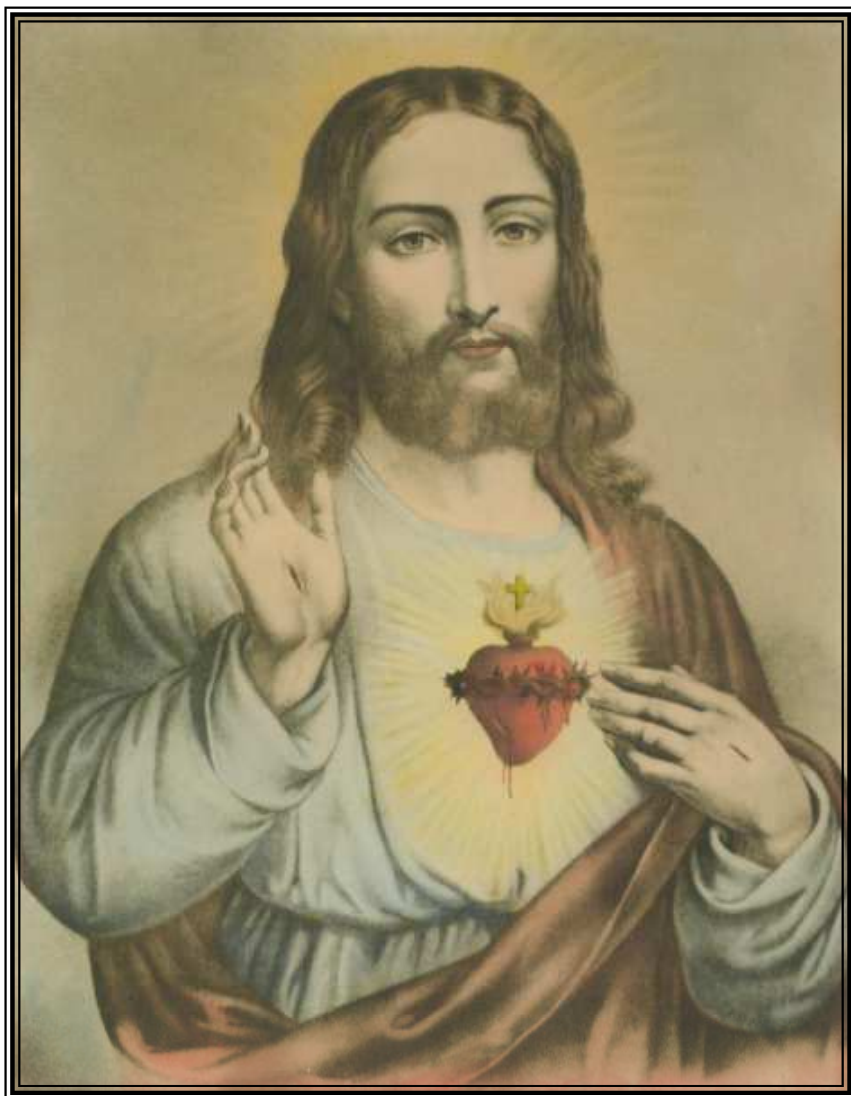


THE SERAPH

June 2016

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**I would create the universe again just to hear you say you love Me.
(Jesus to St. Teresa of Avila)**

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The SERAPH stands opposed to any and all heterodoxy, particularly as manifested in today's heresy of Modernism. It holds to the principle that good will without truth is a sham and that truth without good will is a shame.

The SERAPH seeks to serve and unite in spirit all Roman Catholics faithful to tradition and all men of good will for the betterment of society according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

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God's Calling

Bishop Giles OFM

In the United States, we honor Mothers in May and Fathers in June. These are secular holidays, but they offer us the opportunity to view these days from a Catholic or spiritual perspective. The fourth commandment strictly commands us to love, honor, and obey our parents. The authority that they hold over us is a delegated one. They possess and exercise this authority in the Name of God, Who has given them children and entrusted them to their care. It is God Whom we love, honor, and obey; when we love, honor, and obey our parents. There are no perfect parents, they are all truly very poor representatives of God. This is where faith must come into play. It is with the eyes of faith that we perceive God within our parents, as well as within all our fellow men.

No doubt there are good qualities within everyone, and when we focus upon these good things, it is easy to see the reflection of God. It is when we focus upon the faults, failures, and defects

in one another that it becomes harder to see God, and therefore harder to love, honor, and respect one another – especially those who have authority over us. The key to unlocking this mystery, is in blinding ourselves to one another's faults and focusing upon the graces that God has placed in each of us.

God is superlatively perfect in all His attributes as well as being purely spiritual and simple. He is without parts and is therefore not subject to decay or disintegration. We mentally separate each of His attributes to examine and study them, but in reality they are not separable. God's goodness is the same and one with His Justice, His Wisdom, His Understanding, His Mercy, etc. In us, His creatures, we do not have these attributes in perfection as He does, nor do we have them all to the same degree. For example, some people may tend to be rigorous and seek absolute "justice," but be extremely lacking in mercy. The imbalance of these attributes

often turns these would be good virtues into actual vices.

It has been said that “there is no sinner in this world that does not have a future (opportunity for grace), and there is no saint that did not have a past (some sins, faults or failings).” It is therefore unreasonable for us to seek perfection in one another. If we could find perfection in this manner, there would be no merit or faith required on our part in loving, honoring, and respecting them. Bearing with the defects of one another, can be made tolerable and even a joy when we embrace them and bear them patiently in each other as Jesus Christ has done for us. We should seek to overlook, and excuse the faults we see in others; but we must strive to overcome and eliminate them within ourselves. Our fallen nature tends to do just the opposite. Christ has commanded that we follow Him and learn of Him because He is meek and humble of heart.

We are all children and therefore we all have parents or some authority placed over us that we must strive to love, serve, and obey. Most often, we are not given the choice or option of who or what authority is over us – these are given to us by God.

Our families are ours by the Will of God. With all their problems and defects, they are the best ones for us, because this is where God has placed us. God has the intention of bringing us to perfection and eternal happiness in Heaven. Our family is one of the means that He uses to teach and develop within us each of the virtues, but especially meekness and humility.

The difficulties faced by families today are many, and to aid us in this, God has given many graces in the sacrament of matrimony. Husband and wife, when united by God in this holy sacrament, are given many graces to aid them in the treacherous life they are beginning. Each spouse gives to the other, power and authority over his or her self, which develops and nourishes the virtues of meekness and humility. Their children aid them in the practice of patience, as well as fill their lives with joy.

Our Holy Mother the Church is a family. We belong to one Body, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, and when we work together in meekness and humility, everyone benefits. There is one part of this Mystical Body, that few of our young people consider – the religious

life. The lives of the brothers and sisters in religious life often appear as unnatural or unattainable goals. The world and society present sexual activity as normal, natural, and even necessary for everyone. The young man or woman often believes these lies and makes some very tragic mistakes.

The Mystical Body of Christ has a need for Marriage, and it is good; however St. Paul tells us there is an even greater good to be sought after – by those who can. We must first realize with St. Paul that we CAN do all things in Him who strengthens us! Nothing, is impossible to God. Celibacy is possible and attainable, if we cooperate with the grace of God. It seems that in worldly things we hold out the highest ideals and goals for our children, but in the spiritual life, we suggest that they only strive for the lower levels and not even attempt to rise higher for God.

Religious life does have its crosses and burdens, just as does the married state or even the single state. If we go in search of reasons not to do something we can always find an abundance of them. Sadly, when most people consider religious, they only see the sacrifices. Poverty,

chastity, obedience, humbling daily crosses and sacrifices do not sound appealing to anyone. These things are only a part of the religious life. There are many and varied spiritual joys awaiting the religious, not just in eternity, but even here on earth. “Taste and see how sweet the Lord is.” There are consolations when they are needed most. The unappealing aspects that frighten most people in the world, are actually transformed into some of the greatest joys and consolations for the religious – just as Jesus has promised: “Deny yourself and take up your cross daily, and come follow Me and you will find that My burden is light and sweet.” Few believe this because few have experienced it; few have experienced it because few have tried. Perhaps this is because most are lacking in any real faith. They seem to doubt the very words of Christ.

St. Augustine directs virgins to love and thus, find pleasure even in sacrifice.

“If therefore, you have despised the nuptials of the sons of men, out of which you would beget sons of men, love Him with all your heart who is ‘beautiful above the sons of men.’ (Ps. 44,

3) You have the opportunity; your heart is free from the bonds of marriage. Contemplate the beauty of your Lover; consider Him, equal to His Father, subject also to His Mother; ruling even over the heavens, and serving upon earth, making all things to exist, and being made to exist in the midst of all things. That very thing which the proud deride in Him, see how beautiful it is. By your interior illumination, contemplate the wounds of the Crucified, the scars of the risen One, the blood of the dying One, the ransom of the believer, the price paid by the Redeemer.”

“Let Him be placed in complete possession of your heart, who for you was placed upon the cross; let Him possess entirely within your soul whatever you did not wish to be usurped by marriage. It is not lawful for you to love sparingly Him for whose sake you did not love even what was lawful. I have no fear of pride in you who so love Him who is meek and humble of heart.”

There is truly no one more beautiful and worthy of all our love. The virginal life is the life

of intimate union with God, to be espoused to Him and become one with Him.

There is a terrible trap that the devils use in the attack upon those who have renounced the world and given themselves to God, and that is pride. St. Augustine’s beautiful work on virginity again cautions and directs us how to resist and overcome these snares: “I do not send you to the publicans and sinners that you may learn humility – although they enter the kingdom of heaven before the proud. ... I send you to the King of heaven, to Him through whom men were created, and who was created in the midst of men for the sake of men; to Him who is ‘beautiful above the sons of men’ (Ps. 44, 3) and despised by the sons of men for the sake of the sons of men; to Him who, although ruling over the immortal angels, did not disdain to serve men.”



NOTE:

**The Seraph is not published in July and August.
We are looking forward to seeing you again in September.**

Is it Love or War?

Fr. Joseph Noonan, OFM

The Modernists over the past fifty years have delivered one blow after another to Holy Mother Church. Most Catholics are familiar with the damage that been done, knowing to some extent what the end game is for these traitors of the Faith.

The initial assault was the most devastating, for, essentially it was a surprise attack that only a few saw coming. In continuing to use a war scenario, while the bombs were being dropped (the replacement of the True Mass with a Protestant communion service), other planes were releasing propaganda leaflets telling the shocked and dazed Catholic masses that all is going to be just fine. The printers of this misinformation did not bother to define what was meant by “being fine.” That, of course, would be left to the naïveté of the hierarchy and ignorance of the Catholic Faith. It did not help, either, that the “bombing” took place under the cover of “darkness”, i.e., lies and half-truths.

Through the years Catholics have been led to believe that a great “peace” (Vatican II) exists, but all the while the enemy (Modernists) continues the spiritual war by replacing the valid Sacraments and preaching an unending number of heresies.

They have been quite clever in

how they have gone about planting the heresies. An example that has occurred many times is the one which concerns doctrine and discipline. To put this in the simplest terms possible, it refers to the practical application of a teaching of the Church. The extended explanation which follows is the latest and one of the more hypocritical examples of the Modernists.

On April 8, 2016, the Vatican published the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love). An Apostolic Exhortation is a document which states opinions of the reigning pope. It is generally considered not to be doctrinal or therefore, infallible. In practice these opinions may be connected to doctrine or discipline. As the reader will see this document is tied to both.

This document provides the Catholic world with the thoughts and opinions of Jorge Bergoglio, a.k.a. “Pope Francis,” concerning marriage, family, abortion, contraception, homosexuality, etc. These were the main topics of the two Synods which took place in the fall of 2014 and 2015, respectively.

Five points have been chosen for this article to illustrate the revolutionary and heretical mind of Jorge Bergoglio. It must be noted that what is stated in a document such as this,

that is, one that is not “doctrinal”, will nonetheless have a doctrinal reaction among the more liberal wing of the Modernist Church. It should further be noted that more “conservative” Modernists have openly stated their dissatisfaction (disagreement) with the stated opinions of the heresiarch Jorge Bergoglio. One has yet to witness, though, any type of exodus from this heretical church!

Beginning with **paragraph 53**: ... *“Surely it is legitimate and right to reject older forms of the traditional family marked by authoritarianism and even violence, yet this should not lead to a disparagement of marriage itself, but rather to the rediscovery of its authentic meaning and its renewal.”*

Comment: Bergoglio rejects the right order in the family which has been established by God. Physical abuse of the wives is to be condemned, but this does not mean that the book on marriage needs to be rewritten. How does one reject traditional marriage and family and hope to “rediscover” its authentic meaning and its renewal?

Paragraph 54: *“There are those who believe that many of today’s problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid, “it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism.” The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there*

is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women’s movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women.”

Comment: Apparently Bergoglio accepts the feminist revolution that has destroyed the family in this country. He mocks anyone who disagrees by calling them male chauvinists. This, of course, is not only absurd, but shows himself to be a faithful disciple of radical feminism. He has been so diabolically misled that he believes the Holy Ghost has rightly guided this feminine revolution to bring about a “clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women?” He seems to be so devoid of the proper understanding of the elevation of women through the Blessed Mother and other female saints. History shows that it has been primarily through the Church that women have been elevated to a proper and elevated position in society and the family. It is through the demonic/paganistic goals which are so clearly displayed in today’s feminist movement that has brought about the enslavement of women that has perhaps never been witnessed in society. This so-called freedom has degraded the female in ways which were never present in past ages. The reason so few understand this is because spiritual slavery has blinded the masses.

Paragraph 299: *“I am in agreement with the many Synod Fathers who observed that “the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal. The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it. They are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all. Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted. Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel. This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important.”*

Comment: It is clear that Bergoglio is one of a group of Modernist clerics that wishes to deny Scripture’s words and Our Lord’s intention (What God has brought together,

let no man put asunder). He ignores the fact that the Catholic person in this “marriage” made the conscious decision to be married outside of the Church. This decision resulted in an excommunication of which the person had a responsibility to be aware. Ignorance in such an important matter does not excuse the person. The canonical penalty places them outside of the living Church. Therefore, the person is not able to have a “joyful and fruitful experience.” This heretic has often ignored the doctrine of the Church. There are an unknown number of Modernist clerics who disagree with him, so blatant is his heterodoxy. A person in the state of mortal sin and has been excommunicated can in no way be considered to be a living member of the Church. Therefore, he is not able to live and grow in the state of sanctifying grace which is generally how such a statement as this is understood. At best, it would seem to be disingenuous; at worst, it is a denial of the Church’s teachings on the consequence of mortal sin and excommunication.

Paragraph 301: *“For an adequate understanding of the possibility and need of special discernment in certain “irregular” situations, one thing must always be taken into account, lest anyone think that the demands of the Gospel are in any way being compromised. The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations. Hence it can*

no longer simply be said that all those in any “irregular” situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule. A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding “its inherent values”, or be in a concrete situation which does not allow him or her to act differently and decide otherwise without further sin. ...”

Comment: In a typical Modernist method of watering down the obvious, Bergoglio refuses to call those married outside the Church adulterers. This writer is not the only one who noticed this, even Modernists have commented on it. The term irregular may be acceptable among those who understand what it means to “regularize” a marriage, but for the average Catholic it is nothing more than a word which he wishes to use to somehow lessen the severity of the situation. Bergoglio confirms this cowardice by stating a lie, or to state it quite plainly, a heresy. *“Hence it can no longer simply be said that all those in any “irregular” situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.”* First notice that he begins this sentence by stating “... it can no longer be stated ...” Is he denying the doctrine or is he “changing the pastoral approach” to the sacrament? It is in reality one and the same. One is the honest approach; the other is that of a heretic who looks for loopholes to attempt

to justify his error. The reader must understand that in order to fool the Catholic masses one must dress up the lies and half-truths, otherwise the errors are laid bare for all to see. The fact is, in certain statements he actually does speak in terms quite easy to understand. That is why certain clerics responded quickly to maintain “damage control” among the masses. This, in itself, is a clear indication of the errors which are in this “document of love.” It is quite interesting; this document was written by Bergoglio concerning the topics discussed in the Synods of 2014 and 2015, respectively. The clergy and laity would expect clear explanations on the moral issues discussed by the Modernist hierarchy as a means of providing an overview to them. Some points were quite clear, i.e., abortion, homosexuality and contraception, at least in this document. The issue on Catholics married outside the Church was anything but clear. Now you have individuals calling for a clarification of certain statements in a document that was meant to clarify the issues! Apparently he knows very well how to use Modernist doublespeak. That much is quite clear!

He goes on to state that we can no longer simply say that those living in adultery are guilty of mortal sin and are, therefore, deprived of sanctifying grace. This is an obvious heresy. He tries to excuse at least some of the accused by saying they did not fully understand what

they were doing. This is another interesting twist. One can safely say that most of those who have married outside the Church have done so in the last 50 years-since the Modernist takeover. Did not these *enlightened* clerics prepare couples better than had been done in the past? Were they not taught something as simple as the Sixth Commandment of the Church in their Pre-Cana classes, are they so deficient that this simple but vital point was missed on a world-wide basis? Were not these men and women better educated in the enlightened “Catholic” schools under their guidance? Who is trying to fool who?

Paragraph 305: *For this reason, a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, “sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families.” Along these same lines, the International Theological Commission has noted that “natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves a priori on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions.” Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an*

objective situation of sin - which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such - a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end. [Footnote 351:] In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, “I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy. I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. ...”

Comment: This is the most significant paragraph in the document. It is quite clear that Bergoglio believes those who “hide” behind moral law want only to accuse the guilty with little regard for them. Also, according to the International Theological Commission one is not allowed to use natural law because it is an established set of laws that may be applied in many different types of cases. This is nothing more than disguised chaos. Modernists are known for their relativism/pragmatism. Laws may be ignored if it suits them. Moral and natural law are so basic to our lives, that if they

are tossed aside there remains little or no foundation for the decision-making process. Bergoglio's spirituality is to say the least, out-of-balance. In other words, it is a false spirituality. There is an overemphasis of God's mercy and little said of His justice. Of course this is the usual mindset of the Modernist - it's ALL about God's mercy unless we want to discuss SOCIAL justice.

Footnote 351 is the most significant statement in the entire document. It undermines any legitimate statements that are made regarding marriage and the laws of the Church, but most importantly it undermines Our Lord's words, "What God hath brought together, no man can put asunder." Bergoglio's statement, "*In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments....*" goes against clear Church teaching. Some Modernists want a clarification of the statement. They claim it is vague. Is it? The document speaks primarily about marriage. This part of the document is about Catholics married outside the Church. Bergoglio is twisting and turning the Church's teaching on its head. He will tell you that he is not changing the doctrine but wishes to implement a "new approach" to these excommunicated Catholics. This is Modernist doublespeak for "not officially changing the doctrine (which they can't) but adjusting the discipline. Most Catholics probably are not aware that in many cases doctrine and discipline cannot be

separated. They are essentially tied to each other. That is certainly the situation with marriage.

It is a known fact that some of these excommunicated Catholics have been receiving Communion for years. The local pastors care little for Church teaching. They do what they want if they believe the ordinary will turn a blind eye to these actions. So in reality this document will give "official approval" to a practice which has been taking place in many churches. The reader may recall this same duplicity years ago with standing for Communion and Communion in the hand.

It's quite interesting that the answer to the most important question from the Synods and in this document is inserted in a footnote. It would seem to be an act of cowardice. Perhaps they wanted to downplay the statement. Apparently many forms of media did not understand the insidious actions of Jorge Bergoglio.

In the end, it was a simple answer to a question regarding Catholics married outside the Church directed to Bergoglio in a press conference on April 16, 2016 that exposes the ambiguity of the document. He said it was possible (yes) for excommunicated Catholics to receive Communion. Did it really need to take 256 pages to answer this simple question? It seems to be the disingenuous method of the Modernist.

Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution In England

Francis Borgia Steck, O.F.M.

PART SECOND

UNDER THE STUARTS 1603-1649

CHAPTER VI VENERABLE FRANCIS BEL, O. F. M.

Of wealthy Catholic parents — Student at Saint-Omer and at Valladolid — Ordained priest — Seeks admission into the Franciscan Order — Novitiate and profession — Summoned to the English Province — Priestly zeal in Flanders — Provincial of Scotland — Missionary in England — His character — Arrested as royal spy — Suspected of being a priest — Conveyed to London for trial — Before the commissioners of parliament — In Newgate — His trial — Guilty of treason — Condemned to death — Last days in Newgate — Drawn to Tyburn — Martyrdom.

About six miles from Worcester, in the parish of Hanbury, stood a beautiful residence, styled the Manor House of Temple-Broughton.¹ Here was born,

1 Unless otherwise stated, our narrative is based on Mason, *Certamen Seraphicum*, pp. 147-181. The author's sources of information were the martyr's own account of his arrest and trial, and a



on January 13, 1590, Venerable Francis Bel.² Though belonging to the wealthy class, his parents were widely known as staunch and practical Catholics. His mother, of an ancient family by the name of Daniel, is praised by Mason as a virtuous and accomplished woman. From her it was especially that Arthur, as the future martyr, had been named in life of the martyr written by Du Bosque, who was an eye-witness of what he relates (Mason p. 180).

2 We adopt this spelling of the friar's name in conformity with his own signature to a letter still preserved by the Franciscan Sisters at Taunton. Stone, *Faithful Unto Death*, p. 182, brings a photographic reprint of it.

Baptism, acquired those habits of piety and refinement that characterized his later career.

After the death of his father, in 1598, Arthur remained till his thirteenth year with his mother, who meanwhile entrusted to private tutors his elementary education. Thereupon, she sent him to Acton Place in Suffolk, to join his two cousins in their studies and amusements. Here he remained till his twenty-fourth year.

Already as a boy, Arthur gave unmistakable signs of a higher calling. Hence his relatives were not surprised when he told them of his intention to embrace the priestly and religious state. His saintly mother was overjoyed when she heard of it and gladly gave her consent. Accordingly, in 1614, he bade farewell to his kindred and departed for the Jesuit College of Saint-Omer in Flanders. A year later, having learned that he wished to join their Order, the Fathers sent him to Valladolid in Spain. Here he devoted three years to the study of philosophy and theology whereupon, in consideration of his unusual progress in virtue and learning, his superiors had him ordained a priest.

Two years before this event, in 1616, the restoration of the English

Franciscan Province, begun by Fr. John Gennings, had received the official approbation of the Belgian commissary. Since then, the province had made rapid progress. A number of English Franciscans had joined it, among whom was Fr. Nicholas Day, sometime professor of theology in the friary of Segovia, Spain. Father Bel probably heard of this, and knowing what the sons of St. Francis had suffered in England during the first period of the religious upheaval, he asked his superiors for permission to join the ranks of Fr. Gennings. Gladly they granted his request when they realized that it was more than a passing fancy. The rector of the college made the necessary arrangements with the provincial of the Spanish Franciscans, and on August 9, 1618, Fr. Sebastian de Salazar, guardian at Segovia, vested the pious Jesuit with the garb of St. Francis.

Although a priest, Fr. Francis deemed himself the least among his fellow novices. In humility, mortification, and prayer, he earnestly strove to become a worthy follower of the Saint whose name he was privileged henceforth to bear. The year of probation sped quickly by, and, on September 8, 1619, he made his profession in the hands of Fr. Joseph of St. Clare. With redoubled

zeal, he now resumed his theological studies. Before the end of the year, however, he received the following letter³ from the commissary general:

Whereas, our Most Reverend Father General, Benignus of Genua, has committed to me the care of sending to England and Scotland such fathers as seem suitable to labor in the Lord's vineyard, for the comfort of Catholics, who groan under the heavy yoke of persecution, and for the restoration and preservation of our Order in those parts; and as he has given me power to call English and Scotch Religious from any province whatever: I enjoin you, in whose zeal and piety I trust, in virtue of holy obedience, to come to these parts at your earliest convenience, in order to be sent into the Lord's harvest there, or to prepare yourself for the mission here among your countrymen, until you shall be judged fit to go. I herewith recommend you to our prelates as well as to the faithful of the places where you happen to stop on the way.

Given at Brussels, on the last day of December, 1619.

Father Andrew a Soto, Commissary General.

Fr. Francis immediately presented

3 See Thaddeus, *The Franciscans in England*, p. 201.

the letter to the Spanish provincial and with his consent and blessing set out for Flanders. Great was the joy at Douai when he arrived. The next two years he attended the Benedictine College of St. Vedast, in order to complete his theological course. At last, having passed the necessary examination, he received faculties to exercise his priestly office. During the year 1622, he served as confessor to the Poor Clares at Grave-lines; whereupon he was appointed in the same capacity for the newly founded community of Franciscan Sisters of the Third Order at Brussels. Here the saintly and learned friar was active for seven successive years, directing the nuns on the road of perfection and counseling them in the management of their temporal affairs. To this day, the community, now residing at Taunton in Somerset, revere the venerable martyr as their founder and chief benefactor.⁴

In the meantime, the number of English friars and their mission activity in England had increased to such an extent that, in 1629, the minister general thought it feasible to organize an independent province. The next year, as we have seen, the first provincial chapter was held in the convent of the Franciscan Sisters at Brussels.

4 They were compelled to quit France at the time of the French Revolution. See Thaddeus, p. 46.

At this chapter, Fr. Francis was declared provincial definitor and was appointed guardian and professor of Hebrew at Douai. His stay at St. Bonaventure's, however, was of short duration.

The Belgian commissary general, in 1632, sent him as provincial to Scotland with orders to reorganize the Franciscans in that country into a province. Accordingly, to the great sorrow of the brethren, Fr. Francis left for Toledo, Spain, to attend the general chapter, and from there he set out for Scotland. "It was certainly not Father Bel's fault," Thaddeus observes, "that his efforts were not crowned with success. But the time was not opportune for the restoration of the Order in Scotland."⁵ After two years, therefore, Fr. Francis was permitted to take up mission work in England, as he had long desired. Here he spent the last nine years of his life, becoming titular guardian of London, in 1637, and provincial definitor for a second term, three years later.

Both in Belgium and on the English missions, Fr. Francis was beloved and esteemed by all who came in touch with him. Though severe with himself and zealous for the observance of the Rule, he was affable and obliging towards others, and governed by example rather than by precept.

Naturally of a sunny disposition, his very look and word bespoke the inner joy that none but the humble and mortified know. In him the brethren found a charitable and sociable confrere, a prudent and solicitous superior. Fr. Angelus Mason, who was a novice at Douai in 1631, sums up his character in *Certamen Seraphicum*, by saying, "Father Francis Bel was a true son of the seraphic Father St. Francis."⁶ He further tells us that the brethren wept when their beloved guardian departed for his mission in Scotland. Like Venerable Paul Heath, Fr. Francis was a man of prayer and recollection. He, too, fostered a tender devotion to Mary the Mother of God. In keeping with a vow he had made, he recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin every day and to ensure proper attention, he was wont to say it in the seven languages with which he was conversant, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, French, Flemish, and English.

Equally fervent was his love of prayer and mortification while on the missions in England. In fact, the nine last years of his life may be aptly styled one long preparation for martyrdom. "Francis du Mont," writes De Marsys, "had thus ample scope for observing the martyr, without being seen, and he has told me that he often saw Father Bel, with

5 Thaddeus, p.39.

6 Mason, p. 157.

extended arms, absorbed in prayer, and that he would remain thus, for two or three hours together, several times a day. He also remarked that Father Bel was abstemious to the verge of singularity. ... I must add," he continues, "that Monsieur Langlois, Preacher to the Count d'Harcourt, who had the honor to converse with the martyr two days before his death, and to whom it had been given to sound the secret depths of his soul, declares that he recognized in him all the marks of perfect sanctity, of a mind long detached from all material things. I pray God that his example and his prayers may sow in us some seeds of holiness."⁷ Such is the verdict of men who were intimately acquainted with the martyr.

Early in 1643, Fr. Joseph Bergaigne, then archbishop of Cambrai, was directed by Pope Urban VIII to gather evidence regarding the martyrdoms that had recently taken place in England. On the committee appointed for this purpose by the Archbishop was Fr. Francis.⁸ "It is probable," says Stone, "that the attention of parliament was directed to Father Bel, from the fact

7 Quoted by Stone, pp. 206 seq.

8 Hope, *Franciscan Martyrs in England*, pp. 192 seq. - Fr. William Anderton also was on the commission. Thaddeus, p. 191.

of his name appearing on the list of commissioners, for on the day that the report was published he was himself called upon to take his place among the martyrs."⁹ Only a few months before, on October 16, he had met Venerable John Baptist Bullaker at Newgate and, we may suppose, had accompanied him to Tyburn, so that now he was in a position to give evidence in his case. Ever since, too, the thought of martyrdom, of which Fr. John Baptist had assured him, was uppermost in his mind. For the past twenty years he had been praying for this inestimable grace by daily reciting the thirty-fifth psalm. Little, however, did he think while investigating the recent martyrdoms, that his own was so close at hand.

It was on Monday, November 6, that the saintly missionary hired a horse at Brigstock in Northamptonshire and set out for London, where he had his headquarters. His appearance the next day at Stevenage, a little town in Hertfordshire, roused the suspicions of the garrison stationed there. Taking him for a royal spy, they searched him and found three papers written in Latin and Spanish. Two of these were of a devotional character; while the third, an indifferent note addressed to the Spanish ambassador, revealed the

9 Stone, p. 183.

fact that he was a Franciscan.¹⁰ Unable to decipher the writings, the soldiers summoned the local schoolmaster, who, to shield his ignorance, pompously declared that the papers contained very serious and dangerous matters. On this verdict the friar was arrested.

The next morning he was taken to Hertford and placed in the custody of Marshal Thomas Jones. During the day army officials and prominent citizens visited the suspected priest. In the course of the conversation a drummer stepped forward and asked him of what religion he was.

“I am a Catholic,” replied the friar.

“A Roman Catholic?” insisted the other.

“Why, I told you I was an Englishman. How then can I be a Roman? As to the Catholic Church, however, there can be only one Catholic Church, of which I am a member. This, with the help of God, I will profess till my dying hour.”

“Dost thou believe,” another

¹⁰ The note read: “Most excellent sir, Father Francis Bel, of the Order of St. Francis, professed at Segovia, declares that he most gratefully accepts your offer to remain in your house; but he humbly requests not to be bound by the condition so destructive to his calling, that he should not leave the house on behalf of his neighbor’s welfare, for such a condition he cannot agree to.”

bystander broke in, “that the Pope is the supreme head of the Catholic Church?”

“I do,” came the fearless reply; “neither did I ever doubt it.”

This provoked a hot disputation between the friar and his enemies. To prove their heretical tenets, the latter brought several bibles. Finding the text very corrupt, the man of God severely rebuked his hearers for doing such violence to the word of God. The disputation continued for some time, when finally the Puritans, seeing themselves worsted, declared that in religious matters no certainty could be had. At this blindness and obstinacy, the friar grew warm with indignation.

“To call every religion doubtful,” he contended, “is not the way to attract others to yours, but rather to confirm them in that Church’s doctrine to which Christ has promised infallibility. All your efforts are directed to this: while declaring all religions to be in error, you attempt to draw me from that which cannot err to that which needs must err, and thus you deprive me of what I possess and leave me nothing. In fine, you deal with my soul as you have dealt with my body, which you have robbed of all its clothes and instead

have fitted out in rags. Rest assured, outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation; and I wish you all were like me, excepting my bonds.”

Completely baffled by this boldness and sincerity, the crowd gradually dispersed; whereupon the friar was conducted before the civil authorities. On delivering his writings to the parliamentary commissioner, the marshal warned him to have the prisoner carefully guarded, because one of the papers contained an incantation by means of which he could escape through any prison bars.

“Art thou come from abroad?” asked the presiding officer, turning to the friar.

“I am,” he answered.

“Hast thou received holy orders?”

“That is considered a crime wherefore no one will answer such a question.”

“The prisoner is mine, by right of my office,” fell in the marshal, filled with rage. “I reserve him for further investigation.”

With this, he advanced and once more subjected his victim to a most degrading examination. Finding a key on his person, the wretch demanded under threat of severe torture that the

prisoner reveal the whereabouts of the lock to which the key belonged. Perceiving that it would not be to the detriment of his Catholic friends and benefactors, Fr. Francis replied that the porter of the Spanish ambassador had it.

During the following night, which the friar spent in close study, his keeper robbed him of all his clothes so that the next morning he was forced to don a tattered uniform given him by one of the soldiers. Thus scantily clad and with his hands bound behind him, he was placed on a horse and hastened off to London. In the various towns through which their journey led them, the servant of God became the laughing-stock of the people who gathered on the street corners to hail with insults and abuses this latest victim of Puritan intolerance.¹¹

When they arrived in London, Marshal Jones confined his prisoner in a hotel and ordered him to send for his trunk. Fr. Francis complied, fearing a refusal might inconvenience his friends and benefactors. When the trunk arrived, the marshal took possession of all its contents.

Two guards now conducted the friar before the commissioners of

¹¹ “Helpless and half naked,” the friar wrote in his account, “I rode on a hired horse, all too great a parade, however, for one who professes to carry the cross and to follow Christ.” - Mason, p. 163.

parliament. While they were waiting at the door of the courtroom, the man of God was rebuked and insulted by the passers-by. At last, the commissioners were ready to receive them. After the preliminary questions regarding name, birthplace and religion had been answered, Mr. Corbet, one of the commissioners, began to ask the prisoner about certain persons mentioned in the papers that had been taken from him.

“Prithee, question me not about any third person,” the friar rejoined, “because my conscience forbids me to injure others.”¹²

“Such considerations are out of season,” threw in Mr. Whitaker, “when the public weal is the issue.”

“Is this thy writing?” they then demanded, producing the friar’s note to the Spanish ambassador.

“It is,” came the ready reply; “but it is only an imperfect sketch of what I had in mind to write.”

“Art thou, as the writing shows, a member of the Order of St. Francis?”

Here the friar hesitated.¹³

“Several others,” urged his enemies, “have been brought before us, who

¹² The dialogue form is ours, based on Mason’s narrative.

¹³ He feared for the convenience of his friends in the city, whom he endeavored to shield from harm throughout his trial.

wisely admitted it.”

“I am a poor penitent of the Order of St. Francis; but it is becoming for everyone to do penance.”

“Art thou a priest?”

“That question should not be put; for, if I say yes, I own myself guilty of a crime; if I say no, my denial will implicate others.”

“Is this thy breviary?”

“It is; and it contains many pious prayers dictated by the Holy Spirit.”

“Aye, but interspersed with idolatrous ones that poison all the rest,” broke in Whitaker.

“Forsooth, it is no breviary at all, but a missal,” clamored some of the bystanders, examining the book from all sides.

Here Fr. Francis explained to them the difference between a Roman breviary and a Roman missal. In the meantime, the judges agreed on the sentence to be passed. The prisoner had admitted being a Franciscan moreover, suspicions were strong that he was also a priest. For the present, therefore, he must be confined in Newgate.

The next day, Fr. Francis received a letter from the provincial urging

him to come to Douai and take the place of Ven. Paul Heath. In reply, the man of God penned the following note:

Reverend Father - I received your behest with all due humility and readiness to follow it. Some twenty-four hours before it came to my notice, I had already begun to take the place of Fr. Heath in Newgate. As for the rest, I ask your prayers that I may persevere unto the end. With St. Andrew, I likewise entreat all Christians not to thwart my martyrdom.

Your poor brother,

Francis Bel.

To the letter from the commissary provincial, which arrived a few days later and also summoned him to Douai, he answered that he would obey as soon as the present impediment, for which he had no excuse, would be removed then he playfully explained the nature of this impediment: how he had been arrested, tried, and thrown into Newgate. Expressing his desire to die for Christ, he at the same time declared his willingness to forgo this privilege if such were the will of God. After asking his superior to pray for him, he concluded with the assurance that, were he to escape the death sentence, he would use every

lawful means to recover his liberty so as to be able to obey.

On December 7, the servant of God was summoned to the mayor's bench. His indictment having been read aloud, the judge asked him what he had to offer in his defense.

"Where are my accusers?" demanded the friar.

"Thou shalt face them to-morrow. For the present, declare whether thou art guilty or not."

"To cross the sea, receive holy orders, and return hither, I deem no crime. Therefore, I plead not guilty."

"Reply to the question!" snapped the judge. "What is thy answer?"

"The same that I already gave to the high commissioners; I have no other to give."

"That one we have; in addition, however, we now demand an answer in legal form; namely, art thou guilty or not guilty?"

"Very well, if such be the manner of your procedure, then I maintain that I am not guilty."

"By whom wouldst thou be judged?"

This question, it seems, perplexed the friar; he was at a loss what to say.

“By God and thy country!” suggested one of the bystanders.

“By God and my country,” repeated the friar.

With this, the guards approached and led him back to Newgate.

The next morning, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Fr. Francis was again placed at the bar. After swearing in the twelve jurymen, the judge ordered the witnesses to advance their accusations against the prisoner. Immediately, James Wadsworth and three other notorious apostates stepped forth and testified that they knew the prisoner to be a priest. One of them, Thomas Gage, made such a botch of it that he was sharply reproached by the bench and told to retire. Another, not having been sufficiently instructed what to say, had little evidence to offer. At last, when the witnesses had finished their wretched testimony, the judge turned to the prisoner.

“What hast thou to say in reply to these depositions?” he asked.

“The witnesses,” boldly retorted the friar, “are men of ill repute, and therefore they should find no credence.”

“Well, what objections hast thou to present against them?”

“All are apostates from the Catholic faith. Now, in all justice, men who have broken their troth with God cannot and should not enjoy the confidence of their fellow men.”

“Thy objection is without weight,” they shouted. “Hast thou anything to propose to the jury in thy defense?”

“I have not; but I trust they are Christians. I am not a priest of the order of Levi,” he subjoined, “according to the priesthood of Aaron; nor, indeed, would it be wise for one called by God to the priesthood to pass by the fountain itself and drink of the muddy water.”

“Thou speakest mysteriously. Hast thou anything else to say?”

“Nothing; I refer you to the answers I gave at my trial before the high commissioners.”

Thereupon a copy of the proceedings was presented to him. Having read it through, he handed it back without a word of comment. In the meantime, the jurymen went out for consultation. After a short time, they returned and declared the friar guilty of the charges brought against him. On hearing this, Fr. Francis thanked the jury, declaring that he was ready to die for his faith and

profession. But sentence of death was not immediately passed. The judges, overawed by the noble and fearless bearing of the martyr, still hoped that in the end he would relent. Hence they gave orders that he be led back to prison, where he would have time to reflect on what was in store for him.

“Mr. Bel,” said one of the judges, “you will be cut open while you are still alive, and with your own eyes you will see your entrails burnt before your face; wherefore we beseech you to abjure the Roman Church, or at least the priesthood, so as to avoid this disgraceful and cruel punishment.”

“You can condemn me,” retorted the man of God, “to a light and temporal punishment; but the Protector and Avenger of the innocent can condemn you to a punishment which shall last eternally.”¹⁴

That same afternoon he was again cited to court to hear his sentence. Although he realized that he would be condemned to death, his heart was filled with inexpressible joy.

“My accusers,” he said, “have borne witness against me; the twelve jurymen have pronounced me guilty. Most heartily I thank them;

14 This incident is taken from Hope, p. 206.

for with greatest readiness and joy I will die with Christ and his Apostles and Martyrs, inasmuch as their cause is my own. But since the matter on which I intend to speak is of equal and even greater importance than that of the prophets of old, I will invoke, as they did, heaven and earth. Be astonished, ye heavens, and be confounded, O earth! to behold a Christian State, professing Christ and his Gospel and yet condemning for treason the priesthood which was founded by Christ and which rests on the Gospel; the priesthood, I say, which upholds the Gospel and which in turn is upheld by the Gospel. For this reason I asked this morning, whether the jurymen were Christians; meaning that Christians would perhaps condemn priests of the order of Aaron but not of the order of Christ, and that Jews might condemn priests of Christ but not priests of Levi. What you then called mystical I shall now explain. If anyone has from God a vocation to the priesthood, let him seek it there where the succession is indisputably certain and where it has never been interrupted since the time of Christ, namely in Rome; not there, however, where it is doubtful and unquestionably defective, as is the case with the Protestants; for certain it is that in the Protestant Church there is no true priesthood.”

Here the clerk interposed:

“We are to comply with the laws under which we were born and under which, you confessed, you, too, have been born.”

“Quite correct, I admit,” replied the friar; “forsooth, had I been born among pagans and infidels, I should submit to their laws in so far as they were not opposed to the law of God. Know ye, therefore, that they who first enacted these laws, have long ago and irrevocably obtained what they deserved. Wherefore, let those be prudently and betimes on their guard and look to their consciences who are now charged or will yet be charged with the office of executing these laws.”

“Is there anything else you would like to say?” queried the judge with cynic indifference.

“I have no more to say,” returned the martyr. “I resign myself into your hands.”

At a sign from the judge, the guards approached and shackled the friar’s hands, a ceremony that was generally dispensed with in the case of priests. Then the judge arose and solemnly pronounced sentence of death. Fr. Francis was overjoyed when he heard it and with a loud voice intoned the *Te Deum*.

Before leaving the courtroom, he turned to the judges and thanked them. They in turn reminded him of the terrible torments and death his obstinacy was preparing for him.

“I beseech God,” said the friar with trembling voice, “to grant through His infinite mercy that not greater torments befall you in the next world than those that await me in this.”

As usual, Catholics as well as Protestants flocked to Newgate to see the condemned priest during the two days preceding his execution. For all the saintly friar had a word of comfort or warning, as the case demanded. Many were moved to tears that one so gentle and refined in his manners should be condemned to a death so painful and revolting. But the valiant hero only rejoiced in the anticipation of the eternal reward that was to follow.

“I am astonished,” he said repeatedly to his visitors, “that God should have been pleased to honor me with the crown of martyrdom, and that he should have chosen me, a miserable being, rather than the many holy men now in England, who are aspiring to this happiness.”¹⁵

On Sunday morning, he celebrated Mass and administered Holy

¹⁵ Hope, p. 209.

Communion to a number of Catholics. During the day, four Protestant ministers came at the behest of parliament to dispute with the martyr on doctrinal matters. But they were outwitted at every turn and in the end were compelled to beat an inglorious retreat, much to the satisfaction of the bystanders. Ever since sentence of death had been pronounced, the Spanish and the French ambassadors were taking steps for his acquittal. When Fr. Francis heard of it, however, he became sad and even reproached the prior of St. Magdalen, when the latter told him that they were trying to obtain grace for him.

“Alas! dost thou deem it a grace,” he said, “to be robbed of the crown I have desired so long? Till now, I considered thee my friend; but, let me tell thee, if thou persist in thy design, I shall no longer regard thee as my friend, but as my greatest enemy. I beseech thee, do not prevent my martyrdom. I conjure thee, do not oppose my death which is my greatest happiness; whatever steps thou takest, I shall invoke the most holy Mother of God and St. Andrew that no one in the end may deprive me of the cross which I see before me.”

When, at last, night set in, the man of God dismissed his visitors, saying

it was his wish to be left alone the remaining few hours of his life, so as to prepare himself for the sacrifice he was to offer on the morrow. The entire night he spent in prayer and meditation. Early next morning he rose to say Mass for the last time and to give Holy Communion to several Catholics. He was still rapt in prayer, when the guards entered his cell and told him that his hour had come. Recommending himself to the Most High, he arose and followed them to the street. Without delay, they fastened him to the hurdle and then whipping up the four horses dashed off to Tyburn followed by a concourse of people.

Arriving at the place of execution, the holy man was transported with joy.

“Now I find myself in the place,” he exclaimed, “which blessed Thomas Bullaker predicted to me!”

At the command of the sheriff, he ascended the cart and, as was customary, addressed the people who had assembled in great numbers to witness the bloody spectacle.

“Listen, my dearest countrymen! If you wish to be freed of your miseries, it is necessary that you first put an end to your sins. For, without doubt, your great sins are the cause of your present calamities and misfortunes.

Above all, however, arise from heresy in which you are engrossed these many years. For through heresy, I grieve to say, you are separated like decayed members from the Body of Christ, or are cut like dead branches from the tree of the Church. If you continue to love the darkness more than the light, daily hardships will be your share. Certain it is, many tribulations and calamities will come upon this city of London and upon the entire kingdom of England, if they do not betimes leave off persecuting and harassing the priests and the Catholic people. Consider, I beseech you, and see the afflictions with which God even now visibly begins to punish you, and know for certain that all these punishments are signs of His love and the most evident assurance that He will not destroy you unless forced to do so. All these chastisements, wars, and misfortunes He inflicts upon you, so as in time to gather in the shipwrecked into the harbor of the Catholic Church. Do not, therefore, shamefully abuse His goodness and mercy; do not with violence, as it were, extort your perdition by provoking divine justice.¹⁶ I am brought here to suffer death, but I wish before I suffer to tell you the cause. I am not even accused of any crime, but am condemned solely for being a priest of the Catholic Church. Were I a pagan priest, I should not

¹⁶ So far Mason; the rest of the address and attending incidents are taken from Hope, pp. 212 seq.

wonder at being put to death in a Christian country; but that a Catholic priest should be put to death by those who profess to be Christians and to follow Jesus Christ and His Gospel, ought to surprise every reasonable person. It is said that the laws demand it. But these laws were iniquitously made and now they are being iniquitously executed. I declare before you all in the sight of God and of His Son Jesus Christ who will judge us, and I sign my declaration with my blood, that I die a true member of the Catholic Church.”

“You mean to say the Roman Church,” interrupted a Protestant.

“If you wish me thus to distinguish it,” replied the martyr, “with all my heart I distinguish it from every Protestant Church and every sort of heresy, and call it the Roman Church. My parents lived and died in this religion. They brought me up in this faith, and if I had a longer life to spend I would profess it to my last moment, even though I had to suffer a thousand deaths and the greatest imaginable torments.”

“Mr. Bel,” broke in the sheriff, “we can not let you declaim any longer against our laws and give a wrong impression to the people. You know that you are going to die for having seduced the king’s subjects.”

“I see,” answered the martyr, “a great multitude before me. This is why I wish to do them a good office and draw them back to the right way. They possess a part of the Catholic faith. They believe the Incarnation of our Lord, His Passion, and His Resurrection. But this is not enough, and, therefore, I wish to declare to them the whole truth for the good of their souls.”

“Help yourself ! Help yourself !” shouted some in the crowd.

“Those that are the victims of a false religion,” the man of God quietly continued, “will not listen to the truth. But I protest to you that the Protestant religion is not of divine faith.”

Here the sheriff interposed, forbidding the martyr to say any more against the Protestant religion. Whereupon, the latter with a look of sorrow and pity exclaimed:

“I forgive with my whole heart all who have contributed to my death, and I die joyfully for so glorious a cause.”

A thief who also was to be executed felt such compunction at these words that he solemnly abjured the Anglican heresy and was absolved by the martyr. Finally, orders were given to carry out

the sentence. While the cart was drawn from under him, the martyr raised his hands and received the last absolution from the prior of St. Magdalen. He had hung only a few seconds when the executioner cut him down. On removing his secular dress, they found that beneath it he wore the Franciscan habit and cord. At this sight the crowd was filled with admiration.

“What sort of men are these,” they murmured, “who thus despise earthly comforts?”

Having finished their bloody work on the sacred corpse, the executioners exposed the quarters on the four gates of the city. Mason concludes his life sketch of Ven. Francis Bel by remarking that several miracles were thought to have been wrought through his intercession. Like his fellow friars who died for their faith and profession at this time, he, too, is now on the official list for eventual beatification.¹⁷

17 See *Acta Minorum*, Vol. VI (1887), p. 49 seq., and also Ortolani, *De Causis Beatorum et Servorum Dei Ordinis Minorum*, p. 14.



Franciscan Saints

JUNE 20

BLESSED MICHELINA
Widow, Third Order

The town of Pesaro is situated on the shores of the Adriatic in Italy, not far from the famous shrine of Loreto. There, in 1300, a daughter was born to the wealthy and noble Metelli family, who received the name Michelina in Baptism. The child was endowed with superior natural gifts, and in accordance with the pious tradition of the family, she was reared in the fear of the Lord.

When she was twelve years old, she was married to a nobleman of the powerful family of Malatesta. Although Michelina was good and pious, it is said that her heart was divided between creatures and the Creator, as is often the case. Her husband and a son, with whom the marriage was blessed, occupied her heart

more than was becoming to a Christian woman.

The Lord severed one of these ties by taking her husband to Himself when Michelina was only twenty years old. This was a severe trial for the young wife, but she did not yet recognize the higher designs of God. Her maternal affections were now still more bound up in the child, her son, was a little idol.

About this time a pious Tertiary from Syria came to Pesaro, who edified the entire town by her fervor at prayer and the holiness of her life. Michelina also conceived a great veneration for this pious person and invited her to take up her abode in her palace, promising to provide for all her needs so that she could serve God alone. The

stranger gratefully accepted this hospitality, and almighty God rewarded Michelina by permitting her to learn to love God above all things, and all other things only in God.

Once, on the feast of Pentecost she spoke to the pious Tertiary on abandoning one's heart to God. The latter spoke of it in glowing terms and declared it necessary. "That may be true," said Michelina, "but I cannot aspire to such perfection. My son, the tenderest object of my affections, occupies my heart too much, and my earthly possessions do not leave me free enough to offer my heart to God." "Let us then," replied the Tertiary, "pray together that God may disengage your heart from those things which are an obstacle to your salvation and perfection." The grace of the Holy Spirit seconded the words, and Michelina answered: "Yes, let us. I, too, desire to serve God better than I have heretofore."

The next morning both attended holy Mass and prayed fervently for the intention. At the close of Mass Michelina interiorly heard the voice of our Lord: "I will set you free. I will take your son to Myself, and you

shall henceforth belong to Me alone." When they arrived at home they found the child sick, and soon God took him from this world, in which he would have been in great danger, due to the inordinate tenderness of his mother. The two women saw how the holy angels carried his soul to heaven.

The mother was now like one transformed. Her heart was no longer attached to temporal goods. She distributed them lavishly among the poor in spite of the remonstrances of her relatives. After a while she entered the Third Order of St. Francis, and received the afflicted and the indigent as her new family, whom she loved only in God. She became a mother to the orphans, the support of poor widows, the nurse of the sick, the comfort of the sorrowful; her house was the refuge of all unfortunate persons. She also practiced severe acts of penance in order to atone for her former sentiments.

Towards the end of her life she made a pilgrimage to the holy places, where she venerated the mysteries of Christ's suffering so fervently that in the presence

of everyone she went into ecstasy on Mount Calvary. Upon her return to her native country, she re-doubled her prayers, practices of penance, and works of charity, until our Lord called her to Himself on June 19, 1356.

Her tomb in the Franciscan church was made glorious with numerous miracles. The Apostolic See approved her public veneration in 1737, whereupon the town of Pesaro chose their erstwhile citizen as their special patron.

ON COMPLETE SURRENDER TO GOD

1. Consider how dangerous it was for Blessed Michelina that her heart was divided between the Creator and His creatures. Almighty God, whose actions are always marked with mercy and who has only our welfare in mind, had to deprive her of what was dearest to her here on earth, her husband and her son, in order to rescue her from this danger. God wants the *whole* heart, not only of religious, but also of every Christian, since the words, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart” (Mark 12:30), apply to

everyone. At the same time, the Lord gives the warning, “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me” (Exod. 20:2). But how many Christians there are, even among such that consider themselves pious, who carry about in their hearts, next to God, an attachment to some creature to an extent that, like Blessed Michelina, they must admit it keeps them from belonging entirely to God! The words of the Prophet may be applied to them: “Their heart is divided,” and perhaps also the added judgment: “Now they shall perish.” (Osee 10:2)

2. Consider why a divided heart is so easily led to destruction. Following its natural propensity, the heart of man is more inclined toward creatures than toward God, its Creator. If one has already offered half of it to creatures, they easily cause it to forget God and to offend Him on their account, as for example, in granting a favorite child something which according to God’s will should not be granted, or burdening one’s conscience to please a beloved husband, or for the love of temporal goods disregarding mercy and even justice. But if,

as in the case of Michelina, God in His mercy tears the object of their earthly affections from such divided hearts, how few of them follow the sentiments of Michelina! Rather, they become bitter toward God and do not want to serve Him at all any more. They perish because their hearts were divided. — Do you too, perhaps, have to fear such ruin?

3. Consider how one can and must forestall the misfortune. Often reflect that all the blessings that you possess, and that are dear and precious to your heart, have been given to you by God. “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Thank God for it, and in gratitude love Him all the more on that account. But always remember that it is His property, which He has lent you in His goodness, and which He

can reclaim whenever it pleases Him. Often acknowledge this before God and let Him govern as He wishes; yes, beg Him even to take it from you, should it become harmful to you. Then your heart will ever remain God’s whole and undivided. You will serve God in His creatures, in the poor and neglected, as Michelina did after her conversion, and you will grow in His love.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O God, who in a remarkable way didst detach Blessed Michelina from earthly affections and didst lead her to love Thee, we beseech Thee, vouchsafe to us that, freed from harmful attachment, we may, through her merits and in imitation of her, accomplish with free hearts what is pleasing to Thee. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

NOTE:

**The Seraph is not published in July and August.
We are looking forward to seeing you again in
September.**

THE PRUDENT CHRISTIAN

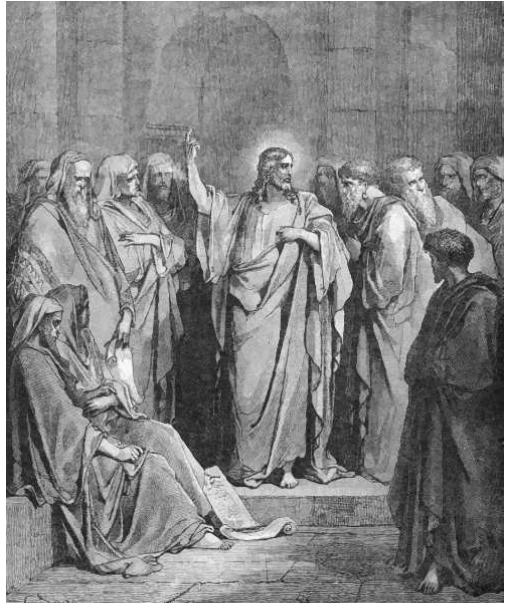
OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE, AND HAPPINESS, OF ATTENDING TO THE CARE OF OUR SALVATION.

BY THE REV. J. FLETCHER, D.D.

“Give me understanding, and I shall live.” — PSALM cxix.

1834.



CONSIDERATION III ON THE OBLIGATION OF LOVING GOD.

(Continued)

IV. Accordingly, it is in consequence of the urgency, and justice, of this debt, that the wisdom of God has ordained, that the love of Him should be the very first law in the code of our salvation. “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart; with thy whole soul; with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This,*” adds our holy Legislator, “*is the first, and greatest, commandment.*” — Citing this injunction, St. Austin exclaims: “Oh, who could possibly have thought it necessary, that God should ever have imposed upon us a precept, such as this? or that He

should have held out threats, if we loved Him not? It, surely, ought to appear sufficient, that He allows us to love Him. For, is it not, both the greatest of all benefits, and the very first of all honors, to do so?” — Why, what should we think of a monarch, who, after having loaded his subjects, or his favorites, with riches, honors, and distinctions, should still deem it necessary, either to command, or even to solicit, them to give him their gratitude, or their affection? We should look upon the men, who, under such circumstances, refused to love such a benefactor, as wretches, undeserving to enjoy the light of heaven.

But, as a generous heart is more easily gained by the soothing attractions of tenderness, than by

the severe, though reasonable, injunctions of authority, — so, by an act of condescension, which is truly astonishing in the majesty of God, — this infinite, and eternal, Being is pleased to stoop so low, as even to *beg* of us to love Him. Laying aside the character of the great Monarch, whom, by every tie of duty, we are bound to obey, — He affectionately assumes that of *a parent*; and under this amiable, and endearing, quality, — calling us His children, — He entreats us to give Him our hearts. “*My son,*” He says to each of us, “*My son, give Me thy heart. It is, indeed, Mine by every title of justice; and by every claim of right, — being created by My hand; stamped with My image; and purchased by My Blood. Still, I ask it, as a gift; and entreat thee to grant it to Me, as a favor. Only give to Me; and I, in return, as thy Father, will enrich it, and fill it with consolations.*” — Oh, if we have hearts susceptible of any generous feelings; — if here, as children, we naturally, and even necessarily, love our earthly parents, — can we help owning, what, under all the above circumstances, ought to be the tenderness, and *even* the enthusiasm, of our love towards our heavenly Parent? Vile, indeed, and callous, is that heart, which loves Him not. And it is of men, thus cold, and obdurate, that the apostle says: “*He, that loves not, remains in death.*”

V. Accordingly, it was this motive, — that is, in order to enkindle the flame of love in the breasts of men, — that principally induced our benevolent Redeemer to come down upon the earth; and to dwell amongst His creatures. “*I came,*” He says, “*to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire but that it should be enkindled?*” It was in order to spread this fire, and to fan its hallowed flame, that the Holy Ghost descended from heaven; and descended under the symbol of fire itself, — thus pointing out to us the nature of the effect, which it was His aim, and intention, to produce. It is so, too, in relation to our mysteries; and, above all, in relation to the mystery of our Altars. The direct aim of this wonderful institution is to nourish, and keep alive in our breasts, the constant warmth of gratitude, and the fire of love. Whence, the saints often describe it by the terms of “*furnace, fire, flame, heat.*” — “*God,*” says St. Ephraim, “*has given us, in this mystery, fire to eat, and drink.*” If, therefore, as Christians, we thus enter into the designs of His goodness in His various institutions, and plans, established for our salvation, — the consequence will be, that we shall not only *love Him; but love Him even, as He requires,* “with all our hearts.”

VI. To love God should not seem

difficult. For, *if* the child, without any effort, loves his parents; the wife, her husband; the friend, his friend; — if even, in all these cases, to love is a real delight, — then also, should nothing appear, — nothing be, — so natural, and gratifying to us, as to cherish in our breasts a tender affection towards Him, who is not only our Father, and our Friend, — the Benefactor, to whom we owe every thing, that we possess, and enjoy, — but, moreover, our Creator, Monarch, hope, refuge, &c. In fact, our hearts are formed for the love of Him. He alone is their proper centre. “*My heart,*” says St. Austin, “*is restless, till it rests, my God, in Thee.*” As the sick man is uneasy in every situation; just so, out of God, our minds are always dissatisfied, and discontented. Whatsoever we lean upon, out of God, is a reed, that soon breaks; and its point inflicts a wound.

And then too, as the love of God is the most necessary of all virtues, — so likewise it is the most amiable; the most consoling; and the most sublime. — *It is the most amiable,* being the affection of a child to a tender parent. — *The most consoling,* — being the principle, which gives a merit to every action; renders the performance of every duty easy; alleviates all our crosses; and heightens all our joys. — *The most sublime.* It was

the source of all that heroism, which animated the saints, — which inspired the martyr with joy at the stake; the penitent with delight in the desert; the confessor with zeal in the discharge of his arduous duties. In short, when once the fire of divine love is lighted up in the heart by the grace of the Holy Ghost, it becomes the very life, and light, of the soul; — impressing a sacred stamp, — the very seal of God Himself, — upon all our thoughts, words, and works; rendering our most ordinary actions, so many virtues; changing our sufferings into satisfactions; and infusing into our breasts that peace, “*which the world cannot give,*” — that peace, which is the foretaste, and the forerunner, of future happiness.

Wherefore, let us consider seriously: and since we have hearts, made for love; and which cannot but love; — since there is nothing so lovely as God; and it is, moreover, by the measure of the love, we bear Him, that our eternal lot is to be decided, — so let us love Him as He requires, “*with all our hearts, and with all our strength.*” It is only by these means, that we shall fulfill His law; — only thus, that we can be entitled to a share of His rewards.

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