHISM SAY?	
To Bear Witness to the Truth with Dignity and Fearlessness	37
➤ DONA LUCILIA –	
RAYS OF MATERNAL INTERCESSION	
A Remedy for All Ills	38
➤ HERALDS WORLDWIDE	42
➤ CATHOLIC TRUTHS	
The Most Holy Name of Mary – Reflection of a Celestial Mission	46
➤ DID YOU KNOW.....	49
➤ TENDENCIES AND MENTALITIES	
Letters and "emails", Autographs and Automatism	50



TheDigitalArtist / Pixabay

19 Why is martyrdom beautiful?



Stéfano Gavilanes

26 God does not die, nor does the Virgin's promise



Reproduction

30 Can we be martyrs in everyday life?



Magazine archive

50 Do letters have a place in the digital age?

Send your questions to Fr. Ricardo, by email:
ourreadersask@heralds.org



✠ Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP

I work in a bakery that is open on Sundays. Am I breaking the Third Commandment if I continue working there?

João Fernandes – São Paulo

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “God’s action is the model for human action. If God ‘rested and was refreshed’ on the seventh day (cf. Ex 31:17), man too ought to ‘rest’ and should let others, especially the poor, ‘be refreshed’” (CCC 2172). For this reason, the Sabbath was observed in the Old Testament.

The Catholic Faith brings a new consideration: Jesus rose from the dead “on the first day of the week” (Mk 16:2), that is, on Sunday. Thus, “the day of Christ’s Resurrection recalls the first creation” and, being also the “eighth day,” because it follows the Sabbath, “it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ’s Resurrection”; therefore, Sunday “for Christians has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord’s Day” (CCC 2174).

Regarding the obligation to attend Holy Mass, the *Code of Canon Law* instructs that “A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass” (CIC, can. 1248 § 1). Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the faithful to set aside time for prayer and Sunday rest.

So, how should you proceed in your case, since you work “in a bakery that is open on Sundays”?

The *Catechism* also teaches: “On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord’s Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body,” but adds that “Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest” (CCC 2185).

In this sense, in the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus poses yet another unsettling question: “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” (6:9). And St. Augustine clarifies that “holy leisure is longed for by the love of truth; but but the necessity imposed by love gives assent to undertake requisite business” (*De civitate Dei*. L.XIX, c.19).

Finally, allow me to give you some very concrete advice: when it is not possible for you to attend Holy Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation, first look for alternative times on the same day, or even on the afternoon of the previous day.

Furthermore, if your employer is Catholic or sensitive to religious matters, discuss the possibility of granting you an adequate break to fulfil the Sunday obligation.

Still, if it is impossible to find time to fulfil the Sunday obligation, there is no reason to be distressed, since the imperative of supporting one’s family or caring for a sick person, among other examples, constitutes a sufficiently serious reason to dispense one from fulfilling this norm of the Church (cf. CIC, can. 1248, § 2).

However, for the proper formation of your conscience and to avoid laxity, I suggest you seek out your Bishop or your parish priest to explain the situation, as they may dispense you from the Sunday obligation in such cases, indicating as a substitute, for example, the practice of another pious work (cf. CIC, can. 1245).

As for Sunday rest, necessary for the body – physical rest – and for the soul – dedication to prayer and the study of Catholic doctrine and spirituality – try to do it on another day. ✠



GOD IS INVINCIBLE!

Every human being longs for God. Like a deer parched for water, the human soul yearns for the Creator (cf. Ps 41:2). Original sin, however, introduced an interior disorder that distorts this natural longing, leading the children of Adam to seek other “gods”: fame, material possessions, pleasures... culminating in the desire to kill the Immortal One. Thus the fool rages: “There is no God” (Ps 53:1), for if He existed, I would be allowed nothing!”

The Old Testament epitomizes this contradiction: the Tower of Babel defies the Most High (cf. Gn 11:4); Sodom prefers debauchery to conversion (cf. Gn 19:4-9); and the people, by exchanging “He who is” (Ex 3:14) for the golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-6), choose “he who *is not*.” The wickedness of this “people who err in heart” (Ps 94:10) knows no bounds: they even kill the prophets (cf. Mt 23:37) in an attempt to eliminate the Author of Life.

In response, the Word Himself becomes flesh and dwells amongst men. The Eternal One lives amongst us! And what is humanity’s reaction? They call Jesus a glutton and a drunkard for dining with simple folk, a friend of sinners for offering salvation (cf. Mt 11:19), and “Beelzebul” for casting out demons (cf. Mt 12:24). The hostility of the Sanhedrin culminates in deicide: “Crucify Him!”

Yet death has no power over Him (cf. Rom 6:9). Identifying Himself as “the Resurrection and the Life” (Jn 11:25), Christ vanquishes death. After the Ascension, the Redeemer does not abandon us, but transfigures His presence, continuing to live in His Mystical Body, the Church, which is immortal like Him by divine promise: “The gates of hell shall not prevail” (Mt 16:18).

Moreover, the Almighty dwells in the soul of the righteous, the abode of the Trinity. Convinced of this, a multitude of martyrs preferred death to losing their friendship with God. Whether Lawrence on the gridiron or Ignatius devoured by wild beasts, their testimony cries out in unison: God does not die! And the saints, likewise, live forever, interceding for the Church and serving as examples; for them, “to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

Throughout the centuries, countless imposters have tried to expel God from society. The de-Christianization that began in the late Middle Ages led to a growing change in mentality, whose values, no longer imbued with the Most Precious Blood of Christ, became increasingly steeped in an unprecedented paganism.

From this followed the three great revolutions and their slogans. From the Protestant Revolution, which proclaimed “Christ yes, the Church no,” the process advanced on to the French Revolution, with its “God yes, Christ no,” then arrived at the Communist Revolution, which finally unleashed “the impious cry: God is dead; and even, God never existed!” (Pius XII. *Speech*, 12/10/1952).

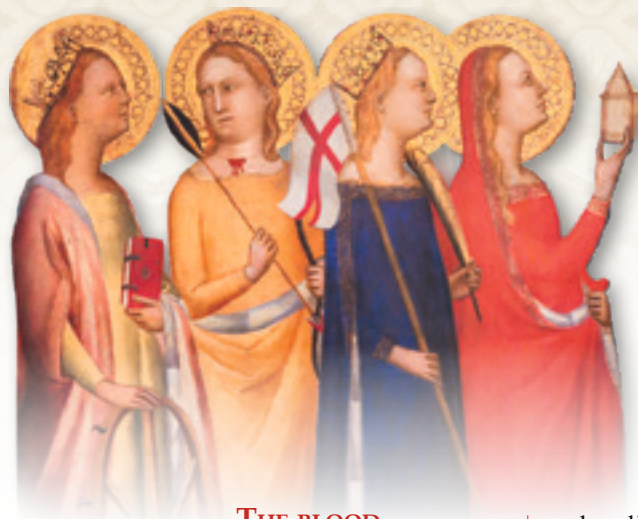
But how can man presume to substitute the Church? To guillotine the Immortal? To decree God’s interment? Let it be noted that this is not a thing of the past: we still witness the banishment of the Divine Teacher from schools, of the Supreme Legislator from the courts and, finally, of the King of the Universe from the entire public sphere...

Faced with those who, with Luciferian hatred, aim to extirpate the sacred, there will always be faithful men who will continue to echo the imprecation of St. Michael: “Who is like unto God?” If death approaches, the cry of Ecuadorian President García Moreno will also resound: “God never dies!” And when their hearts no longer beat, their inert bodies will silently exclaim: “God is invincible!” ❖



*Gabriel García
Moreno, by Luis
Cadena*

Photo: Reproduction



Francisco Lecaros

Martyrs of Yesterday, Today and Every Age...

Their death, incomprehensible to human eyes, is precious in the sight of God; the glory of their faithfulness is an inspiration for our lives.

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS: THE SEED OF NEW CHRISTIANS

The monuments and ruins of ancient Rome speak to humanity of the sufferings and persecutions endured with fortitude by our forebears in the faith, the Christians of the first generations. These ancient remains remind us how true are the words of Tertullian who wrote: “*sanguis martyrum semen christianorum*” — the blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians.” The experience of the martyrs and the witnesses to the faith is not a characteristic only of the Church’s beginnings but marks every epoch of her history.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Homily, 7/5/2000

FIRST CHRISTIANS: PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF THE NAME OF CHRIST

Their very name [of Christians] was equivalent to a declaration of war; and Christians, by the mere fact of their being such, and for no other reason, were forced to choose between apostasy and martyrdom, being allowed no alternative. During the following centuries the same grievances and the same severity prevailed to a greater or less extent, whenever governments were unreasonably jealous of their power

and maliciously disposed against the Church.

LEO XIII.
Au milieu des sollicitudes, 16/2/1892

THEIR DEATH ROUSED SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASM

They were a countless body that the liturgy calls “the white-robed army of martyrs,” *martyrum candidatus exercitus*. Their death did not rouse fear and sadness, but spiritual enthusiasm that gave rise to ever new Christians. For believers the day of death, and even more the day of martyrdom, is not the end of all; rather, it is the “transit” towards immortal life. It is the day of definitive birth, in Latin, *dies natalis*.

BENEDICT XVI.
Angelus, 26/12/2006

LIVING IMAGE OF GOD FOR THE WORLD

The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ’s martyrs who had given the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely joined with us in Christ, and she has always venerated them with special devotion, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy Angels. The Church has piously implored the aid of their inter-

cession. [...] In the lives of those who, sharing in our humanity, are however more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ, God vividly manifests His presence and His face to men. He speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of His Kingdom.

ST. PAUL VI. *Lumen gentium*,
Second Vatican Council, 21/11/1964

THEIR MARTYRDOM CONTINUES TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL

Many brothers and sisters, even today, carry the same cross as our Lord on account of their witness to the faith in difficult situations and hostile contexts: like Him, they are persecuted, condemned and killed. [...] They are women and men, religious, lay people and priests, who pay with their lives for their fidelity to the Gospel. [...] their martyrdom continues to spread the Gospel in a world marked by hatred, violence and war; it is a hope filled with immortality because, even though they have been killed in body, no one can silence their voice or erase the love they have shown; it is a hope filled with immortality because their witness lives on as a prophecy of the victory of good over evil.

LEO XIV.
Homily, 14/9/2025

ASSOCIATED WITH THE REDEEMING SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

Not only do We love them with a fatherly love, but We reverence them with a fatherly veneration, since We are fully aware that their high sense of duty is sometimes crowned with martyrdom. Jesus Christ, the first martyr, said: “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15:20). [...] Missionaries in foreign lands who die in the fulfilment of their sacred duty are seeds destined, when God so wills, to bear abundant fruit.

PIUS XII.

Evangelii præcones, 2/6/1951

THEY WILL NEVER STEAL THE FAITH OF THOSE WHO PERSEVERE

Although men may take away their freedom, subject them to torments, expose them to public scorn, throw them into prison, even condemn them to death, they cannot, however, tear the Catholic Faith from their hearts nor stain their conscience. They may make martyrs, if they wish; but they cannot make traitors to the Christian Religion – as we hope and ask God in our prayers – provided that all, with the firmest will, are persevering in obedience to the laws of God and of the Church.

PIUS XII.

Impensiore caritate, 28/10/1951

GLORY OF THE CHURCH AND CONFUSION OF ITS ADVERSARIES

This is a major victory for the Church and for religion. It casts the persecutors into confusion when they see that even today the divine promises of unending protection and help are really fulfilled. This is the reason why, in the words of St. Leo: “the religion established by the sacrament of the Cross of Christ cannot be destroyed by any kind of cruelty.”

GREGORY XVI.

Probe nostis, 18/9/1840

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO RESIST AND PERSEVERE

Christian virtue must do and suffer much, but God Himself will reward it most generously with everlasting happiness. There is always a bit of martyrdom in such virtue if we really want to strive day by day for a greater perfection of Christian life. For not only by shedding of blood is the witness of our faith given to God, but also by courageous and constant resistance to the lure of evil, and by the complete and generous dedication of all that we are and have to Him Who is our Creator and Redeemer, and will one day be our never ending joy in Heaven.

PIUS XII.

Invicti athletæ Christi, 16/5/1957

MAY THE BLESSED VIRGIN CONSOLE AND SUSTAIN US

Indeed, the persecution of Christians does not only happen through mistreatment and weapons, but also with words, that is, through lies and ideological manipulation. [...] throughout the history of the Church, it is above all the martyrs who remind us that God’s grace is capable of transforming even violence into a sign of redemption. Therefore, joining with our brothers and sisters who suffer for the name of Jesus, let us confidently seek the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. In every trial and difficulty, may the Blessed Virgin console and sustain us.

LEO XIV.

Angelus, 16/11/2025

QUEEN OF MARTYRS UNITED TO THE PASSION OF CHRIST

It was She, the second Eve, who, free from all sin, original or person-

al, and always more intimately united with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father for all the children of Adam, sin-stained by his unhappy fall, and her mother’s rights and her mother’s love were included in the holocaust. [...]. finally, bearing with courage and confidence the tremendous burden of her sorrows and desolation, She, truly the Queen of Martyrs, more than all the faithful “filled up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ [...] for His Body, which is the Church” (Col 1:24) and She continues to have for the Mystical Body of Christ, born of the pierced Heart of the Saviour, the same motherly care and ardent love.

PIUS XII.

Mystici Corporis, 29/6/1943

MOTHER WHO WATCHES OVER ALL THE PERSECUTED

Mary, who held the Redeemer in her arms at Bethlehem, also suffers an interior martyrdom herself. She shared His passion and had to take Him yet again in her arms when He was taken down from the Cross. To this Mother, who knew the joy of His birth and the torment of the death of her divine Son, we entrust all those who are persecuted and suffering in various ways for their witness and service to the Gospel.

BENEDICT XVI.

Angelus,
26/12/2006

Although they were put to death in the flesh, their testimony remains as a prophecy of the victory of good over evil

On this page and the previous, “The Beatitudes” by Puccio di Simone – National Gallery, Parma (Italy)





September 6 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Ez 33:7-9; Ps 94; Rom 13:8-10; Mt 18:15-20)

Fraternat Correction: a Refined Degree of Love



✠ Fr. Luiz Alexandre de Souza, EP

The Gospel passage for this Sunday's Liturgy is found between two excerpts that give it full meaning. First, the warning that precedes it: "it is not the will of my Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Mt 18:14).

In dictating the norms for fraternal correction, on this Sunday, the Divine Master lists some powers conferred on His disciples: to judge public sinners, to bind and loose on earth and in Heaven, to infallibly intercede with God, and to make Him present where the faithful gather in His name. All these faculties, however, are ordained to the ultimate end of the Church: the salvation of souls.

This is so desired by God that, as the first reading of this Sunday attests, He imposes on Ezekiel the obligation to warn the sinner, for whose eternal salvation the prophet will be held accountable if he fails to act. Looking two verses beyond those designated for this Liturgy, we find: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez 33:11). This refers, therefore, to the fraternal correction prescribed in the Old Testament, aimed at changing conduct and consequently leading to salvation.

The driving force and the reason for this correction are indicated by St. Paul in the second reading: love, on which all the Commandments depend. How

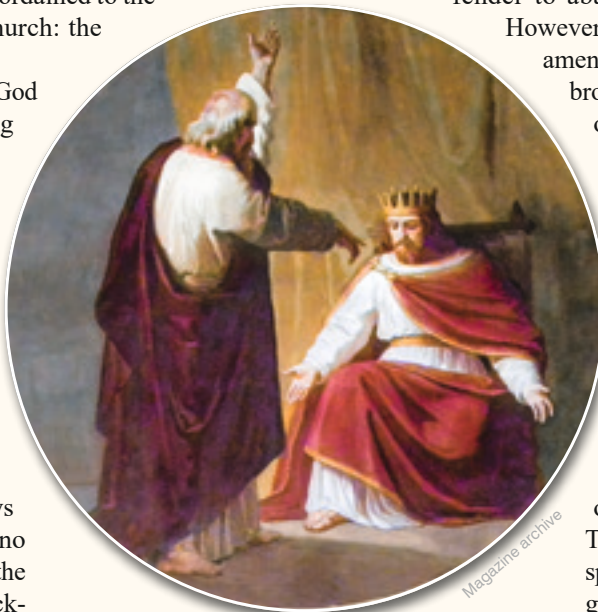
different this is from the contemporary mentality, which confuses love with passive acceptance of the errors of others! The present combination of sacred texts teaches the opposite: to love someone is to do everything possible so that divine designs may be fulfilled in them, above all helping them to avoid sin.

In the progressive way in which Jesus orders correction to be carried out, charity shines through: first, correcting alone, in private – "If he listens to you, you have won over your brother" (Mt 18:15). If he has failed to heed this secret admonition, the presence of witnesses may still convince the offender to abandon the wrong path.

However, if even then he does not amend, then charity takes on a broader character: by virtue of justice, the obstinate culprit is punished and treated as a public sinner, in order to avoid scandal and dissuade the unwary.

The possibility of forgiveness, nevertheless, always accompanies the sinner, should he repent, which is the main goal of fraternal correction. The Divine Redeemer will speak of this unlimited forgiveness in the following parable of the unforgiving debtor (cf. Mt 18:21-35).

Thus, through the arrangement of these Gospel passages, the Divine Master teaches us that fraternal correction is born from the desire to save souls and that it blossoms into forgiveness, both exquisite fruits of love, which, in turn, "is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom 13:10). ✠



David is rebuked by the prophet Nathan -
St. Ambrose Cathedral, Vigevano (Italy)

Fraternat correction, far from being a condemnatory judgement, is the supreme expression of love that seeks to prevent sin and save souls

Forgiveness: God's "Weakness"



✠ Fr. Marcos Faes de Araújo, EP

The maxim of the law of retaliation, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," governed the social relationships of ancient peoples. So great was its influence as a moral standard that even the chosen people – the receptacle of Revelation and messianic expectation – were themselves dominated by this mentality, to the point of neglecting the sublime precept of loving one's neighbour as oneself, already prescribed by Moses (cf. Lv 19:18).

On the other hand, intimate communion with Christ led the Apostles to witness an unfathomable ocean of goodness towards all who approached Him with a contrite heart: lepers, the blind, and the paralyzed were healed, the possessed were freed, the dead were resurrected... Above all, sinners were forgiven, recovering friendship with God and, consequently, the invaluable gift of inner peace!

The Divine Master thus inaugurated a new paradigm in the relationship between God and men: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt 11:29). This new model demanded a radical change of life from the Apostles, a true *metanoia*. It was a matter of conforming one's own existence to the model of evangelical perfection, founded on the renunciation of self-love and entirely devoted to the glory of God and the good of souls.

It is in this context that the question of St. Peter, recorded in the Liturgy of this Sunday, is inserted: "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" (Mt 18:21).

Our Lord's answer is eloquent: one must forgive not only seven times, but seventy times seven! In that culture, the number seven symbolized fullness. The multiplication of these numbers emphasizes the need for unlimited forgiveness.

To illustrate this requirement, Jesus presents the parable of the servant forgiven a "huge amount" (Mt 18:24). The more precise Greek text speaks of

ten thousand talents, an astronomical amount equivalent to hundreds of tons of silver or the salary for millions of days of work!... For the time, it was a debt impossible to pay back through human effort.

Something similar happens in relation to the Kingdom of Heaven: in the plan of salvation, every creature owes an unpayable amount to the Creator. Original sin and our faults, by offending the Infinite Being, also acquire infinite gravity. Only through the merits of the Most Precious Blood of the Redeemer, shed for love of humanity, is our debt paid and Paradise reopened. The non-negotiable condition for obtaining this forgiveness consists in imitating Christ, by forgiving – even if in an incomparably inferior way – those who offend us.

The same principle can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the sad state of contemporary humanity.

Only through an immense and gratuitous forgiveness from the Heart of Jesus, obtained through the supplication of His Most Holy Mother, will the world rise again, repentant, to the authentic Faith. The glorious promises of Fatima – "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph!" – point to the Reign of Mary and of her Divine Spouse, as the full realization of the Son of God's supplication to the Eternal Father: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" (cf. Mt 6:10). ✠

*In imitation
of the Divine
Heart, a new
paradigm
for relation-
ships emerged
among men*



Sacred Heart of Jesus - private collection

It Is Always the Time for Conversion!



Fr. Celio Luís Casale, EP

The parable of the workers reveals the infinite divine mercy that invites everyone, at all times, to work in the Lord's vineyard

It is during His last journey to Jerusalem that Our Lord Jesus Christ tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. In it, the Saviour reveals the extreme goodness that emanates from His Divine Heart.

In the labour of the harvest, a good number of extra workers were needed. Thus, the head of the household goes out, several times throughout the day, in search of workers. In an analogous way, God proceeds with us: at a certain moment in our lives, He invites us to work in His vineyard. Here is the loving plea, full of hope and forgiveness, that “the scoundrel forsake his way, [...] let him turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving” (Is 55:7). What benevolence!

However, as Fillion observes, “not everyone begins to work on their salvation and sanctification at the same time in their life. Some do so in the first hour, from their childhood; others, in their youth; still others, in middle age; and some begin when the precursory signs of death are already manifesting themselves.”¹ It does not matter when grace reaches us: whether in the first or last hour. The reward for all will be unsurpassed. What matters is the promptness of our “yes!”: “Blessed are the workers of the first hour, who have lived only for God! Blessed also are those who, having heard the call of grace at any time in their lives, respond to it and hasten to their Savior, in order to work with Him and for Him!”²

God does not give up on any of us. If the devil of discouragement suggests that our faults make us unworthy, let us remember that the Lord's thoughts are as far above ours “as

the heavens are above the earth” (Is 55:9). Divine accounting is not governed by human logic: the mercy of the Heart of Jesus covers a multitude of sins. God is not a “boss” who rewards for meritorious work; He is a Father who calls everyone to Heaven. It is enough for us to say “yes!”

Even if we say “yes!” and then change to a “no!”, we cannot be discouraged, for grace never abandons us! If we fall into the tortuous and cursed paths of sin, there will always be a Father waiting for our return. The invitation to work in the Lord's vineyard only expires when we breathe our last breath.

Therefore, “no one should be discouraged if they have long put off concerning themselves with their salvation, for God's mercy has a reward reserved for everyone. However, it is also necessary to respond to Jesus' call promptly and decisively. None of those summoned to labour in this parable suggested starting at a later hour, but went to work immediately. Nor did anyone decline. This is how we must act: we must not delay our ‘yes’ to the Master's call.”³

The difficulties and the *pondus diei et æstus* – the burden and heat of the day (cf. Mt 20:12) – are inevitable, but the exceedingly great reward reserved for us in Heaven surpasses any sacrifice suffered on this earth. ✠

¹ FILLION, Louis-Claude. *Vida de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo: Vida pública*. Madrid: Rialp, 2000, v.II, p.435.

² Ibid.

³ CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. The Gnawing Worm of Envy. In: *New Insights on the Gospels*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; Heralds of the Gospel, 2013, v.II, p.352.

“The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard”, by David Teniers the Younger – La Salle University Art Museum, Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)



Divine Pedagogy in Correcting

✠ Fr. Pablo Luis Werner Benjumea, EP



This Sunday's Liturgy presents us with the passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew in which Our Lord Jesus Christ, after expelling the money changers from the Temple and responding to the Jewish leaders about His authority (cf. Mt 21:12-13; 23-27), gives a forceful warning to the high priests and elders: tax collectors and prostitutes will precede them in the Kingdom of Heaven. These sinners, in fact, believed in John the Baptist, while those hardened ones peremptorily rejected the Precursor.

The comparison is undoubtedly humiliating for those religious leaders. Why does the Lord use such harsh language? Lack of love? Quite the contrary: He treats them this way precisely because He loves them.

The Divine Craftsman loves His creatures (cf. Wis 11:24) and wants all men to be saved (cf. 1 Tm 2:4). The Holy Trinity has always known those members of the Sanhedrin, choosing them and creating them so that, as authorities of the chosen people, they might glorify God in their lives and unite themselves to Him. To this end, the Son would become incarnate and, "taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7), suffer the Passion and die on the Cross. There is no greater proof of love (cf. Jn 15:13).

Now, for God we are not mere numbers; we are children. Thus, as a good Father, the Lord adapts His teaching to the temperament, circumstances, and spiritual situation of each one, even in a reprimand.

We can see in the Holy Gospels various forms of correction. With some, Jesus uses harsh expressions: He rebukes Peter, calling Him "Satan" (Mt 16:23); He denounces the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, comparing them to "whitewashed tombs" (Mt 23:27) and "serpents, you brood of vipers" (Mt 23:33). With others, however, He is lenient: He forgives the adulterous woman, exhorting her not to sin again (cf. Jn 8:11); He teaches Martha not to worry about so many things, for only

one thing is necessary (cf. Lk 10:41-42); He incessantly seeks to save even Judas, until the very last moment, questioning him about the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22:48).

This infinite love cost the Redeemer His own Passion and ignominious Death. Given this, how do we act? Do we omit correction for fear of the consequences, for fear, for example, of losing a friendship? And, when we correct, do we truly seek the good of our neighbour, or are we merely venting our pride on them? Finally, do we humbly accept the corrections we receive, or do we rebel, or make excuses?

Let us pray to the Virgin Mary to intercede for us with her Divine Son, so that we may obtain superabundant graces to have a heart like His: full of love, selfless, strong, compassionate, patient, and humble. In this way, we will truly be able to share in "this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). ✠

God deals with each of us individually. Let us do the same!



"Christ and the adulterous woman", by Rocco Marconi – Corsini Gallery, Rome



The Expiatory Victim

A sublime calling which Providence makes clearly felt in the depths of the soul: the expiatory victim, following the example of Our Lord, voluntarily offers up his own life in order to suffer for God's cause and for the benefit of souls.

✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

We know that in the Old Testament, the way to make amends for offenses against God consisted of offering a victim, immolating it with the shedding of blood, a symbol of life. This sacrifice appeased divine wrath and resulted in the reparation of the acquired stain (cf. Lev 5:15-26).

In the Holy Scriptures, we find many figures in this regard, from Genesis, in the episode where Abraham, upon untying Isaac and removing him from the altar, sees a lamb caught by its horns in a bush and sacrifices it in place of his son (cf. Gn 22:3-13), to the glorification of the slain Lamb narrated in Revelation (cf. Rev 5:9-14).

However, in the Book of Leviticus (cf. Lev 16, 10, 20-22) there is a description of another ceremony that the Law imposed on the Jews, from the time of Moses, and which had to be repeated every year on the Day of Atonement. The assembly would gather and present a bound goat. The high priest would approach and, placing his hands on the animal's head, confess all the sins committed by the people of Israel during the entire year. The goat would then be led to a secluded place in the desert, where it was released and left free as a cursed creature, laden with ignominy.

Our Lord, the Victim par excellence

We should keep in mind that all the customs and rites of the Old Law were in some way prefigurative of the great and unique Sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 9:8-12).

The scene of the expiatory goat also suggests a highly expressive idea to the mind, through metaphors: the God of all purity, without any guilt, presents Himself no longer as the purest white Paschal Lamb, clean, fragrant and adorned with ribbons, sacrificed to save our lives, but under the horrendous image of an ugly, dirty and smelly

animal, with the characteristics of the infamy of sin, overwhelmed by the curses hurled upon it.

Much more than Atlas of Greek mythology, supporting the celestial vault on his shoulders, Jesus shows Himself to us, His shoulders oppressed under the sad, heavy, and repugnant burden of so many crimes, accumulated not only by the Jewish people, but by humanity of all times and places... Without uttering a single complaint, the Redeemer submitted Himself to all the torments imposed upon Him by His adversaries, who hated Him.

Far be it from us, however, to be astonished by this aspect of Our Lord, thinking it to be an exaggeration, for all this is still inferior to reality: there are no words to express the infinite gravity of every mortal sin, because it constitutes a formal disobedience to the Eternal Being. Thus, once sin entered the world, we needed a victim whose merits were also infinite, "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). How could this reparation be made?

It was necessary that the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, taking on our flesh and uniting divine and human nature, assume upon Himself the miseries of humanity and shed His own Blood to repair the offense committed against the Father, reintroduce supernatural life into us, and open the gates of Paradise for us.

All the customs and rites of the Old Law were a foreshadowing of the one great Sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ

"The Sending of the Scapegoat", by
William James Webb (edited)



Offering at the Incarnation and Presentation in the Temple

From the first instant when the shadow of the Holy Spirit enveloped Mary and the Soul was infused into the embryo being formed in her blessed and maternal womb, Jesus already possessed the highest and most elevated understanding of the entire past, present, and future, for His Soul was created in the beatific vision. And, seeing God face to face, He knew His mission as Victim and accepted it in the freedom of His human will, in a lucid and conscious holocaust.

The Saviour renewed this act countless times throughout His life, but the culminating moment occurred in the mystery of the Presentation. When His parents prepared Him to take Him to the Temple, and He entered there in Our Lady's arms, His tiny heart, that of a forty-day-old baby, may have palpitated faster, because it burned with emotion and the desire to give Himself.

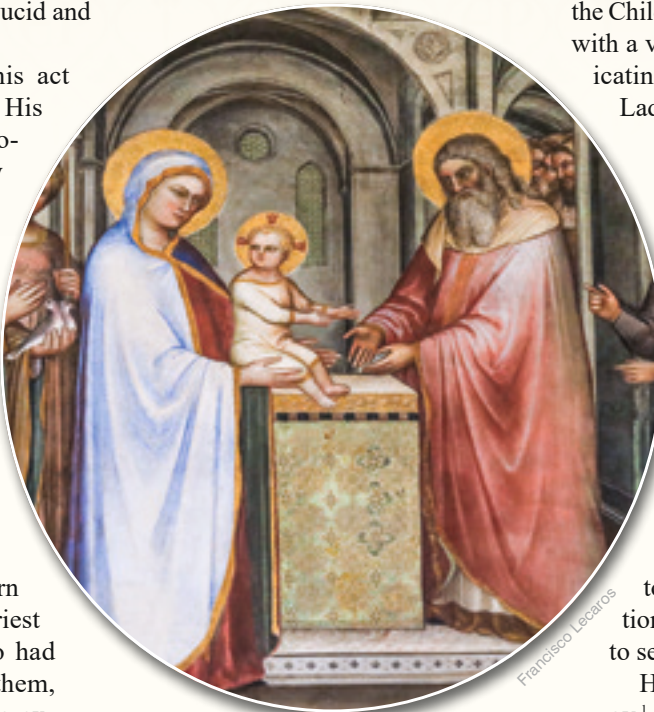
Indeed, since the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, the Law required that firstborn males be presented to the priest as an offering to God, who had a right of ownership over them, having saved them from the exterminating plague that killed the Egyptians (cf. Ex 13:2, 14-15). Therefore, from the hands of His Mother the Child passed to those of aged Simeon who, by revelation of the Holy Spirit in the depths of his soul, waited to see the Messiah.

There, in the Temple of Jerusalem, two priests met: Simeon and Jesus; not only did the venerable elder, as a minister of the Old Covenant, officially offer Him, but the Child Jesus also consecrated Himself as an expiatory Victim to the Father.

Now, if He already belonged to God the Father, why did He wish to submit

Himself to this ceremony? Because He desired, from His earliest age, to seal the Redemption of humankind and the defeat of evil.

Our Lady understood perfectly what was happening and She also offered Him, knowing that on that occasion it was possible to redeem her only Son for five shekels of silver (cf. Ex 13:13; Num 8:17; 18:15-16) and receive Him back, but that the moment would come when She herself would consent to deliver Him on Calvary.



The example of Jesus, Archetype of expiation in favour of souls, opens the way for us to offer ourselves to God with Him

"The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple", by Giusto de Menabuoi – Padua Cathedral (Italy)

This was a magnificent and moving scene, witnessed by all those who were present, who heard Simeon's words and realized that something completely unusual was transpiring.

Of what does the vocation of an expiatory victim consist?

The example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Archetype of expiation in favour of souls, opens the way for us, in-

viting us to also expiate with Him. This is a duty about which we rarely meditate and often forget: that of voluntary penance for our own sins and those of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, mingling, in some way, a drop of our blood in the chalice of the Redeemer.

How many souls have been purified through penance, like David, the king-prophet, St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalene and St. Augustine! Others, innocent and ardent, like St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, immolated themselves with a view to praising God and dedicating themselves entirely to Our Lady!

The expiatory victim par excellence is one who, faced with a need pertaining to God's cause and the benefit of souls, consciously and voluntarily gives up one's own life to produce that desired effect. This is a very specific and sublime vocation, which Providence makes clearly felt in the depths of the soul. Not everyone is called to follow this path; it is up to one to discern whether the inspiration comes from grace or not, and to seek the guidance of a superior.

However, according to Theology,¹ for a person to be considered an expiatory victim, it is not necessary for the offering to be explicit and formal; it is enough to state it in a generic way, conforming to God's will and leaving it in His hands to do with them whatever He wants: to take their life, to have them become bedridden, paralyzed, blind, mute, deaf...

But, in general – as theologians also say – all those who make a genuine and valid offering, and are accepted by Providence, do not associate the torments they endure with the offering they have made, and even forget all about it! Then they suffer with doubt and, in the

honesty of their conscience, believe they deserve this “punishment” because of the faults committed in their past life.²

Providence allows this because, if the person had a clear understanding here on earth that their offering had been accepted, everything would become easy, the trial would cease, and such relief would greatly diminish their merits, possibly even constituting a temptation to vanity. Only when they see God face to face in Heaven will everything become clear!

We all have something to offer

Someone might ask: since this calling is a special and unequivocal invita-

tion, and nothing indicates that grace has touched the depths of my soul in this direction, should I then cross my arms, thinking that I have nothing to offer? Is it perhaps a matter of putting on a hair shirt and flagellating myself with disciplines? Or, if I have already renounced material possessions, my career, and even the possibility of organizing my own time through a vow of obedience, what more can I give?

Let us not deceive ourselves! However excellent a man may be, while he lives on this earth, he always has something to improve, for according to St. Thomas Aquinas,³ only the humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lady,

and the beatific vision could not have been made better than they are.

Let us take the historical example of the Apostles: when they met Our Lord, they left behind their family, their boats, nets, and their entire lives, and followed Him. Wherever He slept, they also camped; They lived on alms from the public, they no longer possessed any goods, they had given absolutely everything.

Did they have nothing left to give?...

The Gospels recount that, as Our Lord went up to Jerusalem for the last time, He categorically announced to them that He would be arrested, judged, condemned, and killed there, but on the third day He would rise again (cf. Mt 20:17-19). It was after this conversation that the mother of James and John, relatives of Jesus, prostrated herself before Him, asking that her sons sit one at His right and the other at His left in the Kingdom that He was about to establish (cf. Mt 20:20-21). The scene was such that the other Apostles began to argue among themselves which of them deserved such a prestigious place...

Therefore, they had given up everything that was easy. But did they understand that the Kingdom of the Messiah was not of this world? Did Peter, who had proclaimed the divinity of the Master (cf. Mt 16:16), grasp this?

The Apostles had mindsets, principles, ways of analysing things and understanding Our Lord from which they did not want to detach themselves, because they would cease to participate



We must learn to offer expiatory actions, however simple and ordinary they may be, and to lay our contribution upon the altar of holocaust

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus on 30 August 1897, her last portrait

¹ “Even without the formal vow, one can offer oneself to the merciful Love of God, according to the formula composed by St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and approved by the Apostolic Penitentiary on July 31, 1923. [...] We can also ask the Blessed Virgin to offer us each day to her Son, according to her maternal prudence, which will not allow us to be subjected to sufferings beyond our

strength; that She may offer us in accordance with her ardent zeal, so that we may give to her Son all that He expects from each of us, until the day of our entry into glory” (GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, OP, Réginald. *La unión del sacerdote con Cristo, Sacerdote y Víctima*. Madrid: Rialp, 1955, p.115-116).

² Commenting on the forty-five years of interior desolation suffered by St. John of the Cross, Friar Garrigou-Lagrange states: “This is truly the path of reparation in all its depth and elevation, the apostolate through spiritual suffering, at an exceptional level. It was not merely the deprivation of sensible consolations, but as it were, an eclipse of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The Saint felt abandoned by God, he felt that God was angry with him. The temptations to despair and sadness were overwhelming” (GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, OP, Réginald. *Les trois âges de la vie intérieure. Prélude de celle du ciel*. Paris: Cerf, 1951, t.II, p.666). Specifically regarding expiatory victims, the words of Mother Francisca of Rio Negro – herself one of these vic-

in the delightful worldview in vogue in Hebrew society at that time.

And what about us? Do we also have a vision of the universe that is not according to Our Lord Jesus Christ? How much indecision, how much temporization, how much liberalism and lack of absolute surrender! Why? Because we like to keep our own criteria.

We need to know how to offer expiatory acts, even simple and common ones, and place our contribution on the altar of holocaust, because this struggle lasts a lifetime and always presents new aspects. Each one has to discover the points to be corrected, and it is certain that Providence, through our Guardian Angel, will inspire us with the appropriate sacrifice to achieve it.

For one, for example, it will be a curiosity that until then was irrepressible. For another, a feeling of honour so ingrained in their interior that they revolt when unjustly accused. For yet another, the struggle against self-love, vanity, and pride, the difficulty of placing one's own failure in the hands of Our Lady...

If God is delighted with the offering that comes from an innocent soul and receives it, so it is with us: "a contrite and humbled heart" (Ps 50:19) moves the Heavens and is like the rain watering this earth, so that from the planted seeds may sprout gigantic trees, which will develop over the centuries and millennia, producing extraordinary effects and reaching the fullness of their fruits.



Gustavo Kralj

At the very heart of social transformation and the founding of a new civilization lies the holocaust of expiatory victims

Msgr. João in 2009

Therefore, the most sacred hour of our existence occurs when trial and temptation assail us, because we approach Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Olives. As long as we suffer in union with Him, walking towards suffering as true "strong men"⁴ – as to St. Teresa recommended to her nuns – then we will become sacral.

And, if it is true that Catholics are called to guide the heart of Public Opinion through example and customs, we must understand that without martyrdom nothing is done, nothing is moved, nothing is achieved.

The core of social transformation and the foundation of a new civilization called the Reign of Mary has its root in the holocaust of the expiatory victims. "My Immaculate Heart will triumph!" – who does not realize that this triumph has already begun to be established on the face of the earth? Only one who is either blind and deaf, or does not know how to interpret the future by looking at the present... ✚

Excerpts from oral expositions given between 1992 and 2010

tims – published by the same French Dominican, her spiritual director, are very enlightening: "Such souls are therefore overwhelmed by great moral suffering and as if absorbed and devoured by inexpressible sorrows. [...] It is as if at certain moments hell were unleashed to wrest from them an act of despair and convince them that after death only absolute nothingness or eter-

nal loss awaits them" (GAR-RIGOU-LAGRANGE, OP, Réginald. *Madre Francisca de Jesus*. Campinas: Ecclesiæ, 2013, p.114). Regarding the trials suffered by the nun, Friar Juan Arintero commented, in response to a letter she wrote to him: "It is necessary to experience this absolute void in order to be filled with the fullness of God. And only God can console the one who suf-

fers such a trial... it is necessary to be conformed to Jesus Christ in His abandonment in Gethsemane and Calvary, in order to enter with Him into a new glorious life. It is not the 'prelude to eternal death,' as you fear, but rather the true mystical death in relation to everything and to oneself, and the prelude to eternal life" (ARINTERO GONZÁLEZ, OP, Juan. Carta para Madre

Francisca de Jesus. In: GAR-RIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Madre Francisca de Jesus*, op. cit., p.18).

³ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I, q.25, a.6, ad 4.

⁴ ST. TERESA OF JESUS. *Caminho de perfeição*, c.VII, n.8.



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Witness, Holocaust, and Glory!

How can one not admire the generosity, fortitude, and charity of these souls? Clinging to the Christian Faith, they faced physical and moral suffering, obtaining, in an instant, eternal life and happiness.



✠ Isabela Fernandes Corrêa

Beneath the streets, squares, and amphitheatres of the bustling Roman capital in the first centuries after Christ, a different life pulsates. Veritable labyrinths extend, narrow and damp, concealing, like criminals, people who possess the ultimate freedom; dark crypts shelter souls clothed in light, destined, soon, for the celestial heights.

In one of the chambers, some faithful gather around a bloody corpse... A priest murmurs prayers over the recently murdered victim. The dismalness of the place pales before the melancholy of the scene. Despite this, an inexplicable glow is noticeable in their faces: contrary to what one would expect, they all show a profound, grave, and serene contentment, mixing tears of sorrow and joy. Although death always brings suffering through separation, joy triumphs in the hearts of those poor fugitives, driven by the certainty of faith, consolidated in hope: the soul of the deceased is finally in the arms of God, from where it will intercede for those who still struggle on earth.

Ah, martyrs! What glory they found beyond the executioners' blades or after the tearing fangs of wild beasts – what a great reward for the loss of

their own lives! The Holy Church has always dedicated enthusiastic praise and outstanding devotion to them, enchanted by that which, to worldly eyes, would cause only horror.

But what is so special about martyrdom, considering that death is the destiny of all men?

From a common word to a title of glory

The word *martyr* comes from the Greek μάρτυς – *mártys* –, which means *witness*. The term evolved from a generic concept to that of testimony given with one's own blood.

In the New Testament, Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5), “is not called a martyr because he died, but simply because he is a witness of Christ in his evangelizing activity.”¹

Only from the second century onwards, with the *Martyrium Policarpi* – an account of the execution of St. Polycarp – did the word come to designate the immolation of life, the ultimate expression of witnessing. Since then, the title has been reserved for those who embraced death out of perfect charity.

According to Theology, martyrdom has been described as “the act of the

virtue of fortitude by which one voluntarily suffers death in witness to the Faith or any other Christian virtue related to the Faith.”²

Fidelity unto the shedding of blood

In this description, two aspects are indispensable: the witness of Faith and the acceptance of death.

Regarding the first, if the martyr is, above all, a witness, what about Christians who did not live with the Saviour?

Strictly speaking, the Apostles and disciples of the Saviour, those who saw with their own eyes, contemplated and touched the manifestation of the Word of Life (cf. 1 Jn 1:1), are called witnesses of the Christian Faith. However, martyrs are also considered witnesses because they saw the Divine Redeemer with the eyes of faith, by embracing Christian doctrine through Tradition. By declaring their firm adherence to the Church, they attest to the truth they received from Christ, present in them to strengthen them in their sufferings.

For this declaration, long speeches are not necessary; the confession of Faith is enough, for in it resides the very truth.³ The accounts of Trajan's persecution (97-117 A.D.) attest that anyone who bore the

name of Christian could be condemned to death, the revocation of which was only possible by renouncing that title.⁴

Death is an essential requisite for martyrdom.⁵ Many faithful suffered torture and imprisonment, becoming *confessors of the Faith*, but, surviving, they did not consummate the final testimony that reproduces the Passion of Christ.⁶ This does not detract from their faithfulness, but only distinguishes them from the martyrs.

Two conditions

Dying is not enough. Martyrdom requires two conditions: first, the victim must voluntarily embrace this sacrifice⁷ out of love for the true religion, for “the mother of martyrdom is the Catholic Faith”;⁸ second, hatred of the faith – *odium fidei* – on the part of the executioner must be the cause of the execution.

To better understand this doctrine, let us analyse two hypothetical cases.

A Christian, under persecution, renounces the Faith to escape execution by hypothermia in an ice-filled pool. Upon being removed from the water and placed in a heated bathtub, he dies due to thermal shock. There is no martyr-

dom, as the death was involuntary: the victim’s intention was to preserve his own life, not to bear witness to his Faith.

The murder of a young Catholic by a thief, motivated exclusively by greed, does not constitute martyrdom. Even if the victim offered his life to God, the absence of *odium fidei* on the part of the aggressor excludes the characterization of martyrdom.

In this sense, St. Augustine assures us: “A criminal may suffer a punishment similar to that of a martyr, but for a different reason. Nailed to the cross were three men (cf. Lk 23:33): one a Saviour, the second to be saved, the third to be condemned; the punishment was the same for all, but the cause was unequal [...]. Therefore, it is not the punishment that makes martyrs, but the cause.”⁹

A wreath of virtues crowned by love

Like precious stones, certain virtues shine especially in the souls of martyrs.

By resisting evil to the point of heroism, they practise the virtue of *fortitude*, which strengthens the human soul so as not to desist in the pursuit of the arduously attained benefit, not even at the risk of bodily life. The arduously attained ben-

efit – perseverance in the life of grace – is sought above all things, considering the world as a true prison and earthly prisons as a kind of liberation from it.¹⁰

They possess profound *faith*, a virtue by which the battle of martyrdom is fought.¹¹ For this, belief in the heart is not enough, but also outward manifestation, that is, the *confession of faith*, an act by which they demonstrate that they have this virtue: “I by my works will show you my faith” (Jas 2:18).¹²

They are also clothed in perfect *obedience*, for they imitate the God-Man in His full submission to the Father’s will in the Passion: “And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2:8-9).

Martyrs also stand out for their *patience*, enduring physical and moral torments with good dispositions. In the face of mistreatment, torture, insults, and slander, they do not succumb to self-love, anger, or despair, for they know that any sufferings are small compared to the heavenly glory that is to be revealed to us (cf. Rom 8:18).¹³



Francisco Lecaros

Beyond the executioners’ blades or the fangs of wild beasts, the martyrs found incomparable glory and recompense

“The Martyrs in the Catacombs”, by Jules-Eugène Lenepveu – Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

On the previous page, “Choir of the Martyrs”, by Giovanni da Milano – Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Italy)

Finally, *charity* is the most important virtue in martyrdom because, as the Apostle testifies, “if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3). Since charity “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14) and “greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13), the greatest external act of charity is martyrdom, when the Christian despises his life for the love of God.¹⁴

The whole Mystical Body of Christ benefits from their merits

The fruits of the generous holocaust of the martyrs are sublime.

Baptism of blood erases original sin and opens the gates of Heaven to those who die for the Faith even without having received sacramental Baptism. This is what happened to the Holy Innocents, killed at the command of Herod out of hatred for the Divine Redeemer who was born in Bethlehem (cf. Mt 2:16).¹⁵

To the baptized who have fallen into grave sin, martyrdom restores the state of grace and cancels the temporal punishments to be paid in Purgatory. In short, the faithful are sanctified to enjoy in Heaven the company of Him who opened the path of martyrdom to them.¹⁶

Beyond the individual benefit, martyrdom fertilizes the Church. As Tertullian affirms, “the blood of the martyrs is

the seed of Christians.”¹⁷ Through their sacrifice, countless souls attain mercy,¹⁸ and the Mystical Body of Christ is

strengthened and grows throughout the world. Even after death, through their heroic selflessness, they draw multitudes to the light of the Faith.

We can all be martyrs!

At the end of these considerations, let us turn our gaze to Mary Most Holy, the Queen of Martyrs. With her soul pierced by sorrow (cf. Lk 2:35), She suffered at Calvary what Theology calls, by analogy, moral martyrdom – or martyrdom of the heart – drinking with her beloved Son every drop from the chalice of Redemption. Although She did not shed bodily blood, her suffering, with which nothing can compare,¹⁹ came from the supreme union with the Passion of Jesus.

Following Mary’s example, we are all called to martyrdom, if not by violent death, at least by love lived fervently in everyday life. To dedicate every minute of existence to the service of God is a most beautiful form of martyrdom. Let us strive “in the silent and heroic practice of the virtues of ordinary Christian life, which constitute the ‘heroism of the small’ and a kind of ‘martyrdom by pinpricks.’”²⁰

Although this daily martyrdom may be more painful and arduous than death caused by fangs of wild beasts, it is the sure path to holiness, guaranteeing us, on judgement day, eternal reward alongside the heroes of the Faith. ✠



Through their sacrifice, countless souls receive mercy, and the Mystical Body of Christ is strengthened and grows throughout the world

Allegory of Faith – Cathedral of St. Agatha, Catania (Italy)

¹ LATOURELLE, René; FISICHELLA, Rino (Dir.). *Diccionario de Teología Fundamental*. 3.ed. Madrid: San Pablo, 1992, p.862.

² ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *Teología Moral para seglares*. 7.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1996, t.I, p.427.

³ Cf. PINCKAERS, OP, Servais. *The Spirituality of Martyrdom... to the Limits of Love*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016, p.56.

⁴ Cf. ÁLVAREZ GÓMEZ, Jesús. *Historia de la Iglesia. Edad Antigua*. Madrid: BAC, 2001, v.I, p.102.

⁵ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.124, a.4.

⁶ Cf. PINCKAERS, op. cit., p.70-71.

⁷ Cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.428.

⁸ ST. MAXIMUS OF TURIN. *Sermo LXXXVIII*: PL 57, 708.

⁹ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Comentário aos Salmos*. Salmo 34. Sermão

II, n.1; 13. São Paulo: Paulus, 1997, p.475; 486.

¹⁰ Cf. TERTULLIAN. *Ad martyras*, c.II, n.1.

¹¹ Cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.427.

¹² ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, op. cit., a.5.

¹³ Cf. TERTULLIAN, op. cit., c.IV, n.9.

¹⁴ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, op. cit., a.3.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, a.1, ad 1.

¹⁶ Cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.428-429.

¹⁷ TERTULLIAN. *Apologeticus*, c.L, n.13.

¹⁸ Cf. ROYO MARÍN, Antonio. *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. 4.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1962, p.345.

¹⁹ Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *Carta aos Amigos da Cruz*. 8.ed. Lorena: Cléofas, 2022, p.46.

²⁰ ROYO MARÍN, Antonio. *Jesucristo y la vida cristiana*. Madrid: BAC, 1961, p.427.



Blood of the Martyrs, Seed of Christians

On the glorious crown of holiness with which Christ adorns His Mystical Bride, an outstanding ruby shines: the blood of the martyrs!



✠ Gabriel Marques dos Santos

Throughout the centuries, Our Lord Jesus Christ has gifted His Mystical Bride, the Church, with countless treasures: the seamless robe of unity, the pure white mantle of orthodoxy, the powerful sceptre of papal authority, and – the greatest of gifts – the crown of holiness.

This diadem is set in the pure gold of charity, and upon it sparkle rich and varied inlays: the pearls of virgins, the amethysts of ascetics, the sapphires of the Doctors... Nevertheless, among all these ornaments, a majestic ruby is outstanding: it is the blood of the martyrs.

“You are a martyr!”

A historical episode illustrates how highly the Church values this precious gem.

On March 24, 1934, Pope Pius XI received in private audience Bishop Teofilus Matulionis, a Lithuanian bishop who had been imprisoned in Soviet concentration camps.

At the very beginning of the encounter, interrupting the visitor’s genuflection, the Holy Father himself knelt and declared: “You are a martyr; you are the one who should bless me first.”¹ As if this exceptional deference were

not enough, the Pope even kissed the prelate’s forehead as a sign of remarkable esteem.

Although Bishop Matulionis had not strictly speaking shed his blood as a martyr, the sufferings he endured for his love of Christ and due to the hatred of the Faith of his persecutors constituted such a close analogy to martyrdom that they merited this recognition.

*The very name
“martyr” is regarded
as a supreme honour
by the Church, which
sees the blood shed
for Christ as the seed
of new Christians*

It is not without reason that the very name *martyr* is considered a supreme honour by the Church. An ancient ecclesiastical writer justified this with the famous expression: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed”² of new Christians. But in what sense?

***Stimulus for the fervent,
courage for the wavering***

First of all, the example of the martyrs encourages Catholics to holy emulation, to even greater progress in virtue, and to a commitment to the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

The year was 1220. Upon hearing of the renown for holiness and the account of the martyrdom of five Franciscan friars in Morocco, Ferdinand of Bouillon felt the call to become, like them, a son of St. Francis and to evangelize the pagans, so that he too might one day attain the palm of martyrdom. To those holy missionaries pertains the glory of having contributed, even after their death, to Ferdinand becoming the great St. Anthony of Padua!

On the other hand, the witness borne by the martyrs instils faith and courage in those who waver between fidelity to God and the seductions of the devil. In this sense, the acts of the martyrs are full of eloquent examples. Let us consider just one.

An ancient historical document recounts the atrocious and sublime martyrdom of some of the first Carthaginian Christians in March of 203. While they were still imprisoned, awaiting the day they would be thrown to the wild beasts,



Scene of martyrdom, by Gherardo Starnina – National Gallery, London

their fortitude impressed Pudens, the soldier in charge of the prison, who discreetly showed them sympathy. This proved to be the opening through which light would enter his soul...

Once in the arena, one of the condemned Catholics, named Satorus, after having passed unscathed through several attacks by the beasts, addressed the soldier thus: “Even as I expected and foretold, I have up to this time felt the bite of no beast. And now believe with all your heart: for behold, I go out thither, and shall be ended by one bite of the leopard.”³

His prophecy fulfilled, Satorus, already drenched in blood, turned again to the one he wished to win over to Christ: “Farewell, and be mindful of my faith and of me; and let not these things disturb, but rather confirm you.”⁴ And, leaving him as an inheritance the relic of a ring dipped in his own blood, he went to present himself to the Lord.

Pudens the soldier, encouraged by this example, embraced the Faith. Later he would also attain the palm of martyrdom.

Silent and eloquent argument

Martyrdom – which etymologically means *witness* – speaks not only to the baptized; it is also an effective instrument for the defence of the Faith.

The martyr's purpose was not merely to triumph, but to provide future generations with an apologetic argument of the veracity of the Gospel account

Upon considering the heroic martyrdoms of the first centuries of Christianity, Dr. Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira ponders the purpose of so much bloodshed: “It was not just about being victorious, but about providing an apologetic argument for future centuries. What was this apologetic argument? [The martyrs] were the living witnesses to the veracity of the Gospel narrative. These witnesses, to prove that the Catholic Religion is true, allowed themselves to be repressed. [...] From this was born Catholic Europe, the Middle Ages, Catholic Civilization.”⁵

Can a soldier be a martyr?

If martyrdom gives such great glory to the Holy Church, would it be law-

ful for a Catholic to defend himself against an unjust aggression? Would he be obliged to passively accept martyrdom?

Accepting martyrdom, in reality, does not necessarily mean inert resignation in the face of injustice. There are occasions when God asks for silence and sacrifice, but there are also circumstances in which grace leads us to say: “No, sir! I feel honoured to be persecuted by you in this way, and I present myself with my head held high! [...] I accept this humiliation with disdain, and I fight with my visor raised!”⁶

Indeed, even if the martyr does not utter words of rebuke to his tormentors, his silence constitutes an eloquent denunciation. The Christian tradition, in the writings of Tertullian, understood martyrdom as an eminent form of combat: “We love suffering in the same way that the soldier loves war. [...] The battle, for us, consists in being brought to court, so that there, risking our lives, we may fight for the truth. Victory consists in achieving that which we fought for: victory that brings with it the glory of pleasing God and the spoils of eternal life.”⁷

If Providence invites some to accept death rather than renounce the Faith, it calls others to defend it against impious aggressions. Medieval chivalry, for example, reflected this glory: martyrdom not as something to be suffered, but as something to be sought in the fight in defence of goodness.⁸

A combatant martyr

To harmonize these two seemingly antagonistic forms of heroism, one need only look at the example of St. José Luis Sánchez del Río. At fourteen, he enlisted in the *Cristero* Army to defend the freedom of the Church in Mexico, which was especially persecuted after the enactment of the so-called Calles Law in 1926.

In a battle in the city of Cotija, the young boy was surrounded and cap-



tured. Brought before the enemy commander, he declared: “General, know that I have been taken prisoner, not because I have surrendered, but because I ran out of ammunition, for if I had more, I would have continued fighting.”

After a brief captivity, José was submitted to torture. At eleven o’clock on the night of February 10, 1928, his executioners skinned the soles of his feet and made him walk barefoot across a stony terrain towards the cemetery. Upon reaching the grave destined for his burial, the soldiers inflicted further blows upon him, attempting to drive him to apostasy.

Frustrated in their attempts, the troop captain asked, in a mocking tone, if the little hero had any message to convey to his parents. Proudly, José Sánchez replied: “Yes, tell them that we will meet again in Heaven.” Then he asked to be shot with his arms outstretched in a cross. The response was immediate, furious, and merciless: a pistol shot to the temple.

In the martyrdom of the young Mexican, we can clearly see the truth of Dr. Plinio’s statement: “It is noble for a martyr to die with his eyes fixed only on God. It is also noble to die forgiving his tormentors. But it is noble to die fighting against them as well.”⁹ After all, since man’s life on this earth is a warfare (cf. Job 7:1); why should his death not be also be?

To deny any of these forms of heroism would be to deny the Catholic

Church one of the many scintillations of the blood-red ruby in its crown.



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St. José Sánchez del Río

“It is noble for a martyr to die with his eyes fixed only on God. It is also noble to die forgiving his tormentors... But it is noble to die fighting against them as well”

Going back to the ruby

Now, what confers upon martyrdom that nobility which distinguishes it from all other forms of perfection? The martyr brings to its fullness the imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the essence of holiness.

Love is repaid with love. If there is no greater proof of love than to give one’s life for a friend (cf. Jn 15:13), we well understand the praise made by St. Augustine: “They restored the price for which they were bought.”¹⁰ And further: “‘If you sit at a great table, observe carefully what is served to you, for you also must prepare something like it’ (Prv 23:1-2). It is certainly a great table, where the lord of the table is Himself the banquet [...] being Himself the host, Himself the food and drink. The martyrs, then, recognized what they ate and drank, so that they could give back in the same kind”.¹¹

The blood of the martyrs does far more than merely engendering new Christians: it irrigates the entire Church. As living members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the sacrifice of these heroes of the Faith, united to that of the Redeemer, benefits all the faithful through the Communion of Saints. Thus, their witness is like the sap that nourishes and invigorates the baptized in a mysterious flow of grace. Such fruitfulness springs from a profound truth: if every Christian completes what is lacking in the Passion of the Lord (cf. Col 1:24), we can affirm that, in a special way, the blood of the martyrs is also the very Blood of Christ. ✠

¹ Cf. GAIDA, Pranas. *Bispo, prisioneiro e mártir do comunismo. Vida de Dom Teófilo Matulionis*. São Paulo: Artpress, 1991, p.53.

² TERTULLIAN. *Apologeticus*, c.L, n.13; cf. LETTER TO DIOGNETUS, n.6.

³ PASSIO SANTORUM PERPETUÆ ET FELICITATIS, n.21. In: MUSURILLO, Herbert (Ed.). *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 129

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 18/2/1972.

⁶ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Talk*. São Paulo, 27/5/1986.

⁷ TERTULLIAN, op. cit., n.1-2.

⁸ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 7/9/1989.

⁹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 8/1/1972.

¹⁰ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Sermon* 329, n.1.

¹¹ Ibid.



Graces of the Early Church

For a time during his adolescence, Plinio would make the most of his walk home from school by visiting the Church of St. Cecilia, whose atmosphere – the depictions of the martyrs, in particular – provided him with a special communication with the supernatural.

✠ Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

The church¹ has the classic cruciform layout. In the right-hand transept of the church – that is, to the left as you enter – above the altar in the side aisle, there is an image of the Immaculate Conception. Needless to say, I went straight over to visit her.

It is a fine statue, of reasonable quality and worthy of a place in that church, though of a rather ordinary beauty. I knew this, but I felt great joy at being there, close to her, and when I prayed I had the impression that Our Lady was answering my plea and conveying my request to God Our Lord.

At the same time, I also sensed something of her purity, and something by which She is immensely superior to every possible and imaginable degree and form of holiness. My soul was lifted to a higher order of realities which I was unable to articulate.

A young Roman martyr

A little further on, near the altar of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, there is a very parochial and provincial imitation of what would be a Roman sarcophagus. It is a kind of well-made little tomb, of good white marble – I believe from Carrara –, all polished, with a large transparent glass cover with bevelling, where a wax figure lies, complete with hair, representing St. Donata, a Roman girl of twelve or thirteen years old, who died a martyr.

Inside this figure are placed the relics – I suppose they are the bones – of St. Donata herself. Displaying bones could horrify human sensibilities, of which the Holy Church is not an enemy, but, on the contrary, a friend. The result: a graceful wax sculpture was made to cover them.

When I was little – therefore before the events I am narrating – I once approached that figure, very curious, and someone gave me a brief explanation, as normally given to children: “That is St. Donata.”

However, being so young, I initially couldn’t quite distinguish whether she was alive or dead... And, if she was dead, I wondered how long she had been. But I felt a certain shyness to ask. So, I kept looking to see if St. Donata was breathing, full of suspicions and uncertainties in view of the situation. On the other hand, although I knew what the word *martyr* meant, I didn’t have that concept as firmly ingrained in my mind as the idea of holiness, and I thought: “She is a saint! Oh! That is so wonderful!”

Even later, during the time when I started attending the Church of St. Cecilia more often, I was not sure if that figure was the little Saint herself, her incorrupt body, or if it was an image containing her relics. There was a plaque written in Latin, which I tried to read and partly understood, but not entirely. Even so, I had the idea that it was not exactly her body.

She is dressed in a beautiful Roman garment or, at least, as someone from early 20th-century São Paulo might imagine – without archaeological concerns – as the clothing of an ancient Roman *demoiselle*,² still very young. A tunic down to her feet, made of common

As he contemplated the richly ornamented image of St. Donata, little Plinio formed an idea of virtue and uprightness that moved him deeply

St. Donata – St. Cecilia Church, São Paulo

Sérgio Miyasaki



silk, but very well-arranged, all adorned with embroidery that seemed to me to be gold and some pretty stones sewn on it – which I only much later realized were only glass beads – giving me the idea of a noble and wealthy girl, whose parents buried her wearing these jewels.

Ornaments that shone like a mystical book

I looked very attentively at the embroidery, the beads, the silk, and the Carrara marble, with the idea that they were telling me something and explaining to me who the martyr St. Donata was. Those stones applied to the little dress gave me the impression that they shone with something of her holiness and the very holiness of the early Church.

It was, therefore, as if each ornament were a word in a sentence, which, in turn, would be a set of ornaments and would represent the definition of St. Donata.

On the dress there is a sash that covers part of it, and which displays, at the centre of the design, a sort of lily of cut glass, imitating a large topaz or some other semi-precious stone. It is in fact similar to an authentic topaz, therefore of a very beautiful light golden-yellow.

I looked with special attention at that coloured stone, for it seemed to me the focal point of the ornaments and, therefore, the most intelligible and availing part of the garment. Not that I analysed it with the eyes of a greedy jeweller, for the value of the stone. That never even crossed my mind! It was the colour that produced a certain effect on my soul.

Generally, at the time I used to go there to pray, the light entered through the stained glass windows and illuminated the sarcophagus of St. Donata, reflecting on the bevelled glass. And more than once it coincided that the sun's rays struck that pseudo-topaz. I saw the light wander on the jewel and shine with beautiful reflections in that

warm colour. That caused me an intense impression and a religious emotion, leading me to have greater admiration and respect for St. Donata, for the special luminosity of that glass ornament was like the expression of the martyr's heroism. I understood that it symbolized her virtues in a magnificent way! In my mind, the colour of the topaz also had some kind of con-



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It was a mystical touch that drew on material realities to make him sense something intangible and sublime

Plinio in the 1920s

nection with the glory of her soul and led me to understand the kind of happiness the martyr was enjoying. It was as if her Heaven was lived within a topaz.

It was a mystical touch, a work of grace, which used ponderable material realities – a piece of glass or a stone – to make me intuit, through their symbolic value, through the discernment of spirits, something imponderable and sublime that simple reasoning would not make me understand: what is grace like in a person who has a moral analogy with topaz?

At the same time, it kindled in me love and devotion to these imponderables in the spirit of a little saint and, in that sense, her body, for me, was like a mystical book!

However, my emotion was not so much caused by St. Donata herself. It was, above all, an idea of virtue and righteousness that touched me deeply, and even if she did not actually possess the characteristics I saw, God wanted me to understand how much holiness encompasses all of that.

Thus, my respect for holiness as such increased, in contemplation of that stone.

St. Expeditus and the dignity of the Roman Empire

In front of the relic of St. Donata, there is a very common image of St. Expeditus, depicted with a cross in his hand and dressed as a Roman legionary. The idea of a Catholic warrior enthused me, and armour always held a true fascination for me. So, I looked at that figure with extraordinary interest.

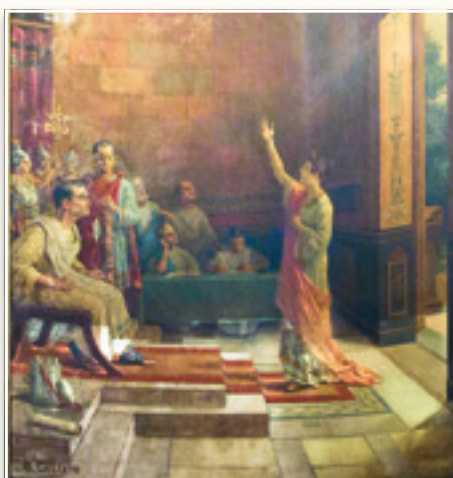
These images of St. Donata and St. Expeditus presented me with a certain notion of the dignity of the Roman Empire, with much colour.

The following thought came to mind: "How well dressed they are!" And I reasoned somewhat childishly: "Naturally! They had to appear before the Emperor to be judged, and even as defendants, out of respect they had to present themselves like this. They are in a kind of court attire, with which they were martyred."

In fact, the word *Roman* seemed to me one of the most beautiful titles there could be. It was like a kind of predestined word, containing all the sounds...

The life of St. Cecilia

I also used to pay close attention to a series of paintings around the main altar, works by the painter Benedito



Gazing at that magnificent depiction and guided by the discernment of spirits, Dr. Plinio had a sense of the different “layers” of graces being received

Scenes from the life of St. Cecilia - Church dedicated to her in São Paulo

Calixto, which focus on the main episodes of the life of St. Cecilia, patron saint of that church.

One of the scenes, for example, is the conversion of Valerian, whose story is as follows:

St. Cecilia’s parents forced her to marry this man, but she converted her husband. They both resolved to maintain perfect chastity after marriage, and so she preserved her virginity.

The painting then depicts a room where St. Cecilia and Valerian – who was also a martyr – are kneeling, praying or conversing, after their marriage. A radiant Angel appears, carrying in each hand a crown of white lilies for them both, symbolizing their resolution.

The scene is partially veiled by a curtain, and hidden behind it, there is a man watching. It was Tiburtius, the husband’s brother, who noticed something extraordinary happening in the place where the newlyweds were, and he wanted to see what it was.

He went on tiptoe, without them noticing, pulled back the curtain revealing the scene, at the exact moment when the Angel was descending with the crowns, radiating beams of light. Then, the two gaze at the apparition with an ecstatic air, while Tiburtius is frozen in a stance of astonishment, like someone who is very shocked...

Seeing that grandiose representation and guided by the discernment of spirits, I had an idea of the different “layers” of graces they received, and of what grace was proper to each one. The couple was much higher and the other was just beginning. That enchanted me!

I learned that St. Cecilia later converted her brother-in-law Tiburtius, who was also a martyr. Thus, all three followed the path of martyrdom.

Scenes of the martyrdom

In another scene, St. Cecilia is seen making a proclamation of Faith that is also an invective against idols, and refusing to worship them. I had the impression that she was already before

the executioners, but then, looking closer, I realized it was a tribunal.

I also looked at the representation of the martyrdom, in which she appears beheaded and prostrate, with blood gushing from her neck. It seemed to me that it was a common decapitation, but, some time later, reading a life of St. Cecilia, I verified something that gave me a horrible chill: this decapitation was poorly done, because the executioner did not sever the entire neck, and her head remained partially attached to the torso, therefore, in the most atrocious circumstances. Still alive, she was in this situation for three days and, no longer able to speak to express her belief in the Holy Trinity, she responded to the executioners by showing three extended fingers. And so the virgin remained until her death, defying her very executioners.

The graces of the early Church

The next scene shows a Mass in the catacombs, and light can be seen filtering in.

These paintings by Benedito Calixto representing the life of St. Cecilia, although very common and even imperfect in terms of perspective, are pleasant and have a kind of provincial innocence, as well as a certain characteristic, not from an artistic point of view, but a social one: they reveal the consensus that existed, at the end of the last century, about the environment of the early Church.

In fact, they express in a dignified – although not entirely accurate – way the graces of the early Church. ✦

Taken, with adaptations, from:
Notas autobiográficas [Autobiographical Notes]. São Paulo: Retornarei, 2014, v.IV, p.33-53

¹ The parish church of St. Cecilia, located in the square of the same name, in the city of São Paulo.

² French for: maiden, young lady.



The Most Perfect of Human Acts?

✠ Fr. Eduardo Miguel Caballero Baza, EP



From the earliest days of Christianity, martyrdom has been a cause of both fear and fascination for the faithful. The mere recollection of places like the Circus Maximus and the Roman Colosseum, or of names like Lawrence, Sebastian, and Ignatius of Antioch, for example, evokes feats of such grandeur and beauty that they far exceed human paradigms. How insignificant the pagan heroes seem when compared to these paladins who, amidst great tribulations, washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb (cf. Rv 7:14)!

What moved them to such acts of bravery? The mere unleashing of natural energies aimed at the exaltation of their own ego? Or acts of sublime virtues practised under the impulse of divine grace? In this case, which virtues would be most directly involved in the act of martyrdom? Thomas Aquinas discusses this topic in the *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.124, throughout five articles.

Since man is composed of body and soul, the powers of the latter do not always act in an orderly fashion, so that what is most noble prevails in him, that is, reason illuminated by faith.

Now, in the face of the multiple attacks of the persecutors of the Faith, whether through fallacious sophisms, moral insults, or acts of violence, the martyr is required to be firm in truth and justice so as not to falter in the face of suffering. Such perseverance can only be the work of virtue, for the latter serves to “safeguard man in the good of reason” (a.1).

Among the fundamental virtues present in martyrdom, fortitude stands out, which has the power “to strengthen man in the good of virtue, especially against dangers, and chiefly against dangers of death” (a.2). Thus, if fortitude has the great merit of being at the heart, being the “mother virtue” from which the act of martyrdom proceeds, this has as its end

the confirmation of another even more sublime virtue: faith. Every martyr is a valiant soldier of Christ, but above all, he is an illustrious hero of faith!

Nevertheless, the *princeps* virtue, the one that shines forth in the act of martyrdom “as its first and chief motive” (a.2, ad 2) is charity, the ultimate goal of every perfective impulse of the human soul. As the Apostle affirms, “if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3).

Aquinas concludes his commentary on the subject with the following question (cf. a.3): is martyrdom an act of the greatest perfection? He considers that, if viewed from the perspective of the virtue from which it emanates –

fortitude – it cannot be said to be the most perfect of acts, since tolerating death is not praiseworthy in itself, except as ordered to a higher good.

However, if we consider it from its principal motive – the love called charity – we can affirm that it constitutes, by nature, “the most perfect of human acts,” for charity “is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14). Thus declares the Divine Master: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). ✠



Martyrdom may be regarded as the most perfect of human acts from the perspective of charity, the bond of perfection

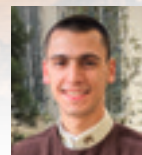
The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius of Antioch – Basilica of St. Clement, Rome



The Promise Vanquished the Volcano

On August 6, 1875, a promise of God was wantonly assassinated. But he triumphed, proclaiming that the God of promises is immortal.

✠ **Ángelo Francisco Neto Martins**



The fifteen hundred metres of wall have been scaled. The very heart of the fortress remains to be conquered. The prudent desist. Only two brave men dare to advance: Wisse and Gabriel.

Storm the heights! The Pichincha volcano, the last bastion of mystery in Ecuadorian geography, is about to be taken on this January 15, 1845.

But the crater does allow itself to be surmounted without resistance, and lets loose its volatile nature. Suddenly, a gigantic boulder hurtles towards young Gabriel. It is his last second of life!

* * *

It would be his last second of life... if a promise far grander than all the incandescent rocks hurled by that volcano did not rest on him.

On January 16, 1599, in fact, the Blessed Virgin Mary had prophesied, at the foot of that same Mount Pichincha: "In the 19th century there will live a truly Christian president, a man of character, to whom God Our Lord will give the palm of martyrdom in the square where this convent of mine is located. He will consecrate the Republic to the Divine Heart of my Most Holy Son."¹

Gabriel was unaware of these words of the Virgin. However, on that day, the promise and the volcano contended. And the promise won! From then on,

however, it would be up to the daring young man to fulfil, despite all menacing volcanoes, this promise, albeit unknown to him.

Youth erupts!

Gabriel García Moreno lived his vibrant twenty-third year in Quito, the capital of Ecuador.² He was already teaching and practising law; he studied Physics and Mathematics, experimented with Chemistry, mapped out active volcanoes...

As can be seen, he possessed a multifaceted and prodigious intelligence. It was in favour of it, in fact, that he had left Guayaquil – the city where he was born on Christmas Eve of 1821 – to study at the country's only institution of higher education, today the Central University of Ecuador.

It was then that he faced alone the inevitable volcanicity of young manhood. Far from his parents, living his youth with free time and intellectual prestige, he had everything to be swallowed by the lava of concupiscence. But this is not what happened. When the inevitable youthful passions arose to steal his heart, it had already been captivated by knowledge.

There were no vacations in his student schedule. He would wake up at three in the morning to peruse his books

on law – the degree he was pursuing – as well as his books on Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Did he rest? Yes, by learning languages...

The volcano of his flourishing years had erupted, but upon the fields of knowledge, fertilizing them. The promise prevailed.

The young volcano

However, another, far riskier passion emerged in García Moreno's spirit: politics. The year was 1843, and the student was participating in a conspiracy to overthrow the autocratic regime. It is rumoured that, dagger in hand, he even waited on a street corner in Quito at night for the head of state, Juan José Flores. This is not entirely improbable, given the character that inflamed him.

A volcanic temperament burned within him – tireless, magmatic, and productive – which perfectly fulfilled Mary's promise of a "man of character"... The problem is that such a disposition caused worrisome effects, such as challenging a soldier to a duel, or publishing an extraordinarily aggressive newspaper on his own, of whose well-aimed barbs several personalities of the Government – and the Church! – became the target.

Let us recall that this young man lacked any political or economic sup-

port, thus being at the mercy of prison or exile, if not the scaffold. But only until 1847, the year he married Rosa Ascáubi, from an influential and wealthy family of Quito. Everything was resolved. In a short time, he was responsible for important government positions.

He was safe from poverty. Not from politics, nor from his temperament, two constant volcanoes.

Defeated...

These explosive factors remained extremely active: in just over two years, seventeen revolutions broke out in the country, and in Quito, three new newspapers by García Moreno appeared, each more relentless than the last: *El zurriago*, *El vengador*, *El diablo*...³

Who was more active: restless Ecuador or the unsettling Ecuadorian? It is difficult to answer..., but the day came when politics defeated the politician: when he founded his fourth newspaper, in 1853, to challenge the authorities which – wrote Gabriel – used and abused the “right of oppression” and the “shameful privilege of embezzlement and theft.”⁴

The Government then forced him to cross the border. García Moreno was defeated. However, it would be in the land of his exile, Peru, that the war of his life would begin: the ascent of the inner volcano.

...he conquered himself!

At that time, was he Catholic? “I am Catholic,” he once stated, “and I pride myself for being so, although I cannot count myself among the devout.”⁵ A non-practising Catholic, to use the paradoxical term of our day. But Our Lady had prophesied that he would be “truly Christian,” and She would make her word prevail.

Extensive reading in scholastic philosophy and theology, combined with the enforced solitude of Paíta, the small Peruvian town to which he had withdrawn, gradually opened up the horizons of the Faith to García Moreno.

Perhaps spurred on by these luminous impulses, at the end of April 1855 he left for Europe, heading to Paris. His aim was to deepen his scientific knowledge. God, however, had other plans.

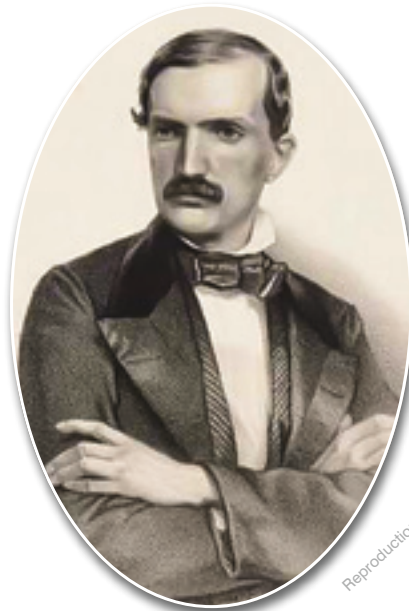
The South American leads a scandalous life in Paris! He studies for about twelve hours a day, scorns the refined Parisian balls, and preserves his marital fidelity intact, despite the distance. A rock of scandal, or, in other words, a steadfast Catholic... although “not counted among the devout.”

But one day everything changed.

Gabriel was debating about the efficacy of the Sacraments, fervently defending these wonders of grace. Suddenly, a colleague of his dismantles the defence:

“You speak very well, but it seems to me that you neglect the practice. How long has it been since your last Confession?”

“You answered me with a personal argument that may seem excellent to you today, but that will no longer be valid tomorrow.”



Our Lady had prophesied that he would be “a true Christian” and She would ensure that her word prevailed

Gabriel García Moreno; on the previous page, the Pichincha volcano, Quito

That same afternoon, Gabriel went to Confession. From that day forward, he will attend Mass every morning and pray the Rosary daily. He was “truly Christian.”

Upon defeat, he conquered himself.

March 10, 1861

Meanwhile, Ecuador continued with its political eruptions. In one of them, García Moreno was granted amnesty and returned to his homeland in December 1856. His prestige had grown during his absence, and he was promptly appointed mayor of Quito. A few months later, he assumed leadership responsibilities in the triumvirate – a provisional government formed by three members – after a serious crisis.

But a new uprising broke out, during which our protagonist had his powers usurped and was put behind bars. His personality, however, proved more solid than the bars:

“To whom did you swear allegiance?” – he asked the prison guard.

“To the Head of State.”

“I am the Head of State.”

The sentry saluted the prisoner, who, with a solemn bearing, escaped from the prison through the main door. The authority he had claimed would be ratified on a national scale less than two years later.

March 10, 1861. In Quito, the Convention elects Dr. Gabriel García Moreno as President of the Republic, by thirty-seven votes to one. At last, that enormous volcano, Ecuador, had been vanquished.

“Tyrant! Dictator!”

This is the moment for the greatest accomplishment of this Roman Catholic. But before we recall the progress he spearheaded, we must dispel certain calumnies that portray him as a tyrant and a dictator. Could they be justifiable?

Can a man be called an opportunist who impoverishes himself when he is in office, who does not appoint family



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Our Lady of Good Success presented Gabriel García Moreno, her fulfilled promise, to the God who does not die, but triumphs through His martyrs

Our Lady of Good Success – Royal Monastery of the Immaculate Conception; in the foreground, the body of García Moreno shortly after his assassination

members as ministers, who punishes the guilty even when they are his friends? Is a man a dictator who, elected and re-elected almost unanimously, tries to resign from the presidency and is impeded from doing so, whose Constitution is acclaimed by all the people? What an unprecedented “dictatorship”...

Tyrant: this is the title given to him for approving capital punishment at a time when it was included in the laws of all countries – the first nation to abolish the death penalty was Venezuela, in 1863. A tyrant who, only after repeatedly pardoning a general guilty of recurrent crimes of high treason, finally decrees his execution. A soldier is arrested and refuses to flee, despite the negligence of the guards, paid by García Moreno to let the traitor escape... The criminal is taken to the scaffold, but the president does not attend the execution. What was he doing? He was praying for the condemned man, as he had done all night – a truly original “tyrant,” it must be admitted... The Archbishop interrupts the president’s prayers to plead for clemency for the defendant. And he receives the reply of a man with a conscience that is both delicate and strong:

“If you assure me that I am guilty of venial sin by this death sentence, I pardon the condemned man, even if it compromises the peace of the Republic.”

The prelate had nothing to incriminate.

Developments in a Catholic nation

Leaving aside the slander, let us move on to the facts.

The years of García Moreno’s government were the setting for great developments in Ecuador. This land, in thirty-nine years, had generated no less than fifty revolutions. Stability was finally achieved and, with it, the annual revenue multiplied sevenfold, the railroad, the telegraph, seven hundred kilometres of roads, more than one hundred schools, nation-wide education... and so many other improvements that defy a biographer’s capacity for abridgment.

This magnificent work can be summarized by its crux. García Moreno sought above all to “reestablish the reign of morality, without which,” he explained, “order is nothing more than a truce or weariness, and outside of which freedom is deception and chimera.”²⁶ How did accomplish this? By irrigating society with the spirit of the Church.

His Constitution, approved by the votes of more than 95% of the population, is iconic. In it we can read: “To be a citizen, one must be Catholic.”²⁷ Given all that follows from this premise, what was the result? Quito’s main jail, with room for three hundred pris-

oners, had only fifty occupants, from the entire country.

With Ecuador thus prepared, the time had come for the prophecy to be fulfilled: “He will consecrate the Republic to the Divine Heart of my Most Holy Son.” On March 25, 1874, Ecuador was finally dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Standing, after the carillon and cannon salvos, before the nation, García Moreno addressed the Eternal King: “This, Lord, is your people!”

These were the fruits of Gabriel’s fertile interior life. His efforts were generating the new Ecuador, because he himself was transformed.

The volcano produces vineyards

The new Gabriel of fifty years of age is no longer the former Gabriel of his youthful days. His temperament, always volatile, now obeys the dictates of reason. His humility makes him ask for corrections and avoid honours. And the people, admiringly, even witness their president visiting lepers, teaching Catechism to farmers, attending Mass every day and praying the Rosary at length.

His spiritual program, written on a piece of paper, is more than expressive: to always maintain the presence of God, to do the opposite of what his choleric temperament demands, to perform an examination of conscience three times a day, not to talk about himself,

to master his senses of sight and taste. These are some of the resolutions carried out by the busiest man in Ecuador.

The Gabriel who climbed Pichincha before the age of twenty-five would only reach his own summit after half a century of life. Commenting on one of his photographs from his later years, Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira observes: “Using his flaws like extinct volcanoes, on whose slopes vineyards grow – more or less like Vesuvius which, when well-managed, produces splendid vineyards – there is in him something of a superior and magnificent coherence, of a superior and magnificent rectitude, [...] which makes him not look at anything or anyone in particular, but contemplate something that exists far above himself.”⁸

What did he glimpse far above himself? Perhaps a promise that whispered: “a president to whom God will give the palm of martyrdom in the square where this convent of mine stands” ...⁹

The final victory

August 6, 1875, the first Friday of the month, the day of the Transfiguration of the Lord. The President of Ecuador is on a balcony of the Government Palace, above the square that extends from this building to the Royal Monastery of the

Immaculate Conception, of the Conceptionist nuns, where there is a beautiful image of Our Lady of Good Success, who prophesied marvels in 1599.

He has just finished praying in the cathedral, where perhaps he repeated to God the plea he had addressed to the Pope: to die in defence of the Faith and the Church.



“There is in him something of a superior and magnificent coherence, of a superior and magnificent rectitude”

Official portrait of Gabriel García Moreno, by Luis Cadena

Suddenly, a cry: “Tyrant!”

A machete blow strikes García Moreno on the back of the neck. He defends himself with his cane, but other young murderers appear, certainly instigated to the crime by higher authorities. The president, after being shot and stabbed, is thrown from the balcony to the square below.

One of the assassins rushes up to him and stabs his face repeatedly, while shouting:

“Die! Die!”

Between blows, García Moreno still manages to find the strength for a final cry of faith:

“God never dies!”

* * *

Over Gabriel, on that day, the Virgin’s promise clashed with the volcano of the infernal Serpent. And the promise triumphed!

Yes, it triumphed! It had taken the Pichincha, dominated Ecuador, mastered Gabriel. All that remained was to overcome God... And God is overcome only by the Cross!

While the people gathered relics of their beloved leader, the Mother of Good Success presented Gabriel García Moreno, her fulfilled promise, to the God who does not die, but triumphs in His martyrs. ✠

¹ SOUSA PEREIRA, OFM, Manuel. *Vida admirable de la Madre Mariana de Jesús Torres y Berriochoa*. Quito: Jesús de la Misericordia, 2008, t.I, p.159. It is noteworthy that this book was first published in 1790 (cf. GUERRERO SAMANIEGO, Carlos Humberto. *Fray Manuel Sousa Pereira: ¿Un franciscano oculto en el olvido?* Guayaquil: [s.n.], 2019, p.18).

² The historical facts included throughout this article were taken and conferred from the following works: GÁLVEZ, Manuel. *Vida de Don Ga-*

bríel García Moreno. Quito: Jesús de la Misericordia, 2012; BERTHE, CSsR, Augustin. *García Moreno. Le héros martyr*. Paris: Retaux-Bray, 1939; PATTEE, Ricardo. *Gabriel García Moreno. E o Ecuador do seu tempo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1956.

³ Spanish for: *The Scourge, the Avenger, The Devil...*

⁴ PATTEE, op. cit., p.124.

⁵ GÁLVEZ, op. cit., p.151.

⁶ Ibid., p.265.

⁷ Ibid., p.462.

⁸ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 13/1/1977.

⁹ Regarding the assassination of García Moreno, Blessed Pius IX, the reigning Pontiff at the time, made the following statement in a speech to pilgrims from the French city of Laval in September 1875: “Sectarians decreed the death of the honourable president, who fell beneath the assassin’s blade, a victim of his faith and of his Christian charity towards his homeland”. Pope Leo XIII expressed a similar view on January 20, 1888, during an audience granted to a representative of the Ecuadorian government: “A man

who was a champion of the Catholic Faith and to whom the words used by the Church to celebrate the memory of the holy martyrs Thomas of Canterbury and Stanislaus of Poland rightly apply: *he fell for the Church under the dagger of the wicked*.” The diocesan process for the beatification of García Moreno was opened in 1939 by Cardinal Carlos María de la Torre, Archbishop of Quito, for which reason he may be considered a Servant of God.



Martyr of Love

In supreme fidelity to her vocation, the “little flower” of Carmel shone through the virtue of fortitude like a warrior on the battlefield or a St. Lawrence burning on the grill.



✠ Bruna Almeida Piva

The year was 1887. Two young French girls were strolling through the city of Rome on a pleasant November morning, accompanied by their father. They were on a pilgrimage to the famous and emblematic Colosseum, which soon appeared before them, harmonious, imposing, serious, and at once light and monumental... a true silent witness, defeated, but persevering against the outrages of the centuries.¹ At the sight of it, both trembled: they were before the place where so many martyrs had sacrificed their lives for Our Lord Jesus Christ!

They approached to kiss that ground sanctified with so much blood when they encountered a barrier that prevented them from entering... They then set about trying to discover a way to get in. Regarding that moment, the youngest sister, Thérèse Martin, later recounted: “Seeing a worker passing by with a ladder, I almost asked him for it. Luckily, I did not put my idea into practice, because I would have been taken for a fool!...”²

Shortly afterward, however, Thérèse found a spot where the rubble touched the fence, making it passable. She quickly called her sister, Celine, and the two fearlessly be-

gan to scale the sacred ruins. “Father looked at us, astonished by our audacity, and immediately ordered us to return. But the two fugitives heard nothing more. Just as warriors feel their courage increase in the midst of danger, so our joy increased, in proportion to the effort we made to

*Would attributing
the title of martyr
to St. Thérèse be
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praise, based more
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than reason?*

achieve the object of our desires. [...] Soon after, [...] having knelt on that sacred ground, our souls united in the same prayer... My heart was beating very strongly as my lips drew near the dust stained crimson by the blood of the early Christians. I asked for the grace to be a martyr for Jesus too, and I felt, deep within me, that my prayer was being heard!...”³

“This is the dream of my youth”

Anyone who has discovered the life of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and come to know of her doctrine of the Little Way will have witnessed the authenticity of this exclamation: “Martyrdom! This is the dream of my youth,”⁴ a dream that grew with her in the Carmelite cloister as one of the most salient features of her spirituality.

In fact, her entire existence exudes the precious fragrance of the holocaust that so many Christians suffered for the Faith at the dawn of Christianity. During her journey through this land of exile, for example, she often uttered sayings like these: “As for me, what does it matter to live or to die! [...] The joys of the earth are over! There can be nothing but heavenly joys for me. [...] O Jesus! May I be [Your] happy victim! Consume Your little host in the fire of divine love! [...] I want to be fascinated by Your divine gaze, I want to become a prey to Your love!”⁵

These fervent and authentic thoughts are as worthy of a martyr as were the paradigmatic words of the great St. Ignatius of Antioch: “I am God’s wheat, and I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be presented as pure wheat of Christ. [...] I seek Him who died for us; I desire



Him who rose again for us. [...] My earthly desire has been crucified, and there is no longer in me fire to love matter. Within me there is a living water, which murmurs and says: 'Come to the Father.'"⁶ Transcending the seventeen centuries that separated the lives of these two Saints, their aspirations reveal the same spirit, the same love.

On the other hand, however, attributing the title of martyr to St. Thérèse may seem like superficial flattery, imbued more with sentiment than reason. After all, simple words, however sincere and ardent they may be, do not constitute *martyrdom*. Above all, she never suffered any religious persecution until the day she closed her eyes to this life, peaceful in her bed as a tuberculosis patient, surrounded by her sisters in habit, behind the silent walls of a Carmelite convent...

This last argument would win if Theology did not teach that religious life is a true martyrdom, although not in a strict sense, but by a profound analogy. St. Thomas Aquinas comments,⁷ quoting St. Gregory the Great, that when someone gives to God *everything* they have and their *whole* life, through a vow, they offer Him a holocaust. By embracing the Carmelite vocation with exquisite perfection, St. Thérèse lived out this *whole* to the full and shone with the virtue of fortitude more than a warrior on the battlefield,⁸ or as much as St. Lawrence burning on the grill.

There is no greater proof of love...

The key to understanding this holocaust of the Saint of Lisieux is her unconditional love of God. She herself referred to her spiritual path as a *martyrdom of love*, and in fact she achieved "the exercise and the reward of a martyr,"⁹ not through the same torment as the martyrs, as St. Augustine teaches,¹⁰ but for the same cause: charity.

As an immediate fruit of this virtue, she demonstrated unwavering abnegation. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mt 16:24), taught the Divine Master. And St. Thérèse made these words the rule of her conduct, the whip with which she herself lacerated her sinful nature to offer it as a sacrifice to God. In confirmation of this truth, multiple examples from her life could be narrated, of which we have gathered only a few.

As one of her novices recounts, in her free time or even at work, she always took care to kindly attend to anyone who interrupted her, even when they abused her good will or demanded that she perform some service to which she was not obligated. For her, this was the most natural attitude, and she went out of her way to please everyone.

Regarding a fellow nun who, according to the Saint herself, had the gift of displeasing her *in everything*, and who caused her many violent inner struggles, she behaved with the greatest possible kindness. She always sought her company and used

to smile at her with such affection that the nun came to believe herself especially loved. "Since we met," she once said naively, "we have experienced an irresistible mutual attraction."¹¹ The community itself believed there was a tender friendship between the two, so great that it even provoked a certain envy in Marie, St. Thérèse's blood sister...

Another charming example given by the Carmelite saint was her conduct with one of her novices, of tenacious nature and modest intelligence. Sister Martha of Jesus, as she was called, later declared: "[The Servant of God] was to me of a kindness and charity that can only be revealed in Heaven [...]. Indeed, I made her suffer a lot because of my difficult character; but I can affirm, with all sincerity, that she always maintained the same sweetness, the same equality of [treatment]. [...] She never rejected me despite the frequency of my visits; she never showed the slightest annoyance at receiving me."¹²

Sister Martha used to become annoyed with her and, on one occasion,

"I asked for the grace to be a martyr for Jesus too, and I felt, deep within me, that my prayer was being heard"

Colosseum - Rome; inset, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus in 1885. On the previous page, the Carmelite saint in 1889



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even said things to her that certainly caused her great grief. St. Thérèse showed no displeasure and responded calmly and kindly, then inviting her to accompany her on a task. Annoyed, the novice then wanted to test the Saint's patience and no longer responded to what she said. Finally, however, she could not help but surrender to her kindness and ask her forgiveness for her bad behaviour.

Because she had behaved like a mother in dealing with the numerous whims, extravagances, and brutalities of this nun, St. Thérèse earned her immense esteem and ended up winning her over to God, making her a good nun. "I never tired of seeing how charitably she treated me," Sister Martha recounts; "[I would not] know how to express the great self-denial she instilled in my soul."¹³

Fidelity to the Rule

If in relation to her fellow nuns St. Thérèse proved the authenticity of her love for God (cf. 1 Jn 4:20-21), through

her observance of the Carmelite rule she manifested the radical nature of that love and her audacity.

Of delicate health, she suffered constant and severe stomach ailments from the time she entered religious life. However, she never asked for exemption from common exercises and arduous work. She made it her rule to endure until exhaustion before complaining to her superior. "[If] I can still walk," she would say, "I must continue to do my duty."¹⁴

"We must not allow ourselves a comfortable life. Since we intend to be martyrs, we must use the instruments we have for this"

It is not difficult to imagine how much such ailments cost her amidst the long hours of chanting the Office, the austere diet, the short nights of sleep so often spent awake because of the cold, to which she was very sensitive... Who could calculate the value of these obscure sacrifices endured over the years? And she persevered in this purpose even after the onset of tuberculosis, the illness that led to her death...

"We must not allow ourselves a comfortable life. Since we intend to be martyrs, we must use the instruments we have for this,"¹⁵ she taught. The arduous part of this martyrdom lies in the fact that the religious must voluntarily and lovingly apply to themselves the instruments of torture, without the action of merciless executioners, and this when human nature values its own flesh too much to abhor it, and loves its life too much to lose it entirely in the service of God.¹⁶

St. Thérèse ended her days without having uttered useless words, without wasting a minute, without consenting to a single lack of charity or a single



While St. Thérèse proved the authenticity of her love for God in her conduct towards her fellow nuns, it was through her observance of the Carmelite rule that she manifested the radical nature of that love and her audacity

Nuns of the Carmel of Lisieux during their work period; St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus is circled

impulse of ill humour, without the slightest infidelity to the rule.

In a word, she did not let any small sacrifice escape her; and these *nothings*, as she considered them, are what ground her and transformed her into pure wheat of God.¹⁷

“It is only the total immolation of oneself that deserves the name of love”.¹⁸ this is the essence of martyrdom and the definition of life of the Saint of Lisieux. How many martyrs, willingly subjected to the cruelty of their executioners, would hesitate to surrender to this continuous death, at every moment. They would perhaps tire of this holocaust “by pinpricks”¹⁹ and apostatize... for it is easier to embrace death in an instant for faith in Christ than to surrender to Him day by day, part by part, the most precious gift of life.²⁰

The perfection of all sacrifices

The human physiognomy is a reflection of the soul. Let us conclude, then, these considerations by contemplating for a few moments a photo-



“It is only the total immolation of oneself that deserves the name of love”

St. Thérèse in 1896

graph of St. Thérèse. Among the many that would lend themselves to our analysis, let us observe this one, in which she appears kneeling, holding white lilies in front of a cross.

According to Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, the physiognomy appears indescribably sorrowful, yet smiling; she does not seek to hide her own pain, “but to stand firm through a prodigy of virtue, of fidelity to grace, despite the pain. Her lips smile only because her will wants them to smile,”²¹ in an attitude of profound faith.

Her luminous gaze radiates peace, only allowing a glimpse, behind it, of one of those oceans of sacrifice so great that only a Catholic and generous soul can contain them.

Contemplating her angelic demeanour, few words of praise come to our lips seeming more suitable to describe her than that of a *martyr* of the religious life. Let us, then, seek to admire her; but not with those fleeting and fruitless fascinations typical of today’s mindset, but rather with a Catholic spirit, which leads us to imitate the virtues we love.

And to obtain good success in this imitation, let us implore: O St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, teach us to find in the love of our little crosses the perfection of all the sacrifices of our soul! ❖

¹ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Dois ideais: o direito e a máquina [Two Ideals: Law and the Machine]. In: *Catolicismo*. Campos dos Goytacazes. Year IV. No. 42 (June, 1954); p.7.

² ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE. Manuscript A. In: *Obras Completas*. Marco de Canaveses: Carmelo, 1996, p.171. Slightly modified translation.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Idem. Manuscript B. In: *Obras Completas*, op. cit., p.228.

⁵ THE SPIRIT OF ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS. Conforme seus escritos e as testemunhas oculares

de sua vida. 7.ed. São Paulo: Paulus, 2023, p.65; 217-221.

⁶ ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH. Letter to the Romans, c.IV, n.1; c.VI, n.1; c.VII, n.2. In: *Padres apostólicos*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1995, p.105-107.

⁷ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.186, a.6.

⁸ Cf. BARRIOS MONEO, CME, Alberto. *Santa Teresita. Modelo y mártir de la vida religiosa*. 6.ed. Madrid: Colsa, 1967, p.345.

⁹ BARRIOS MONEO, CME, Alberto. *La espiritualidad de Santa Teresa de Lisieux a la luz de los procesos de su canonización y de sus “Manu-*

scrits autobiographiques”. Madrid: [s.n.], 1958, t.II, p.83.

¹⁰ Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Psalmo 34, Sermo II, n.13.

¹¹ BARRIOS MONEO, *Santa Teresita. Modelo y mártir de la vida religiosa*, op. cit., p.208.

¹² Ibid., p.194.

¹³ Ibid., p.195.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.348.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.350.

¹⁶ Cf. ibid.

¹⁷ Cf. ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE. Últimos colóquios. In: *Obras Completas*, op. cit., p.1203.

¹⁸ THE SPIRIT OF ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS, op. cit., p.42.

¹⁹ Cf. ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE. Carta 74. In: *Obras Completas*, op. cit., p.381.

²⁰ Cf. BARRIOS MONEO, *Santa Teresita. Modelo y mártir de la vida religiosa*, op. cit., p.345.

²¹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Paz de alma no Tabor e no Calvário [Peace of Soul on Mount Tabor and on Calvary]. In: *Catolicismo*. Campos dos Goytacazes. Year X. No. 111 (March, 1960); p.7.



Priest, Apostle and... Slave!

The epitaph engraved on his tomb – “Slave of the slaves” – reminds us not only of who he was, but above all, of the best way to become great in the eyes of God: to make oneself a slave to others through charity.

✠ **Arthur Felipe Grando Leal**



Stefan Zweig, the world-renowned Austrian writer, recounts in the preface to his book on Ferdinand Magellan what motivated him to study the adventures of the Age of Discovery and the Age of Exploration.

One day, comfortably settled on an ocean liner with all the amenities that a ship of that sort could offer, he was travelling to Argentina, where a group of friends awaited him. After seven or eight days at sea, the hours seemed endless and tedious to him.

As he observed the unhurried crawl of the hands on his watch, reflecting

the ship's slow progress across the sea, the famous writer was overcome by a sudden sense of shame. The mere comparison of his journey with that of a navigator from the Age of Discovery made him blush! He was on the most comfortable of crossings, aboard a splendid and luxurious ship, with every conceivable amenity. When the temperature dropped at night, all he had to do was press the button on the heater; when the weather became sweltering at midday, he had a fan and even a swimming pool at his disposal; the restaurant served appetizing dishes and

exquisite drinks; if he wished to pass the time with some rewarding reading, there was a vast library; and there was no shortage of inviting areas for games and music.

In such comfortable surroundings, recalling the maritime expeditions of yesteryear was humiliating and even embarrassing for him: times when men like him would set sail in fragile caravels, determined to explore unknown seas, braving the elements and shortages of food and drinking water, on an adventure whose successful outcome was extremely uncertain.

An adventure of this magnitude was undertaken in 1610, by a young Jesuit priest named Peter Claver, who set out with the sole aim of saving souls.

“The hidden life”

Peter Claver was born in Verdú, Spain, on June 25, 1581. Some authors refer to the period between his birth and his profession of simple vows in the Society of Jesus, at the age of twenty-one, as his “hidden life”. This is due to the scarcity of information, documents and biographical accounts of his childhood and adolescence.

It is known, however, that the decisive event in his formation and the fulfilment of his vocation was his encounter with another member of the





Society of Jesus, St. Alphonsus Rodríguez, who for forty-seven years held the humble position of porter at the Our Lady of Mount Zion School on the Spanish island of Mallorca.

A guide, master and role model

Alphonsus Rodríguez knew full well that holiness is the proper state of those who constantly do God's will. Thus, the simplicity of his role, carried out with the utmost love of obedience, never constituted an obstacle for him to his highest ideal: to honour, love and serve the Creator.

Docility, submission and fidelity to his vocation characterized the man who would become Peter Claver's mentor, guiding him along the path of imitating Christ.

So fruitful was the relationship between these two Jesuit saints that one of his biographers would affirm: "Without St. Alphonsus Rodríguez, St. Peter Claver could neither be explained nor would he have existed."¹ It is said that, when they met for the first time, the two embraced, unable to hold back their tears. It was St. Alphonsus who inspired, guided and even foresaw Peter Claver's mission.

What was this mission?

Peter, "duc in altum"!

Peter Claver felt called to literally go out into deeper waters, following Our Lord's mandate to the Prince of the Apostles: "*Duc in altum!*" (Lk 5:4). God was calling him to cross unknown seas and be a great fisher of men, in a continent full of difficulties.

However, it was not just an inner voice or prompting. His mission had been clearly expressed by St. Alphonsus Rodríguez, one day when the two were sitting in the shade of a tree in the schoolyard. His respected elder said to him: "How many idle people there



Like the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter Claver was called by God to cross unknown seas and become a great fisher of men

St. Peter Claver – Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Santander (Spain); on the previous page, caravels at sea – Private collection

are in Europe who could be apostles in America!" And, with tears in his eyes, he added: "May the charity of God not fail to sail those seas that human avarice has already crossed. Are not those souls also worth the life of a God? Did He not also die for them? Ah, Peter, my most beloved son, why do you not also go and gather the Blood of Jesus Christ?"

For Peter Claver, it was evident that God was manifesting his will through these words of his teacher. However, speaking of America in those times caused astonishment even among the most daring missionaries. For this very reason, Alphonsus Rodríguez did not fail to encourage him: "He who does not know how to suffer does not know how to love, and there awaits you... Ah! If you only knew the great treasure that awaits you!"

A short time later, at the age of twenty-nine, Peter set sail from the port of Seville, bidding farewell to Europe on April 15, 1610.

The "voices" did not lie

Long and dangerous were the journeys in those days, but he arrived without major problems in Cartagena de Indias, in New Granada – present-day Colombia.

At the end of his life, St. Peter Claver revealed in confidence another part of his master's prophecy. He affirmed, with joy at seeing it fulfilled, that his master had clearly communicated three things to him: the first, that his work would be directed primarily towards the Black people; the second, that it would take place in New Granada; the third, that it would specifically unfold in Cartagena de Indias.

At the beginning of the mission, something seemed to contradict the prediction, as he was first sent to Bogotá and then to Tunja. However, the two missions entrusted to him during this period totalled only three years of the more than forty he lived in Colombia. The "voices" of St. Alphonsus did not lie!

Returning to Cartagena, Peter soon began his apostolic work with the enslaved people brought from Africa.

After a period of uncertainty and discernment regarding his vocation to the priesthood, he received the Sacrament of Holy Orders on March 19, 1616, thus configuring himself to Christ, Priest and Victim. From then on, his apostolate would be much more effective and fruitful.

Freed from the worst slavery

We are at a loss for words to accurately describe the suffering endured on the slave ships by those human beings reduced to the state of captivity and servitude. However, by merciful divine design, the voyage over the Atlantic Ocean, like a new Red Sea crossing for them, would bring their liberation from another slavery: that of sin.

God – who draws good even from circumstances of calamity and misfortune – prepared a guide capable of giving them something they could not even imagine: divine life, through the waters of Baptism. On the shore, not far from the port, was Peter Claver awaiting the prisoners, who urgently needed healing for their bodies and, even more so, care for their souls.

When a ship arrived, he would immediately rush to it, accompanied by interpreters, carrying food, drink, and medicine. He would enter those wretched and nauseating holds without hesitation, with the intention of cleaning wounds, applying dressings and opening the hearts of those unhappy people to the grace of Christ. With affectionate words that filled them with confidence, he would gradually prepare those souls to receive Baptism and to resolve to lead a Christian life, founded on the practice of the Commandments.

Dead to himself, alive to God

Through Fr. Peter Claver, God revealed Himself to those poor exiles as a kind, welcoming, and merciful Father. The holy missionary baptized about three hundred thousand native Africans throughout his forty-four years of apostolic mission. His love for the Blessed Virgin also led him to preach devotion to the Holy Rosary with great enthusiasm, and he would personally make and distribute rosaries by the thousands every year.

His last four years on this earth were spent in the convent's infirmary, his body practically immobilized by illness. He who, like St. Paul, had become all things to all people (cf. 1 Cor 9:22), spent his days in si-

lent contemplation, abandoned and forgotten by men. One last suffering was still reserved for him: a hired ex-slave – such as those to whom he had dedicated his whole life –, designated as his nurse, behaved instead like a cruel executioner, treating him with extreme brutality and often depriving him of the necessary nourishment.



To be great in the eyes of God, a man must be a slave of others through charity, bearing in his own flesh the sufferings of Christ

St. Peter Claver baptizing a slave – Church of St. Peter, Lima

Until the end of his days, Peter Claver was a man dead to himself, to his preferences, his comforts and his personal glory. For him, as for the Apostle of the Gentiles, living for the sake of his captives was gain, and dying, an advantage that led him to Heaven (cf. Phil 1:21).

The news of his impending death seemed to awaken Cartagena de Indias from the supernatural lethargy in

which it lay. People from the entire city – slaves and free men, rich and poor – gathered around the bedside where he lay dying to pay him their tribute of gratitude, showing the veneration due to a true saint.

Crowned with great merits, he departed this world for eternal beatitude on September 8, 1654, the feast of the Nativity of the Heavenly Lady whom he so loved. He left behind a body that seemed merely asleep, exuding a sweet and pleasant fragrance.

His life, a valuable legacy

Today, the epitaph *Slave of the slaves*, engraved on the altar that contains his mortal remains, reminds us that, to be great before God, man must serve others through charity, bearing in his flesh the sufferings of Christ (cf. Col 1:24).

How far the words *suffering, cross, and sacrifice* are from the modern vocabulary! Far, and even the object of aversion and contempt...

However, although contemporary life is full of pleasures, conveniences, and comforts, it will never cease to present moments of suffering, crisis, and perplexities.

If, in such times of adversity, we remember St. Peter Claver, we will have the courage and strength to embrace the Cross of Christ, to sacrifice ourselves unreservedly for the salvation of souls and, like him, to make ourselves slaves to one another through charity (cf. Gal 5:13). ✚

¹ VALTIERRA, SJ, Ángel; HORNEDO, SJ, Rafael María de. *San Pedro Claver: Esclavo de los esclavos*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1997, p.34. The biographical details contained in this article were taken from this book.



To Bear Witness to the Truth with Dignity and Fearlessness

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

§2471 Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that He “has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” The Christian is not to “be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord” (2 Tm 1:8). In situations that require witness to the Faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges. We must keep “a clear conscience toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16).

The *Catechism* summarizes a fundamental mission in the life of the baptized: the duty to proclaim and defend the truths of the Faith. To this end, the text sets out two key models: Our Lord Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of virtue and holiness, and St. Paul, a remarkable example of courage and integrity.

By referring to the Redeemer’s dialogue with Pilate (cf. Jn 18:37), the *Catechism* invites us to reflect on the witness to the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas,¹ in the introduction to the *Summa contra Gentiles*, quotes precisely this passage from the Gospel to argue that the proper office of the wise man is dedication to the contemplation of this Supreme Truth, that is, God, the source of all truth.

With remarkable clarity, Aquinas explains that just as medicine promotes health and wards off illness, the wise person must meditate on God and refute all error and falsehood, as the Book of Proverbs states: “my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips” (Prv 8:7).

Bearing witness to Christ requires self-denial and consistency, virtues which St. Paul instilled in his disciple Timothy (cf. 2 Tm 1:8).

Reaffirming this vocation, the Second Vatican Council² recalls that Christians must manifest, by example and by

the witness of the word, the new life received in Baptism and reinvigorated by Confirmation. The intrepid defence of the truth made by the Apostle before Governor Felix (cf. Acts 24:16) testifies that the credibility of the Christian witness does not reside only in words, but in the authenticity and integrity of life.

In the face of today’s neo-pagan society, often hostile or indifferent to the Faith, the universal vocation to holiness demands courage. Strengthened by the Sacraments and having recourse

to the intercession of Mary Most Holy – whose model of fearless fidelity at the foot of the Cross is a paradigm for all – the faithful are called to fulfil, with righteousness, this sublime and honourable mission of witnesses of the Redeemer. ✠

¹ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa contra gentiles*. L.I, c.1.

² Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Ad gentes*, n.11.



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Called to contemplate the Supreme Truth, a wise person must meditate on God and refute all error and falsehood, not only through words, but also through the authenticity and integrity of his life

“Jesus before Pilate”, by Fra Angelico – St Mark’s Museum, Florence (Italy)



A Remedy for All Ills

Just as she once watched over the well-being of her children, today Dona Lucilia looks for opportunities to alleviate, with her maternal intercession, the ills of those who have recourse to her.



✠ **Elizabete Fátima Talarico Astorino**

The words “confidence” and “mother” are practically synonymous. There is no child who does not trust its mother, and where a good mother is lacking, true confidence will rarely flourish. Perhaps that is why devotees from all walks of life decide to entrust their requests, difficulties and needs, whether large or small, to the hands of Dona Lucilia... This is what we will consider in the following accounts.

A request and an immediate response

Professor Edson Sampel, from São Paulo – a reader well known for his devotion to Dona Lucilia – has sent us yet another account of a brief episode in which Dona Lucilia’s discreet – yet effective – presence made itself felt. He writes:

“My wife and I were anxiously searching the house for some euros. We couldn’t quite remember where we had put them. Or rather: I knew perfectly well where I had put the money, but it wasn’t there anymore. We were

already imagining that something bad had happened, like a thief breaking into our apartment.

“At a certain point, we decided to stop looking for the money. I was very

concerned, so I decided to pray the Rosary. At the end of the second decade, as always, I asked for the intercession of Dona Lucilia. That afternoon I asked for her help fervently. Well, I finished praying the Rosary and went back to searching for the euros. In the very first place I looked, I found the money!”

A friend for all occasions

Like Professor Edson, there are many who have witnessed how much a small prayer is enough for Dona Lucilia to intercede with the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the intentions of those who turn to her.

From Portugal, Mrs. Maria Laura Gonçalves Brandão sends us a brief but moving testimony of Dona Lucilia’s intervention on her behalf, a mother distressed by her daughter’s sorrows.

Indeed, the Portuguese reader tells us that she decided to place in Dona Lucilia’s hands her request that her daughter’s infertility be overcome so that she could finally have the joy of



Having entrusted her daughter’s difficulties to Dona Lucilia, Mrs. Gonçalves Brandão now gives thanks to God for her first grandchild

Mrs. Gonçalves Brandão and her husband with their grandson

holding a grandchild in her arms. Here are her words:

“I wish to give thanks in writing for an extraordinary grace that I asked for and received from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the intercession of Dona Lucilia. My daughter wanted to have children, but she had already lost two baby boys, and she underwent several treatments and could not become pregnant. After I asked and prayed to Dona Lucilia, she underwent another treatment and became pregnant. Everything went well with the pregnancy and the delivery, and until now. I have a grandson who is fifteen months old and my daughter is pregnant again, in her twenty-fourth week. Please pray for her, because she is already forty-five years old.

“I would appreciate it if you could forward this ‘miracle’ to the appropriate people so that it can be published, so that we can praise God and glorify our friend Dona Lucilia, who protects us at all times!”

The beginning of an ordeal

During a recent visit to Paraguay, I had the opportunity to meet a blessed family, very Catholic and devoted to Dona Lucilia, who received effective help from this kind mother some years ago for one of them, Valeria Gutiérrez, when she discovered a dangerous brain tumour.

It was Micaela, Valeria’s sister, who recounted to me the details of the painful situation they went through, and how they faced it as a family, all united in their intentions and prayers, entrusting the complete resolution of the case to the care of Dona Lucilia.

It all began on January 17, 2023. Valeria had to be hospitalized due to acute neck pain and a strange numbness in her left arm. Several tests were performed to determine the cause of

this discomfort, and finally, a large brain tumour was discovered in the frontal region of her head. Micaela tells us what followed the news:

“The anguish was so great when we found out that I decided to seek help from the Heralds of the Gospel. A Herald priest visited her in the hospital, bringing with him a photograph of Dona Lucilia, to whom we prayed

“The first neurosurgeon we spoke to said that a biopsy was urgently needed to determine if the tumour was malignant. On January 25, Valeria underwent a procedure for this purpose. The results showed the presence of a meningioma with benign characteristics.

“Days later, the same doctor called a family meeting and warned us that, due to the size of the tumour and its location, the consequences of an operation could be numerous: including meningitis, loss of senses, loss of mobility, and even postoperative facial deformity... According to him, operating on her in Paraguay would have little chance of success, and therefore he suggested taking her abroad for a second opinion.”

The situation was grim. However, according to Micaela’s account, a ray of light illuminated the situation:

“At that moment, by divine inspiration, we decided to consult another neurosurgeon who had just arrived from the United States. After analysing the case, he said he was qualified to perform the operation in Paraguay, as he had the necessary instruments for the procedure; however, he stressed that the most important thing was to have God’s help, especially in this case, due to its complexity.

The chances of success and the doctor’s positive attitude gave the family new hope. However, the professional also clarified that, if it was impossible to completely remove the tumour, Valeria would need to undergo several sessions of radiotherapy.

Intervention and surprising recovery

Preparations were made for the surgical intervention. Micaela’s account continues:



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Putting her trust in Dona Lucilia’s intercession, Valeria underwent an eight-hour surgery. The result was the complete extraction of the tumour and a remarkable recovery

Valeria Gutiérrez with a picture of Dona Lucilia

and whose ‘miraculous’ intercession we have sought from the very first moment. This picture stayed with Valeria until her recovery.”

Perplexities and hopes

As is natural, the desire for Valeria to overcome this ordeal was great on the part of all her family members; however, the doctors gave unfavourable prognoses. Micaela continues her account:

“On February 11, the day of Our Lady of Lourdes, a priest from the Heralds of the Gospel visited Valeria again before her surgery to administer the necessary Sacraments, and reminded us to have recourse to the intercession of Dona Lucilia.”

So they did, both she and her family, and trusting in Dona Lucilia they faced the surgery, performed on February 13, and lasting eight hours:

“When the doctor came out to talk to us, he said he was very satisfied with the result of the operation, as he had managed to completely remove the tumour. He stated that he was very surprised by the rapid and favourable postoperative reaction. Valeria woke up immediately, lucid and apparently with most of her senses intact. In fact, the doctor was amazed when she said: ‘I’m feeling cold.’”

Valeria had a surprising recovery. She spent only two days in the ICU and emerged with no lingering effects other than a slight loss of smell and taste – a minor sequela considering the gravity of her condition. She was therefore discharged earlier than expected and did not require any post-operative treatment.

A minor malaise turns into tragedy

For a family in Maringá, in the state of Paraná, Dona Lucilia was also a source of comfort during a time of distress. Mrs. Patricia Borges and her husband, Mr. Mateus Fernando Borges, recount what happened to their son Felipe:

“In the early morning of April 24, 2025, Felipe woke up coughing a lot



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“Dona Lucilia, our mother: help us!” was Felipe’s plea; a few minutes later he got up, having recovered from the serious condition in which he had been admitted to hospital

Felipe, holding Dona Lucilia’s biography

and with very laboured breathing. I gave him some medicine and he went back to sleep. But throughout the morning, as he was still coughing a lot, we decided that he shouldn’t go to school. I stayed home with him, and my husband went to work. However, I noticed that all morning long my son was having great difficulty breathing.”

What until then seemed like a passing discomfort began to take shape as a complex problem, which is why Patricia asked her husband to return from work to take the boy to the hospital. As Patricia narrates:

“By that time, I realized that Felipe was getting much worse and decided to take him to the doctor myself. I went to get the car keys, which were on top of Dona Lucilia’s book,¹ I took the key and the book together, put Felipe in

the car and we went to the hospital. On the way, my son was already struggling a lot, and I could see that he was almost not breathing. So I drove as fast as possible! When I arrived in the hospital parking lot, my son could no longer get out of the car and walk, he was unconscious...”

Distraught, Patricia entered the hospital with her son in her arms, pleading for help. She was immediately taken to the examination room, where the doctor assessed the boy’s oxygen saturation and determined the severity of his condition: 97% of Felipe’s lungs were compromised, meaning he was breathing with only 3% of his lung capacity! Given the urgency, the doctor decided on emergency treatment, leading the mother to the room where the procedure would be performed. The

account continues:

“I picked Felipe up and we ran through the hospital corridors. Meanwhile, the doctor explained the procedure to me – a combination of a nebulizer and inhalation – because if oxygen were administered directly, my son would not survive.

We arrived at the treatment room; several nurses came in and attached a small pump to Felipe. I just stood there, paralyzed, not knowing what to do or what to think, watching my son lying there unconscious, not speaking, not even moving...”

“A child who can’t breathe, can’t run...”

After the initial care, the doctor deemed it necessary to admit the child to the ICU, as the situation was very se-

rious. She explained the case to Patricia and left to complete the paperwork. This news left her distraught:

“My heart raced, my legs went cold, and I didn’t know what to do. The nurses continued the procedure, the doctor left, I sat down and stayed there looking at my son. After the second dose of inhalation, the nurses left, and it was just me and him. At that moment, I opened my purse and took out Dona Lucilia’s book.”

It is worth explaining why Patricia had this book with her. Shortly before, she had heard of Dona Lucilia and, wanting to know her story, she borrowed a copy of her biography. The narration continues:

“When Felipe saw the book, he took off his inhaler and exclaimed: ‘Dona Lucilia, our mother: help us! Right, Mom?’ I replied: ‘Yes, son, let’s ask Dona Lucilia to help us!’”

Minutes later, Felipe expressed a desire to get up. Patricia suggested carrying him, but the boy emphatically refused: “No need, Mom!” And, matching his words to his actions, he removed the inhaler, got off the stretcher, and ran out of the room...

Amazed, one of the nurses who was walking down the hallway towards the boy’s room to attend to him asked the mother: “Was that Felipe who just ran by here? That’s not possible! A child who can’t breathe can’t run...”

The nurse was absolutely right, but the fact is that the child was already breathing without difficulty.

Another motherly caress

Back in the room, Felipe had another medication session and, since he hadn’t had lunch, asked for something to eat. The nurse kindly asked what he would like. The boy immediately replied: “I want spaghetti with garlic and olive oil, and lots of bacon!”

The request brought smiles to the nurse and the mother, as it was unlikely such a dish could be found in the hospital. Easing the situation, the nurse

clarified: “Felipe, I can’t get that, it’s impossible. What I can get is a little spaghetti, but in a soup.”

Then, the staff member responsible for serving the meals, who was passing by in the corridor, gave Patricia the only available lunchbox. Her surprise was immense when she opened the container and found exactly the dish her son had asked for!

Without a doubt, it was another caress from Dona Lucilia, who watched over the boy’s health with the same dedication and solicitude with which, in the past, she had cared for her own children.

At the farewell: a confirmation

Medicated and well-fed, Felipe returned to the examination room with his mother. The doctor, after re-evaluating him, was surprised by the sudden change in his condition. “I am witnessing a miracle!” she exclaimed. “He arrived unconscious and now he is fully recovered.” Given the improvement, Felipe was discharged, continuing treatment at home.

Patricia recalls a touching moment at the farewell: “While I was putting away the prescriptions, the doctor hugged Felipe and said, ‘Salve Maria, Felipe!’ He responded promptly. In the car, his mother asked if her son had initiated the greeting, and he explained that he had only responded to it. At that moment, his mother was certain of Dona Lucilia’s intervention. ✦

¹ The biography of Dona Lucilia, written by Msgr. João: CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Dona Lucilia*. Città del Vaticano-São Paulo: LEV; Lumen Sapientiae, 2013

Dona Lucilia has won the trust of devotees from all walks of life and has helped them with a wide variety of requests, difficulties and needs

Dona Lucilia in Paris, in 1912





Photos: Sergio Céspedes

Campos dos Goytacazes (Brazil) – The dedication and blessing of the altar of St. Paul the Apostle Oratory, belonging to the Heralds of the Gospel, took place on July 11. The ceremony was presided over by Diocesan Bishop Roberto Francisco Ferrería Paz, and concelebrated by the Vicar General, Msgr. Leandro de Moraes Diniz, the local parish priest, Fr. Dênison Martins, along with numerous other priests from the diocese and the Heralds of the Gospel.



Photos: Sergio Céspedes

Murilo Dugonski

São Paulo – A solemn procession with the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, led by youth from the priestly formation centre of the Clerical Society Virgo Flos Carmeli, marked the 19th edition of Expocatólica on July 25. On that occasion, the event's director, Kiara Castro, crowned the image of the Blessed Virgin.



Strengthened by Confidence!

More than fifteen hundred collaborators of the Heralds of the Gospel participated in the international congress held in three successive sessions, between July 17 and 26, at the Tabor Formation House complex. These days were

marked by periods of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Masses, processional Rosaries, presentations, and study circles. Each participant received a souvenir copy of *The Book of Confidence*, authored by Fr. Thomas de Saint-Laurent.



Photos: Leandro Souza

Stephen Nami



Photos: Francisco Espinola



Preetham Dsilva



Paraguay – On August 2, Cardinal Adalberto Martínez Flores, Archbishop of Asunción, celebrated the Solemn Eucharist for the installation of Fr. Kirthan Carlo, EP, as parish priest of the Church of St. Isidore the Farmer, in the city of Limpio. The Holy Mass was concelebrated by priests from the local diocese and the Heralds of the Gospel, and was attended by a large number of the faithful.

Photos: César Yunes



Lesotho – Heralds residing in Mozambique and South Africa carried out a fruitful Marian mission at the St. Louis Parish in Matsieng, from June 26 to 28. The mission included visits to families, a procession, a beautiful motorcade, and the recitation of a thousand Hail Marys for the Queen Consort of Lesotho, who was celebrating her birthday.

Activities in Italy



Institution of ministries – On July 3, during a ceremony held at the Church of San Benedetto in Piscinula in Rome, Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis, Archbishop Emeritus of Aparecida, conferred the ministries of lector and acolyte upon members of the Heralds of the Gospel residing in Europe.



Triduum in honour of St. Benedict – A three-day series of solemn Eucharistic celebrations led up to the Patron Saint's feast day at the Church of San Benedetto in Piscinula, from July 8 to 10. We highlight the Masses celebrated by Bishop Luis Marin de San Martín, OSA, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity (photo 1); Bishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization (photo 2); and Bishop Jeremias Schröder, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation (photo 3).



Marian missions – In July, the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary visited the Sicilian parishes of St. Mary of Carmel in Catania (photos 1 and 2) and St. John the Baptist in Messina (photo 3), bestowing her blessings on churches, residences, schools, and nursing homes.



Reflection of a Celestial Mission

Beloved, beautiful, exalted, drop of the sea, star... Such are the possible interpretations of the name “Mary”. Is it by chance that this name was given to the Mother of God?

✠ Miguel de Souza Ferrari



Thiago Tamura

“**T**he man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gn 3:20). “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gn 17:5). “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)” (Jn 1:42).

Accustomed to considering people’s names, even our own, merely as a social convention, we may not perceive the full depth of these biblical passages. Why did the Almighty clothe with such solemnity so simple and commonplace a matter as the choice of a name?

The Hebrew people of the Old Testament did not think as we do; they “considered the name of a person to bear a transcendent meaning, especially if it were inspired by God,”¹ as Msgr. João explains. Thus, when the Creator named someone, He showed that this person had been invested with a heavenly mission.

A name given by God

If the Bible presents so many providential men and women whose very name carries a supernatural purpose, it would be impossible to imagine that the Eternal Father would devote less attention to the choice of the name of His predilect one.

The Scriptures mention nothing about Our Lady’s childhood, nor the choice of her name. However, according to pious private revelations, even before the Blessed Virgin Mary was miraculously conceived, the Archangel Gabriel “communicated to Joachim in dreams that his wife had received a celestial visit, revealing to her that she would conceive a Daughter. And he told Joachim that the child should be named Mary.”²

Mary! What a universe of symbolism is hidden under this name! Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira rightly stated: “The Most Holy Name of Our Lady, like the Most Holy Name of Jesus, must be considered as a name symbolic of her sublime virtue, of her mission, of who She truly is.”³

But what aspects of the Queen of Angels’ immeasurable mission can be glimpsed through her Holy Name?

Yahweh’s Beloved

The first Mary to appear in the Holy Scriptures is the sister of Moses and Aaron (cf. Ex 15:20), probably the same one who instigated Pharaoh’s daughter to save the prophet from the waters (cf. Ex 2:4-10).

This led scholars to search the Egyptian language for the etymology of the name. One possibility is that it comes from *Myr-yayam*, that is, “Yahweh’s Beloved”.⁴ How appropriate this

It is unimaginable that the Eternal Father would devote less attention to the choice of the name of His predilect one

Our Lady, Help of Christians – Tabor Formation Centre, Caieiras (Brazil)

interpretation is when applied to the Virgin: She who was the object of divine love from all eternity bears in her very name the mark of her predestination! Moreover, the fact that this name is related to the sister of Moses – who collaborated in the liberation of the chosen people – may allude to the traditional role attributed to Mary Most Holy in the Redemption of humankind wrought by her Divine Son.

Nevertheless, however beautiful these interpretations may be, philologists and exegetes were not content with them. Perhaps impelled by the breath of grace, they continued their investigations.

Replete with gifts

After considering the Virgin as the receptacle of the Creator's infinite love, Mariology contemplated her replete with gifts and graces, corollaries of celestial benevolence. Hence the hypothesis that the name Mary comes from *mārā*, a term that can be understood as *beautiful*.⁵ Here we find Our Lady as the *tota pulchra*, the all-beautiful in the eyes of the Most High (cf. Sg 4:7).

Enriched with favours, She was elevated above all creation, rising "like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun" (Sg 6:10). For this reason, Mary can also mean "the exalted one."⁶ Thus, just as She is the *beloved* and the *beautiful* in the sight of God, so too, in relation to the rest of creation, She appears so exalted that She has rightfully become the sovereign – hence *Lady* is the Syriac interpretation of that Holy Name.⁷

Light in the darkness of the world

The fullness of grace makes the Virgin's soul radiant, a true source of light. As St. Thomas Aquinas affirms, "She is rightly called Mary, which means 'enlightened in herself,' whence applies to Mary what Isaiah said: 'The Lord will fill your soul with splendour' (Is 58:11)."⁸ Now, as with celestial bodies, so much light needs to be dif-



"O you, whoever you may be, who feel far from land, tossed about by the waves of this world in the midst of storms and tempests, keep your eyes fixed on the glow of this star if you would not be overwhelmed"

"Storm at Sea", by Pieter Mulier – State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Russia)

fused; therefore, her name "also means 'illuminator of others,' in relation to the whole world; therefore, Mary is compared to the Sun and the Moon."⁹

Mary is, therefore, like a celestial body illuminating us in the darkness of this world. Hence the interpretation, very widespread in the Middle Ages – although philologically imprecise – of Mary meaning *star of the sea*: She who guides us amidst the tribulations of the *mare magnum* in which we live.

In this regard, it is fitting to quote the celebrated excerpt from the Abbot of Clairvaux: "She is that noble star born of Jacob, whose rays illuminate the whole earth, whose brightness both shines forth in the heavens and penetrates the depths. [...] O you, whoever you may be, who feel far from land, tossed about by the waves of this world in the midst of storms and tempests rather than walking upon the solid ground, keep your eyes fixed on the glow of this star if you would not be overwhelmed by the floods."¹⁰

A drop of divinity

We mentioned that the translation *star of the sea* is not entirely correct from a linguistic point of view. In fact, it comes from a slip, perhaps due to a copyist's error, in the interpretation of St. Jerome: from *stilla maris* – drop of the sea – came *stella maris* – star of the sea.¹¹

Although the mistake was, in a way, providential, we cannot fail to contemplate Mary as a "drop" of the sea of divinity.

If a "drop of grace" is worth more than the entire work of creation – as Msgr. João liked to paraphrase St. Thomas¹² – how much more valuable is this divine "drop" that is Mary? To such an extent is She full of God that the Archangel Gabriel, at the Annunciation, replaces her name with the title "Full of Grace" – *kecharitomene* – (Lk 1:28), revealing that this designation identifies her from eternity and that from her holiness come all the graces we receive.

A battle cry

If the name Mary signifies *beauty* and *predilection* before the Lord, as well as *light* and *grace* for her children, what will it represent to the enemies of God?

The answer this time does not lie in philology, but in history. Indeed, Pope Innocent XI instituted the celebration of the Most Holy Name of Mary on the occasion of the victory at the Battle of Vienna, on September 12, 1683. This miraculous triumph, which saved Christendom from the Mohammedan invasion, was attributed to the invocation of the name of Mary, to whom the unfolding of the battle was consecrated. There, near the Vienna Woods – *Wienerwald* –, for Christians the name of Mary proved strong and encourag-

ing, and for the infidels, “terrible as an army set in array” (Sg 6:3).

This reminds us of the words of St. Bernard: “If the winds of temptations surge, if you run aground on the shoals of troubles, look to this star, call upon Mary!”¹³ In whatever difficulty we find ourselves – especially when confronted with the snares of the devil, the attractions of the world, and the tyranny of the flesh – let us always remember that the Most Holy Name of Mary is for us a battle cry and a sure pledge of victory.

A name laden with blessings

Mary! A most holy name, perfectly suited to the unique mission of the Mother of God. It reveals to us that Our Lady has been loved from all eternity,

showered with the most distinguished graces and elevated above the Seraphim; Queen and sovereign, She exercises her rule with mercy and, illuminating the sinners who walk in this vale of tears, guides their steps like a celestial light, until, protected from the attacks of the enemy, they reach the ocean of divinity.

If this name is so laden with blessings and its invocation so powerful, how can we not place all our hope in it? Whoever invokes Mary obtains from God everything they need. And, if anyone still hesitates, let them put it to the test. For this person, St. Bernard’s assurance is fitting: “Thus you will see, by your own experience, how rightly it was said: ‘And the Virgin’s name was Mary.’”¹⁴ ❖

¹ CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Mary Most Holy: The Paradise of God Revealed to Men*. São Paulo: Heralds of the Gospel, 2022, v.II, p.99.

² Ibid., p.65.

³ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 11/9/1964.

⁴ ROPERO BERZOSA, Alfonso. *Gran diccionario enciclo-*

pédico de la Biblia. 7.ed. Barcelona: Clie, 2021, p.1700.

⁵ Cf. BORN, Adrianus van den. *Dicionário enciclopédico da Bíblia*. 6.ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2004, col.946.

⁶ ROPERO BERZOSA, op. cit., p.1700.

⁷ Cf. ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE. *Etymologiarum*. L.VII, c.10, n.1: PL 82, 289.

⁸ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Expositio salutationis angelicæ*, a.1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX. *De laudibus Virginis Matris*. Homilia II, n.17: PL 183, 70.

¹¹ Cf. ST. JEROME. *Liber de nominibus hebraicis*. *Novi Tes-*

tamenti: PL 23, 886; BORN, op. cit., col.947.

¹² Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiæ*. I-II, q.113, a.9, ad 2.

¹³ ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, op. cit., 70.

¹⁴ Ibid., 71.



At the Battle of Vienna, the name of Mary proved to be a source of strength and encouragement to Christians, and to the infidels, as fearsome “as an army set in array”

“The Liberation of Vienna”, by Frans Geffels – Vienna Museum

...that the True Cross was hidden for centuries?

For centuries, Judea – a territory dominated by the Roman Empire – kept a profound secret: the whereabouts of the Cross of Christ. It was only in 326 that St. Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine and a fervent Christian, decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, along with an expedition in search of the most precious relic of Christendom.

The excavation was arduous. Mount Calvary had been buried and levelled by the Romans, transforming the sacred site into an esplanade.

Nevertheless, after weeks of labour, the team of workers finally revealed the original topography. Then came the surprise: in a deeper investigation, three crosses were found! It re-

mained to be seen which one of them was the pledge of our salvation...

Amidst the general commotion, the Bishop of Jerusalem, St. Macarius, begged God to send a sign: “Grant us to know, Lord, in an evident way, which of these three crosses served for Thy

glory!” Now, there was a sick woman in the city, whose case the doctors considered hopeless. When she was touched by the first two crosses, nothing happened. However, upon coming into contact with the third, the woman instantly recovered her health. The miracle left no room for doubt: the true Cross had been found!

St. Helen later divided the precious relic, with parts destined for Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. Given the devotion of the faithful, these portions were later fragmented, allowing for the dissemination of relics of the true Cross throughout the Christian world. Symbolically, however, for the Cross continues to stand while the world turns: *stat Crux dum volvitur orbis*. ✚



“The Discovery of the True Cross”, by Agnolo Gaddi – Basilica of the Holy Cross, Florence (Italy)

...why we pray with our hands folded?

Hands folded, palm to palm, next to the chest of one who prays: this is one of the most common and expressive positions for Christian prayer. Whether a priest at the Sacrifice of the Mass, the anxious student before an exam, or the mother interceding for her children, this posture transcends generations and bor-

ders. And with good reason, given the origins of this tradition.

This position of supplication has its origins in the Middle Ages. It was the age of feudalism, when, in a pledge of mutual aid and complete loyalty, men were united within a hierarchical structure, not through cold, formal contracts that were mere empty words, but through a personal commitment.

A knight who offered himself to the service of a liege lord – whether a king or another noble – swore his oath of fidelity before the master with his hands together on his chest.

Even the soldiers of Christ – “*miles Christi*” (2 Tm 2:3) – began to address

the Divine General in their prayers in this way, and the custom became prevalent from the 12th century onwards.

Along with the widespread movement in favour of this practice, the Church itself recommended it to its children: at the Synod of Oxford (1222), for example, Cardinal Langton instructed the faithful to have their hands folded during the elevation of the Host. Over time, the gesture gained prominence in sacred ceremonies and, through use, became the most common position for prayer in the Liturgy.

When we fold our hands to pray, let us remember the depth of this act: we declare to God that we are His vassals and warriors. May this habit inspire us to humbly ask for the strength necessary to serve Him with loyalty and courage. ✚

Prayers after Mass at Our Lady of the Rosary Basilica, Caieiras (Brazil)



Letters and “emails”, Autographs and Automatism

History, life's teacher, writes its lessons not only on the great blackboards of chronology. Perhaps the most precious of them are inscribed in the small accounts of everyday life, often trivial at present.

✉ **Dcn. Gabriel Borges Bonfim Silva, EP**



We may be stating the most obvious of banalities when we say that we are a long way – and how long! – away from the days when people used to write letters. But, the evident aside, let us consider the extent to which a letter can still be, even in this age of global and instant communication, an interesting subject for social and psychological analysis.

How can we comprehend the interior activity of those who wrote or received a letter, when we are so accustomed to the dizzyingly fast pace of communication in our daily lives?

“It was like an email of its day,” someone might say. But on closer examination, the comparison reveals more differences than similarities, and it is precisely this contrast that will help us understand the importance of writing and receiving letters in people's lives before the digital revolution.

Without wishing to naively argue against the countless conveniences of modern means of communication, we venture this parallel in order to better understand people – both those of yesterday and those of today.

A letter reveals much more about its writer's personality. Even today, graphology uses handwriting as a means of psychological insight. An unconscious seismograph, handwriting betrays emotions, temperament and even the deepest convictions, going so far as to reveal what lies between the lines...

In most cases, a mature thought – or at least those deep feelings that resist first impressions – was projected onto paper. It took time to sit down and write; it cost money to buy paper and ink. Nothing could be said in vain. Now, does not the ease of a “click” all too often give rise to useless and empty verbiage?

A letter was a real event. When it landed in the recipient's hands, it carried, on the outside, the scent of the distances travelled, through so many perils, and on the inside, a trace of the sender's presence. Our emails are certainly incomparably more versatile, but who would dare to claim that they possess the same poetry?

In former missives, one could truly speak of manuscripts; nothing be-

tween the soul and the paper anticipated the thought or directed it – not even an auto-correct function! At a natural pace, the thought flowed onto the paper and the heart sensed which words would resonate most deeply. What a gulf there is between autographs and automatism...

When ideas were lofty indeed and sentiments deep, words alone could no longer convey their full meaning. People turned to poetry, which is almost a song. As St. Augustine said, “What is sung in the heart cannot be expressed in words. [...] Let the heart rejoice without words, and may the immensity of joy know no bounds set by syllables.”¹

* * *

We invite reader to take a moment to look at the photographs of the letters on these pages. And, as a challenge, a question: is it possible to discern any characteristic of their author? Perhaps their social class, a psychological trait or the sender's state of mind? To make it easier, we will give you a clue: these are letters written in the 17th century, in Brazil.

That didn't help much? Nevertheless, it is surely the letter of a distinguished figure: a nobleman, a governor, a high-ranking military officer or an influential bourgeois. Who knows if it is correspondence from one settler addressed to another settler or to the Portuguese Crown... perhaps from a descendant of Pero Vaz de Caminha or... – I know! – from a Jesuit missionary!

On closer inspection, it is difficult to make out what they say, but their appearance leaves no doubt: they convey something of great intellectual, volitional, passionate and, we might emphasize, personal significance. The identity of their author, or authors, as well as the surprising context surrounding them, will be revealed in a forthcoming article. ✦

¹ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Expositions on the Psalms*. Psalm 32. Sermon I, n.8.



In the foreground, letters from the 17th century; in the background, a Brazilian landscape by Frans Post – Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Germany). On the previous page, a detail from 'Man Writing a Letter' by Gabriël Metsu – National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Photos: Reproduction

Passion of the Son, Martyrdom of the Mother

She suffered, beyond all expression, for all that Jesus Christ suffered [...]. What caused St. Lawrence to suffer was the burning gridiron upon which he lay; St. Stephen, the stones with which he was lapidated; the confessors of the Faith, the prisons, the racks, the fangs of wild beasts, the iron nails, hunger and thirst. However, the love they had for Jesus softened their sufferings.

For Mary, her tormentor is the very ardent love She has for the Saviour. [...] Jesus' exhaustion, His sufferings, His sorrows, the persecutions, the calumnies to which He is subjected, the ingratitude hurled against Him – She shared in all these to an unspeakable degree.

Yet what caused her the highest degree of suffering of all was the bloody immolation of her beloved Son. For her it was the martyrdom of martyrdoms.

Fr. Charles Rolland