

**The Life of Saint Paul of the Cross
Founder of the Congregation
of the Cross and Passion**

1694-1775

Volume 1 – 1694-1741

Father Louis Therese of Jesus Agonizing, C.P.

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Fr. Simon Woods, C.P.

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**DEDICATION
to
HIS EMINENCE
FERDINAND CARDINAL DONNET**

Archbishop of Bordeaux

Your Eminence,

The Life of Saint Paul of the Cross, which it is my privilege to dedicate to you, may rightfully be called your very own. Without your Eminence the work may not have been completed, and I may never have realized the idea that I had in mind for a very long time. It is then the humble fruit of a tree planted by your own hands in the vineyard confided to your care by the Heavenly Father.

It was when your Eminence was in Rome for the Beatification of our holy Founder that you obtained from His Holiness Pope Pius IX the sons of Saint Paul of the Cross for your Archdiocese... And, if this little family was welcome and took its humble beginnings in the fruitful soil of France under your protection and guidance, is it not due to your paternal interest and initiative?

Soon, it is true, a learned and zealous clergy imitated your zeal; but in those days of supreme struggle, of unceasing conflict against the rights of the Church, your Eminence realized that it is necessary that zeal be united with learning, especially when the war “against the Lord and his Christ” becomes so universal.

You knew that far too many souls would tread the path leading to perdition unless men were raised up who would become the saviors of their souls.

That is the reason why you have invited to your vast Diocese men taken from the ranks of the different Religious Orders, apostles ever ready to come to your side as co-operators in the ceaseless search for souls, the fire of whose zeal would successfully triumph over the obstacles hindering their apostolate efforts; and from all your apostolic assistants, you have formed one army, already united, of valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Your Eminence, among so many other works, due to your indefatigable apostolic zeal, there is one, I dare to say, that will not be the last of your glories before God. That is the souls, saved by these untiring apostolic laborers, the souls who will be your crown and your joy in the kingdom of Heaven,

For ourselves, the humble Religious of the Passion, for a long time we have had your name inscribed within that sacred sanctuary which no one can ever efface – the heart of

the Divine Master; there we have included your name with those of other glorious benefactors, Crescenzi, Rezzonico, Albani, Altieri, Corsi, and among those illustrious Princes of the Church who have proved themselves loyal protectors of our Congregation, whose names are linked with the immortal name of the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius IX.

In deigning to accept the dedication of these humble pages, that are so unworthy of your excellence, your Eminence, and especially unworthy of the glorious Saint whose Life we have written, we proclaim to you and to the world our debt of gratitude.

You have permitted us to lay at your feet, and it is also your wish to impart to this Life a special benediction from the depths of your heart, a heart that is ever ready to encourage and to strengthen men of good will who aspire to the loyal and loving service of God, of the Church and of humanity.

I am, with sentiments of most profound respect, Your Eminence,

Your most humble and obedient servant,
Louis Therese of Jesus Agonizing, Passionist

The Retreat of Our Lady of Sorrows
BORDEAUX
28TH APRIL, 1869
FEAST OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

**LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE
THE ARCHBISHOP OF BORDEAUX**

Bordeaux,
24th May, 1869

Reverend Father,

The Life of Saint Paul of the Cross, Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ, who was canonized on the 24th June, 1867, by Pius IX of immortal memory, during one of the most impressive celebrations of the universal Church, at which I had the honor of being present, is a work of the most profound interest, the marvelous achievements of his long life of more than eighty years will perhaps astonish innumerable Christians of our day who are so little accustomed to reading prodigies of a supernatural nature; but, in spite of their repugnance to these things, they doubt their authenticity. For you have written your Life not by the aid of ancient documents that have been resurrected from the tomb of forgotten things, which in spite of the talent and the good will of the biographer, still leaves the truth veiled in obscurity; but you have had at hand the testimony of conscientious witnesses who have not long passed away from us. The seal of veracity which stamps your Life is such that seems to us that you have borrowed from the Apostle, Saint Peter, the words of his first discourse to the people after the Last Supper.

Virum approbatum a Deo in vobis, virtutibus et prodigiis et signis quae fecit Deus per illum in medio vestri, sicut et vos scitis.

“A man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as you also know.” Acts 2, 22

Your hero, who has become your spiritual father, you have followed from the day of his birth at Ovada in the Republic of Genoa, 3rd January, 1694, until the day of his glorious death on the Caelian Hill in the Retreat of Saints John and Paul, 18th October, 1775, with scrupulous exactness and a filial affection. You have shown with charming simplicity, at Castellazzo, the home of the Saint, his youthful piety and penances, and the charity that inspired his every action. One cannot read this Life without being emotionally stirred; nor can one read without associating Saint Benedict in the grotto of Subiaco, Ignatius in the cave of Manresa, with the austerities of the youthful Paul Danei, and of the struggles he had to endure when, withdrawing to a damp and cold room under a stairway in the sacristy of the Church of Saint Charles at Castellazzo, he wrote in obedience to the wish of the Bishop, the Rules of the Congregation of the Passion.

The manner, in which you have described Monte Argentario, so life-like and so delicately, had made us fall in love with that hallowed room, the silent witness during long years to the prayer, the penance and the silence of the first members of your Congregation. If today this privileged place, where Mary so mysteriously called your holy Founder, has been stolen from you, let us hope that in happier times that are not far off, God will return this sacred sanctuary to you, the holy cradle of your holy

Congregation. Nothing is more touching than the description of those many journeys of the Saint to Rome, along arduous and treacherous paths, bareheaded and barefooted, in the biting cold of winter or the scorching heat of summer, and of the obstacles that he encountered in his efforts to obtain the approbation of the Holy See for the foundation of this new Congregation. These difficulties seemed to impede the inspired and holy work. But was it not rather that the tree destined to spread high and wide its protective shelter and shade should be buffeted by storms from the very beginning of its existence, so that its roots would acquire the strength necessary to support and sustain its innumerable branches? Yes, the works of Saint Paul of the Cross were most pleasing to God; also was it not necessary, too, that they should be tried in the fire of tribulation,

Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit ut tentatio probaret te.

“Because you were acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove you.” (Tobias 12,13)

But, once the Congregation was approved by a Rescript from Pope Benedict XIV, it expanded and developed to equal the Orders of Dominic and Ignatius. The fecundity of the word of Saint Paul of the Cross during apostolic missions is something simply astonishing, but which is only explained in the light of the sanctity of the Missionary; and the prodigies accompanying his word and work were a sign of God’s approval on the labors of the grand Servant of God,

The tender friendship that the Pontiffs - Clement XIII, Clement XIV, Pius VI - vowed to Saint Paul of the Cross is explained also by the beauty of soul of the Founder, in which these Pontiffs, disturbed by the calamities of the times, were happy to find the help and consolation they sought.

I must refrain myself, Reverend Father, for if I do not, I will never finish relating those sentiments which your Life of Saint Paul of the Cross has aroused in my soul. But one word more: the doctrine which, during the course of your narrative you have related, is true and orthodox; your unpretentious style is pure, simple and delightful and your hero, as you have portrayed him, is the very same as your fathers have known, admired and loved. It now only remains for me to bless this work, and I do so with my whole heart, begging of God that it may shine before priests and people, for I am convinced that it will increase in their hearts devotion to Jesus crucified, which is the sole source of all sanctity.

Asking you, Reverend Father, to accept the assurance of my deep affection.

Ferdinand Cardinal Donnet
Archbishop of Bordeaux

INTRODUCTION

“We preach Christ Crucified” (I Cor. 1:23)

Behold a Saint of modern times. Yet, in the words of an illustrious Pontiff, modern in time but modeled on the saints of old.

The Church, Spouse of Jesus Christ, is always a fruitful mother; she is ever bringing forth a new, a chosen soul. And down through the ages, her newborn, having shed radiance upon the Church on earth, passes to heaven where the Mother venerates him among the Blessed in Heaven.

Paul of the Cross! Pius IX, of immortal memory, declared him Blessed on 1st May, 1853. The same Pontiff enrolled him among the ranks of the Saints on 29th June, 1867. The ceremony of canonization is the most memorable, the most august and the most brilliant of all the solemnities of the Church. During this solemnity, in the presence of the faithful assembled in the capital of the Catholic world, the Holy Father crowned with the halo of the Saint the Founder of the Institute of the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ - Paul of the Cross.

This is not a Saint forgotten in the obscurity of time. This is not a life in which the strange wonders are the product of an exalted piety, nor is it the repetition of an imaginary legend. No, the miracles of Paul of the Cross are not a fiction, they are a living reality.

He is not completely lost to us. He is quite near us. Not a hundred years have elapsed since he passed from the exile of earth to the eternal home of Heaven. Our own Fathers saw him and heard him speak. In Rome, where I spent many months during the time of his canonization, I saw him, I might even say, I embraced our beloved Father. For in the Retreat of Saints John and Paul, he is still animated by the fragrance of his presence. There was his cell, now an oratory; it was there he was delighted by visions from heaven. From his cell you can see the little chapel where in his last years he offered his Mass. There, the large Crucifix that accompanied him on his missions. On one side are all the articles he used: his habit, his leather belt, his sandals, his manuscripts, his sermons, his letters and his instruments of penance; holy relics that our Fathers treasure with a twofold devotion of faith and love. There, in this sanctuary, I preferred each morning to say Mass. Although I cannot explain it, I felt in that poor oratory that he was very, very near, even nearer than in the beautiful Basilica, where rests his body under the High Altar, clothed in the Passionist habit, the Holy Rules in his hand and the mission Crucifix on his breast.

It was in this Retreat that I wrote a large part of this Life. There, I spoke with some of our aged Fathers, who were trained in the religious life by those very men who had modeled their religious life on the example and the teaching of the Founder.

We possess many Italian lives of Saint Paul of the Cross. We have read them, examined them and compared them all.

The first biography of the Saint was written by Blessed Vincent Strambi, who received the habit of the Passion from the hands of the Founder himself, who lived with him, assisted him during his last hours upon earth and loved him as a Father with a tender and filial devotion.

(Note: Blessed Vincent Strambi was successively a missionary, professor of theology in Sts. John and Paul, Rector of that Retreat, Provincial, Consultor and Secretary. In 1801, Pius VII appointed him Bishop of Macerata and Tolentino. As confessor of the faith, in 1808, he was exiled, first to Novare and then to Milan. On returning to his diocese, he again undertook his apostolic labors with renewed vigor. Many times he was called to Rome to preach to the Sacred College of Cardinals. He frequently begged Pius VII to relieve him of his bishopric, hoping that he might return to his monastery to live the common life with his brethren. Leo II, later, gave his consent, but on the condition that he live at the Vatican. Charity was to make him a victim of another kind. The Pope fell ill. Bishop Strambi, who was assisting at his side, offers his life for the Pope. The Holy Father is instantly cured. A few days later, the Bishop dies on 1st January, 1824. His body rests in the Basilica of Saints John and Paul.)

With what love, with what earnestness has he written the Life of the founder. With what charm has he pictured that saintly soul, the counterpart of his own soul, the heart that throbbed in unison with his own. He never wearies of contemplating these pure and harmonious traits. Very often he notes from the Processes of Canonization, which were already begun in his own time as Pope Pius VI had them commenced immediately after the Saint's death. The revolutions of Europe interrupted them. The Life, written by Blessed Vincent, appeared perhaps too soon. There are digressions, repetitions and a lack of chronological order. Still, however, it is a precious mine into which we have searched and each time returned with our hands full of priceless treasures.

The Processes, continue Blessed Vincent, have provided us with numerous documents. Delving into these massive volumes, we have often been carried away by their richness. Our laborious research has been amply rewarded by the unique and remarkable details with which it furnished us.

These are our sources, manifested and endowed with all the characteristics of indubitable authenticity. With all these helps we have had only one fear: that in spite of all we might fail to portray the dazzling radiance of the fascinating and powerful figure of Saint Paul of the Cross.

I.

The heroic lover of the Cross, like the great Apostle whose name he bore; hermit and a penitent with the purity and the innocence of John the Baptist; loving even unto folly Jesus Christ and the virtue of holy poverty like Francis of Assisi; desiring to suffer and to be despised like John of the Cross; an ardent apostle like Dominic and Ignatius; a wonder-worker like the great saints of all ages of the Church; a founder of a religious Order -- such is Saint Paul of the Cross.

On 17th June, 1843, Gregory XVI signed the decree which permitted the introduction of his cause of canonization. The numerous miracles which have been wrought through the intercession of Blessed Vincent makes us hope that after the Father, the son will soon receive the crown of the Saints.

It is on Calvary, in the Sacred Wounds of the Redeemer, that he has won these treasures of perfection and sublime holiness. He was a living image of Jesus Crucified. He received the stigmata in his heart, engraved thereon by our Divine Lord Himself were the instruments of the Passion. Lay people, priests, bishops, Cardinals, Sovereign Pontiffs, all had for him, even during his life, that veneration which only the Saint can command. His long apostolate was distinguished by most painful trials and by striking successes. The Passion of Jesus Christ was the source of his inspirations. He gloried in the fact that he knew nothing but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. An apostle powerful in word and work, he saved countless souls from hell and won glorious victories over error, sin and the devil. He healed diseases, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, words to the dumb, the use of limbs to the paralyzed, life to the dead. He calmed violent storms, penetrated the secret depths of the heart and revealed the hidden events of the future.

In a word, he possessed that sovereign power which God communicates to his greatest saints.

His sermons would be illumined by divine inspirations, and he would interrupt them with a passionate cry of soul. His was eloquence far superior to the cold and calculating rhetoric, which determines its words with rule and measure. He learned, in the great school of the Apostles, what it is that elevates and saves the world. This eloquence is the fruit of sanctity alone; man can never achieve it. Nothing is more moving than the sermons of our Saint; they recall the days of Chrysostom, Augustine, Ephrem and Vincent Ferrer. The Missionary spoke to his Congregation, and the Congregation answered him by its cries of repentance and sighs of sorrow. Often, Paul, with an instrument of penance in his hand, would mercilessly strike his shoulders until blood gushed forth. On the platform with the Blood of the Victim of Calvary, the blood of the apostle of the Crucified would pour over souls as waves of mercy and love. "Enough, Father, enough. Yes, yes, we will be converted," would be the cry that would echo around the Church. The eloquence of blood produces wonderful fruits of salvation. People came from everywhere to listen to him. They came from everywhere to go to confession to him. They called him a Saint, the Father of souls.

"It is a decree of Providence," writes the great Bossuet, "that words be not sufficient to announce Jesus Christ." Something more telling is necessary to persuade the hardened heart. Wounds must speak to it; blood must move it. Even the apostolate of Jesus Christ had its greatest power and fecundity only when the voice of His Precious Blood resounded over the earth from the heights of the Cross. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things unto myself" (John 12:32). Words can convince; only blood can persuade. Art makes an orator; suffering makes an apostle. This is the secret of that magnetic attraction which draws people to these poor missionaries, barefooted,

clothed in a rough black tunic, girded with a leather belt. It is sometimes said, "The religious, as they were in the days of old, are no longer to be seen." That is wrong; the contrary is true. What will conquer this age of pride, of sensuality and of avarice, but only the apostolate of humility, of suffering and of poverty? This is the external mortification speaking to the eyes of all. Apostles who mortify yourselves at home in your monastery, no longer are your austerities believed. But who can deny the blood stains that your bleeding feet trace upon the streets.

Therefore, it is by the Passion that our Saint raised souls to the highest degrees of prayer. For him, the Passion was his spiritual life: the beginning, the progress, the end. It was at once the source of the soul's purification, the means of acquiring virtue and the pledge of attaining a divine union. We will see how he himself walked this path and arrived at the highest heights of sanctity.

God chose him to found a new religious Order in the Church. A sorrowful, we might say, a frightening glory. What humiliations await him, what sufferings to be borne, what trails to be endured, what obstacles to be overcome. What heroism of soul, what unshakeable faith, what constant virtue is necessary, especially at a time when religious Orders were openly attacked, cruelly persecuted and expelled from entire countries. How many times, we are not ashamed to admit it, how many times during the writing of this life, have our eyes been moistened with unrestrained tears, as we relate his sufferings of body and anguish and agony of soul. O God, surely one of less heroic virtue than Paul of the Cross would have abandoned all in despair of soul. Surely, the captain with less strength of soul would have deserted the bridge and allowed the ship to drift helplessly towards destruction. Superhuman strength was assuredly necessary. That is why Paul used to say, "The real Founder of the Congregation is Christ Crucified."

II.

It is not our intention to write a treatise on religious Orders. More capable pens have already treated this subject fully. We will only say a few words on the work of Saint Paul of the Cross in founding his religious Congregation.

The Congregation of the Passion is consecrated especially to the apostolate of the Word of God, or preaching. There can be no doubt that there would be in the evangelical ministry a most regrettable deficiency, as regards the glory of God and the general good of souls, if the religious apostolate did not exist. That is why the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit and using her infallible authority, has always approved of it.

The great servants of God, and in particular Saint Augustine, have all tried to solve the problem of how to reconcile the contemplative life with the active life, both for the salvation of the people and the sanctification of the apostle.

The active life is not without danger. Parish duties demand the constant attention and vigilance of the priest. Living in the midst of the world, he is exposed to a twofold peril:

the peril of isolation, if he lives alone, and a peril, no less grave, of worldly interests, if he withdraws from that isolation.

The contemplative life has its apostolate: the apostolate of prayer. In truth it is the most powerful and the most fruitful. The Divine Master Himself called it the “better part.” But yet this is not the apostolate properly so called, such as Jesus Christ practiced and entrusted to His disciples

The life of the Master and that of His apostles is a mingling of these two lives. This mixed life constitutes the apostolate proper to religious.

In order to influence others efficaciously, we must ourselves be filled with God. Contemplation enkindles the fire of heaven in the soul of the apostle; the active life communicates that fire upon the earth.

The active life crushes the soul, saps its strength and makes it barren, especially when that activity is ceaseless.

The purely contemplative life, with its severe and continuous corporal austerities, lessens the strength and deprives the body of the vigor necessary for preaching the Gospel.

An exact balance must be found which brings these two lives into harmony, so that neither will harm the other, but each will counterbalance the other, or rather, act as a powerful lever which will sustain and animate the other.

This is what the Divine Spirit inspired in Saint Paul of the Cross. Sufficient solitude, mortification and contemplation to kindle the sacred fire in the soul: not over much, for it would weaken the body and steal that bodily strength which is necessary for the apostolate. Behold the solution of the problem. Behold the Passionist such as his Congregation makes him.

It is good, before dealing with the life of Saint Paul of the Cross, to make this observation. The austerities practiced by him in the beginning were more severe than those prescribed in the Rule which he wrote; and not all the mortifications in the Rule were approved by the Holy See. Perhaps the ardent nature of the Founder inspired him to go beyond the limit of the Rule as regards exterior mortifications. We will hear him in his old age making this confession about himself.

As the purpose of the Congregation was the active life combined with the contemplative life, there must be, as we have said, an exact harmony of austerity and indulgence.

This harmony has been attained in the wisdom of our Constitutions. I know by experience, and others have learnt it also, that not only can the most delicate constitutions fulfill the prescriptions of the Rule, but they are even strengthened by it.

Let us say something on the spirit of the Institute.

A perfect obedience to the Supreme Head of the Church, a profound reverence for Bishops, a great respect for priests with a scrupulous care not to infringe upon their rights and a care to build our monasteries in such places which will not interfere with the work of the pastor, but may on the other hand, be able to help him when necessary. This is what our holy Founder desired.

The actions of God are never mere isolated happenings. They are, on the contrary, all linked together. History demonstrates this indissoluble union. Persecution never strikes the regular clergy without striking at the same time the secular clergy - after the Monastery, the Church, after the monk, the pastor. Let us all then be united as an army of God against the army of Satan.

What is the life-giving strength of the Congregation? It is the continual remembrance of the Passion of Jesus Christ. The Passionist religious always remains with Mary at the foot of the Cross to meditate upon the Crucified Christ, to imitate Him, to preach Him. 'Passioni stat.'

The Passion! We must not believe that it gives the mind, and especially the heart, only a limited horizon. It is a bottomless and limitless ocean. It is infinite.

It does not merely commence in the Garden of Olives and conclude on the hilltop of Calvary. The saints tell us that from the very first moment of the Incarnation the long Agony of the Redeemer began. Down through the ages, there has been and there will always be a Judas, a Pilate, and the Jews to perpetuate the bloody scene of Gethsemane, of the Praetorium and of Golgotha.

Taking a large crucifix with him, the Passionist missionary goes to preach to the people. He takes possession of the pulpit; at its side he erects his Crucifix. Whenever possible, there is given to the people each morning a meditation on the different scenes of the Passion. In the evening he preaches on the eternal truths.

To be an apostle, that is to say, to be understood by the minds of all, to preach in the towns, in the cloister, in hospitals, in the country and in sparsely populated places, in prisons, everywhere, so long as there is a soul to be saved, such is the prescription imposed by our Holy Rules.

Let us see how the Holy Spirit inspired Saint Paul of the Cross to write them.

What is the particular spirit of the Passionist Congregation? Besides the three vows of religion - poverty, chastity and obedience - we make a fourth vow - that of spreading devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ. When Pope Benedict XIV approved the Rules of the Congregation, he attentively considered this fourth vow. Then the illustrious Pontiff declared, "This Congregation is the last to come into the Church, whereas it seems that it should have been the first."

Alas, O venerable Pontiff, would there not come a time when Christians would forget that they were the disciples of a Crucified Master, when, under a Leader crowned with thorns, they would be crowned with flowers and would esteem and desire only the comforts, the pleasures, the riches of the world! Would there not come a time when the world would be insensible to all religion, and would make a mockery of everything religious, knowledge, eloquence and apologetics. Learned doctors would expose the darkness of error; eloquent preachers would draw upon all the resources of oratory; the wise would break all the arms of sophism, and still blasé souls would remain unmoved. All these means had failed. Today, the Divine Redeemer must be presented anew. He must be held before the eyes of men as the Crucified God. He must be shown with His tears, with His Blood, with His Sacred Wounds, with His opened heart. Yes, that is how God must be presented to this present world, so degraded on the one side for it has fathomed the abyss of despair; so proud on the other for it has exalted itself against the Justice of God, clothing itself as the angel of pride with head raised high to blaspheme against the thunderbolt that strikes it.

Here is Infinite Mercy greater than all the crimes of all ages. Here is Love Incarnate. He who resists the plea of love has no heart. Thanks be to God, there remains, even in the most depraved human soul, a spark of love. Let us throw upon this spark the burning coals of Divine Love, of Crucified Love, and we will transform the world. What wonders are wrought through the Passion of Jesus Christ to win souls for God, not only on one day of one year, but also on every day of every year. It is to the foot of the Cross that all must be led, the proud, the sensual, the dissident, and there love will give birth to faith.

III.

Hence, the innumerable miracles that God has performed through Saint Paul of the Cross, wondrous miracles that recall those of the great wonder workers. In this Life we have withheld nothing. We relate them as simply as they were stated in the Processes of canonization. They are facts scrupulously examined and approved by the highest and the most enlightened authority in the Church.

The life of the greatest saints and their influence on souls cannot be explained without miracles any more than the origin of Christianity. Must not the world doubt this? Is it not a difficult problem? How can one live a life of rigorous mortification that is beyond human strength without the assistance of Heaven? How can we explain that enthusiasm for souls, that attraction towards the saints? Is it not because of the wonders, or at least the grace, which, working through these apostles mighty in word and work, make them men of power? How can we explain those wonderful conversions by the voice of a man from a life of luxury to a life of frightening austerity, from a life of richness to a life of the strictest poverty, from a life of selfishness to a life of heroic self-denial? "Haec mutatio dextrae Excelsi." This conversion is the work of the Most High.

A miracle is a marvel of the Love and Mercy of God. It is also a help towards faith. A miracle is the Divine Hand showing itself to men under the veil of a marvel. By this

means creatures draw nearer to God without being afraid, without being blinded by the radiance of the Divine Majesty. Sometimes it does happen that a miracle does frighten, as we see in the Gospels, but it never upsets the balance of the moral world. Man never loses his liberty. He always remains free to give himself to God or to withhold himself. He can always merit or refuse to merit. A miracle does not force his will, but it attracts in a similar way to Divine grace. And so faithful hearts expose themselves to the light of a miracle, but proud minds grow indignant; they are hardened and become confirmed in evil, as Pharaoh and so many others. To escape from the miracle which troubles, their defiled conscience, their blind pride revolts. They prefer, as did the Pharisees, to attribute the miracles to Beelzebub than to Jesus Christ. But whence come these ceaselessly renewed attacks against divine wonders if not that they are also an attack against the demonstration of Catholic truth?

The author of a miracle is God Himself. Could He work them to approve error? Certainly not! It is in Catholicism alone that these wonders are worked. Then it alone is the truth. That is the reason why we can suffer for the truth, because it overcomes the passions, and the divine seal is given to the truth which distinguishes it from all others. A miracle cannot be denied without offending against reason. But, instead, men prefer to attack the credulity of the world, the geniuses of Chrysostom, Cyprian, Bossuet and Pascal.

In the popular lives of the saints in our day nothing is passed over. Neither will we remain silent about anything in the life of St. Paul of the Cross.

To conceal these marvelous facts is to steal from the flower its perfume and from the mysteries of heaven their ineffable charm. To refrain from speaking under the timid fear of the vain sarcasms of sophists would be to fail God, to fail the saints, to fail even mankind, who have been deceived about the truth by the misfortunes of our times.

Our Divine Lord continued to work miracles although He knew that they would be a scandal to the Pharisees, who in their jealous hatred would calumniate Him. Today, Jesus Christ continues to perform them in His Church so that the whole world might see them. To be silent, to pass over these divine marvels, would it not be a sign that we were ashamed of the Master?

To suppress the supernatural in the lives of the saints would be to take from their crown its most precious jewels and to obscure that which is most shining of their glory.

Moreover, does it not happen that at these authentic relations of the works of the divine power, men who have not the gift of faith open their eyes to the light? Therefore, we ought not to neglect any means that will bring to them the peace and hope which the faith gives to those who believe.

It is in this eighteenth century, while Voltaire 'laughed,' that the marvels were worked of which we will speak. When the human mind is most annoyed by the workings of heaven, then it is that God is pleased to multiply them for the triumph of truth.

IV.

Those who deny miracles also deny the heroes of sanctity. They say, "There are no longer saints as there used to be." These words do not astonish me. Christian teachers tell us that at times there escapes from the adorable face of the Savior a ray of divine light. Upright hearts, even though they be sinners, find, hidden under the veil of human flesh, God. Depraved hearts, especially the worshippers of self, see Jesus Christ as an ordinary man. For the one it is the Son of God; for the other the Son of the carpenter. As with the Master, so it is with the saints. They hide from the eyes of men. They cast around themselves a veil of humility. When the divine ray reveals itself in them, we must know how to grasp it. To understand the character of the Saint, we need divine assistance, just as we need a divine gift to appreciate the faith.

"There are no longer saints who work wonders." Even when these words were being spoken, the Cure D'Ars was healing the sick, reading consciences, foretelling the future and driving out devils.

Yes, there are still saints among us, and saints there always will be, because their threefold mission of truth, consolation and expiation are indispensable to the world.

Is the arm of God shortened? Or rather, is it that the power of the Cross, which has transformed the world, vanished from the earth?

Paul of the Cross surrendered himself entirely to Jesus Crucified, and in return Jesus Crucified made him one of His most illustrious saints. We will see how he responded to the divine gifts without in the least neglecting his natural gifts. What a spectacle worthy of God and of angels that a soul like ours, wounded by the fall, should by its generous sacrifices raise itself to conquer its fallen nature and rise to the sublime heights of sanctity and, thus, reveal the glory of the faith. Even on earth it shows the splendor of the blessed in Heaven. What a consolation to us and what hope it arouses in us. If on earth God transforms before our very eyes His chosen souls, cannot we say of ourselves, "This is what I shall one day be."

V.

The life of a saint is not a book of literature but a book of piety. The author should write it with faith and love, with his heart and with his soul. The reader on his side should be penetrated with the same sentiments and, hence, seek from his reading, not the satisfaction of vain curiosity but the nourishing of his piety, not passing emotions but affections that are lasting and efficacious. He should draw from it food for his soul and thus fulfill the duties of his state in life.

We cannot imitate all the practices of a saint. They were raised by God for a particular work. Grace was given them to equip them for that special mission entrusted to them by God.

In the life of Saint Paul of the Cross, we will find some things to be admired and some things to be imitated. His Christian virtues are to be imitated by the faithful; his fidelity to the vows of religion to be imitated by souls consecrated to God in the religious state; his apostolic zeal and priestly virtues to be imitated by the priest. All this we will find in the first plan.

The second plan will afford us some wonderful examples. Christian mothers will see in them the power God has entrusted to them to form their children as saints. The pious virgin will find in them practical counsels which will safeguard her from the perils of the world and lead her to greater progress in virtue. Souls that are troubled, weakened or tried by aridity and temptation or discouraged by the continual weariness of human life will be able to fortify their courage at the same source. Sinners, encouraged by the examples of generous and faithful conversions, will learn confidence in God, who is the God of Mercy. Each will learn from this Life that Calvary is the only true way to Heaven.

We will have to admire, while giving thanks to God, the Author of every perfect gift, the astonishing workings of divine grace and the beauty of the higher paths of perfection through which God leads His saints.

But, let us not be envious of similar favors. For if we could only fully understand the martyrdom which results from these glorious, yet forbidding revelations, our timidity, our weakness and our frailty would perhaps recoil in horror.

Equilibrium is broken in their lives here below on earth. Love too strong for our weak flesh becomes, as we see in Saint Paul of the Cross, an unspeakable torment. A torment as regards God: the soul gains the knowledge of His eternal beauty; it is drawn to Him by a violent, irresistible attraction...yet it is held back by the bonds of this earthly life. Thus follows those darts of love, ecstasies and flights of the soul, all of which in their violent effort to be united with God raise up the body with itself; these ecstasies are often followed by swoonings of love under the weight of its intense delights. It is an inexpressible state of a loving soul, which is caused by the absence of the one loved.

A torment also as regards men. Who can express what this soul suffers? It feels the pangs of exile. Earth is for it a strange land, which speaks a language which it knows not. Moreover, if the saint is an apostle, as was Saint Paul of the Cross, with what zeal would he not wish to lead souls to God. When he sees men rejecting grace, when he sees them resisting his zealous efforts and, if I might speak thus, when he sees them racing headlong to their eternal destruction, what grief tears at his heart at his helpless and unavailing efforts to lead all souls to God. This is the heartbreak of a mother who sees her child casting himself to destruction yet, standing by, helpless.

Thus it is that the eloquence of the saints far surpasses our cold conceptions and defies our feeble expression.

Saint Paul of the Cross, by frequent heavenly visions, has contemplated the realities of the supernatural world. What words could he find to express the longings of his soul?

Let us not envy the saints in their communications with heaven. It is more pleasant and much safer for us under the luminous shadow of the faith and beneath the calm mysteries of the Sacraments.

Faith and the Sacraments are the most admirable of God's dealings with the soul. They are a gentle and ineffable harmony of grace and nature. God shows Himself in them in the half-light without dazzling us too much. God makes Himself felt in them under a fine and light veil without depriving human nature of its own activity. As Bossuet says, "He does good to us through them without telling us about it."

VI.

I think these reflections are a necessary preparation for the reading of this Life.

God knows how I desire to reproduce faithfully in my narrative the soul of the apostle, and with what love I would inspire in the hearts of all men towards this great Saint. I wish to make him live again. I will almost say, making him incarnate in these pages. Atlas, too pale and too discolored is the portrait I have drawn of him. But I confess that many times during the writing of this Life, when I saw the greatness of the task and the insufficiency of my own ability, and I might add the little time remaining after my apostolic labors, I have been tempted to abandon the task. Obedience and prayer have alone sustained my courage. Sometimes, a glance at the Crucifix has made me continue my unfinished effort; sometimes, I have fallen upon my knees and said, "O Jesus Crucified, since I must portray the life of a Saint who has labored unceasingly for Your glory, look upon my poverty, my misery. O Lord, write the Life Yourself, or at least permit me to dip my pen in the inexhaustible source of Your Sacred Heart, whence proceed all holy thoughts, all noble sentiments of faith. If you permit this, your Founder will be glorified, your Cross will be loved, and perhaps some soul will be consoled.

May the Congregation of the Passion, O Lord, produce abundant fruit in the kingdom of Saint Louis, which has received from You one of the richest souvenirs of Calvary - your precious Crown. The thorns from your Crown were preferred by this saintly monarch to the gold and the riches of his own royal crown.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH OF SAINT PAUL OF THE CROSS - HIS INFANCY - HIS DEVOTION TO THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST - HIS FIRST STUDIES

1694 - 1709

Saint Paul of the Cross was born on the third of January, 1694, in Ovada, Italy, a market town dependent at that time on the Republic of Genoa. His father, Luca Danei, a native of Castellazzo in the diocese of Alessandria, was descended from the noble family of Danei, formerly one of the most flourishing in that city, but later fallen from their former splendor. His mother, Anna Maria Massari of equally honorable parents, was born at Roveriolo in the diocese of Genoa. (Castellazzo belonged to the States of Sardinia - 4,195 inhabitants - about 5 miles south of Alessandria, which lies about 50 miles southeast of Turin on the River Tanaro, and has a population of about 30,500).

From his infancy Luca Danei had left Castellazzo to live at Ovada where he made his home with that of a companion worthy of his heart and his virtues.

The parents of Saint Paul of the Cross were perfect models of Christian Marriage. They were more concerned with the goods of heaven than with the fleeting goods of this earth. They sought only, in an honorable occupation, to gain those things necessary to rear a large family and to live in the love and the fear of God. (No document indicates what this business was.)

A man of strong faith, of upright character and of rare piety, Luca found his delight in prayer, spiritual reading and the lives of the saints. From the practice of Christian virtues, he derived a superior strength to triumph over adversity and an increase in love for God. For God he would willingly have sacrificed everything: his dearest possessions, his purest affections, his very life itself; such was his faith, as a spouse, as a father, that he yearned for martyrdom. Towards his neighbor he was equally as loving, generous and charitable. We will see how his death crowned his life with the most heroic charity.

The manly virtues of the father found their complement in the charm, the tenderness and the devotion of a spouse and mother in the heart of Anna Maria. Humble, modest and saintly she loved the solitude of her home and the quietness of the church. Her time was divided between her duty to God and to her family. She looked upon her household duties and the education of her children as a holy vocation. If at any time she felt some feeling arise, she immediately repressed it, and from her lips there proceeded only words of blessing and peace, "May God make saints of you all." Such sweet and perfect virtue won for her the love, the esteem and the veneration of all who met her. Her virtue shone forth particularly when the hand of death deprived her of the comfort and the consolation of her husband. The burdens of a large family she bore alone without a word of complaint, even in spite of continual suffering. After a few years she, too, went to her eternal reward. In death as in life she was a perfect example of Christian resignation and holiness.

We know the chosen plants whence blossomed that pure flower, the perfume of whose virtues we are about to enjoy. If then, these Christian spouses were not favored with earthly possessions, they were rich at least in the treasures of grace. To reward them for their virtue, God blessed their marriage by sending them sixteen children. But there was to be a further blessing, for in the designs of God, it is from a large family that He chooses His privileged souls.

Paul was the eldest of the children. In this beloved son the parents had suspected a secret design of Providence. God was pleased, as we often read in the lives of the saints, to mark the cradle of His chosen ones with a presage of their future sanctity and of the mission to which He would call them.

The birth of our Saint was accompanied by circumstances which border on the extraordinary. During the time his mother bore him, she was free from the fatigue, the weariness and the strain which mothers ordinarily experience. Paul was born during the night. At this moment a mysterious light illumined the room with such brilliance that the light of the lamps seemed dull. The newly born will himself be a light burning in the night of the eighteenth century when the torch of the faith will be dimmed. He was born on the Octave day of the Feast of Saint John, the Beloved Disciple. Like the Beloved Disciple he will always remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross. He was baptized on the Feast of the Epiphany; would he not manifest God to the world by his apostolic ministry. He received the name of Paul Francis, like the great Apostle Paul, he would receive the mission of preaching Christ Crucified; like the seraphic Francis, he would establish a religious Order founded on the spirit of the strictest poverty.

All the circumstances surrounding this child foretold of a great and a holy destiny.

Anna Maria, a wise and Christian mother, would not allow any but herself to nurse the child; thus Paul, together with nourishment for his body, would likewise draw from his mother nourishment for his soul.

It was not long before the son gave very clear signs of God's designs upon him. As if already endowed with the gift of discernment, he would take his milk only at regular times. This is a preparation for the rigorous abstinence which he would observe during the whole of his life.

A child of such promise called for the tenderest care. The first training by his mother – an education so delicate, so decisive for the future, which forms a man from the cradle, which nothing else can supply, found in Ann Maria everything that was needed: nobility of thought, delicacy of feeling, zeal for holiness and sweetness of manner.

In the eyes of this mother, worthy to serve as a model for so many others, Christian education was the best form of character training. How she watched and directed the treasure which her heavenly Father had entrusted to her. With what zeal did she plant the seeds of every virtue in the heart of her young son. She had him always near her, protecting him from anything that could stain his innocent soul. So effective was her vigilance that Paul would ever preserve the treasure of an unspotted Baptismal

innocence. The Mother taught him to know, to love and to serve God. She related to him the stories of the lives of the hermits of the desert. Since she was so closely united to God herself, she told the story with such charm and fervor that Paul always listened rapt in attention. Inspired by these stories, he longed for a life of solitude, a desire that never left him. At other times his mother told him the story of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. Even at this young age, the child was moved to tears. When the mother was combing his hair, if he was about to cry, as children of that age ordinarily do, then she would ingeniously and with charm begin to tell him about the lives of the holy hermits. It was marvelous to see the change in Paul. With the tears still in his eyes, his face would brighten with a gracious smile. At other times she would hold a Crucifix in her hands before him saying, "Look, my son, see how Jesus has suffered." And gazing on the figure of the Crucified God, he would remain silent.

The good mother did not forget to consecrate her child to Mary, Queen of Virgins. She often told him about the Child Jesus and His Holy Mother; how this Child was docile and obedient; how His Mother was loving and kind. Paul developed a singular love for the Child Jesus and His Mother. It was a joy for him to make short aspirations to them. Kneeling before their image, with hands joined and with eyes raised to heaven, he would say his prayers. It is always with the Heart of Mary before their eyes that the saints walk in the path of Christian perfection. In this Life we will see how the Child Jesus manifested His love for Paul, and the Blessed Virgin her loving protection.

The never ending round of duties of the mother was lightened by the willing cooperation of the father who, more by example than by word, helped in the training and the education of the child,

The memory of his virtuous and holy mother remained deeply engraved on the heart of Paul. Even during the last years of his life, when explaining from the pulpit the duties of parents towards their children, he loved to relate the example of his own mother, to whom he owed not only life itself but also the inestimable privilege of belonging to God. "If I am saved," he used to say, "as I hope through God's mercy I will, it will be due to the training of my mother."

What praise from the lips of such a son.

Happy, then, are the mothers who like Anna Maria rear their children not for the attainment of worldly honor but for the greater glory of God. Their children will be their joy upon earth and their crown in Heaven,

This tender plant cultivated with tender care was not slow to burst forth into flower. As Paul advanced in age, so also he grew in virtue. Every day his natural inclination for solitude, prayer and mortification increased, and his character became more gentle and affable, more disposed to win the hearts of all. (We wish to remind the reader here that of the first ten years of Paul's life, documents give but a few facts without any indication of the exact time.)

Uninterested in the games of his companions, Paul would wander off with his young

brother, John Baptist, who would be his faithful companion in the years to come on apostolic missions, to spend their time in building altars and then in decorating them with flowers and a picture of the Child Jesus and His Blessed Mother. There he would spend many hours reciting the Rosary, a holy practice that he maintained throughout the whole of his life.

One day, while he was kneeling before the image of the Blessed Virgin and paying a tribute of love to her, a little Child of ravishing beauty appeared before him. It was the Child Jesus Himself, who had come to reward Paul for his expressions of love.

Mary, the Mother of God, also gave an extraordinary proof of her protection to Paul and his brother John Baptist. One day they were looking for flowers, no doubt for their little altar. Walking along the bank of the river, the two brothers, eager for the flowers just out of reach, slipped and fell into the river Tanaro, a river belonging to the states of Sardinia. The water was deep, the current strong, they were carried away by the stream, almost drowning... Suddenly, a lady of ravishing beauty and majestic charm walked upon the water towards them, took them by the hand and led them to the safety of the bank; she had saved them from certain death. More than ever, this signal favor inflamed the heart of Paul with the love and gratitude for the Lady, who had delivered him from death, and for the Divine Child, whose beauty held him enraptured.

Even at this tender age, God favored him with divine inspirations, the gift of tears, and a high degree of prayer. He had not learned the methods of meditation, but, guided only by the Holy Spirit, he would often spend a long time in thinking of the Passion of Our Lord, of which he had heard so much from the lips of his mother. This mother must have known that she was preparing the way for God's plans upon Paul by inspiring him with devotion to the Passion. Our young Saint kept ever before his eyes the image of Jesus Crucified; he thought of the cruel sufferings of the Savior, and at the sight of this, he could not restrain his tears.

Our Divine Lord also prepared Paul for his future providential mission. He drew Paul to the Passion with an irresistible attraction. From that time onward He favored him with frequent visions of His life, His sufferings and His death. The Savior would appear to Paul, His Head crowned with thorns, His Face bruised and bleeding, His Body torn and gaping with wounds, His Sacred Flesh hanging in shreds... The impression these visions left upon this chosen child was deep and lasting. The very remembrance of them filled his heart and his soul with anguish and sorrow. It is not surprising then that, even at this early age, he began to have an intense love for suffering.

Paul already knew to mortify his sense of taste and to afflict his innocent body. At night he would leave his bed and go to sleep on a wooden plank that he might imitate His Master, who in his last agony had no other bed than the wooden bed of the Cross. Often on his knees in the silence of the night, he would meditate on the cruel sufferings of Jesus Crucified. On Fridays, especially, he would mortify himself throughout the whole of the day, his mind filled with the thought of the sufferings of His God. At table he would deny himself food. Suddenly he would become sad and pale, his eyes would fill with tears; he could not force himself to eat even a small piece of bread without bursting

into tears. This young child made for himself an instrument of penance from cord and with this he chastised his innocent flesh.

He knew how to communicate his desire for austerity and prayer to his brother John Baptist. In this Life we will see them practicing together frightening penances.

The Passion of Jesus Christ was ever in the mind of Paul Danei. Often he gathered his younger brothers and sisters in his chapel that he might speak to them of the Sacred Passion. His words were filled with a fervor and a zeal most unusual for one of his age. His youthful audience, seeing him weep, wept with him. Thus, it was that by penance and prayer Paul prepared his heart as a sanctuary for his Eucharistic King.

The time was approaching when he would kneel at the altar rails to make his first Holy Communion. His mother sent him to the catechism classes at the parish church. She also explained to him the meaning of the Blessed Eucharist. Although we do not know the exact time of his First Communion; we might presume that it was before he went with his parents to live at Tremolino. There he made his Communion with all the fervor of his young heart. It was also at Tremolino that he was to complete his studies.

In spite of this unfortunate lack of detail in the documents, it is easy for us to form some idea of the particular graces God bestowed upon him on the morning he welcomed into his innocent heart Our Divine Lord. From this time onward he advanced more and more in virtue and never ceased to walk with giant strides along the way of holiness,

Henceforth, Holy Communion will be his happiness and his strength. Holy Communion will preserve this fragrant lily from all that could defile it. The Tabernacle will be the impregnable fortress from which Paul would draw the strength to preserve his innocence.

He had now reached his tenth year. Luca, seeing that his son had a keen and a penetrating mind and a retentive memory, wished to choose as his teacher one who possessed knowledge together with virtue. He entrusted this delicate task to a friend of the family, a Carmelite religious of Cremolino in the hills of Montferrat, not far from Ovada,

The docility of the young scholar, his intelligence, his application to study and his genuine holiness, won the heart of his tutor. The latter gave him every attention, not only because of his friendship towards his father, but also because of the ability of the son. Paul quickly absorbed the instructions of his teacher and at the same time fulfilled the highest expectations of his father. His progress in study surpassed all that could be expected of one of his age. This Carmelite religious always spoke of Paul in words of praise. "Doubtless his natural talents," says Blessed Vincent Strambi, "were the reason for his progress." But success was also due to his constant application to study. Paul worked at his lessons with serenity of mind and tranquility of heart, free from those passions which dull the intellect. Serious and attentive, Paul learnt how to reason logically and to express himself gracefully with conviction and with a natural eloquence. This was the beginning of a style of speaking which in later years, during his work as a

missioner, would delight and move the people.

Study, which can be made a prayer, does not hinder one's holiness. And so his progress in the knowledge of the saints was no less remarkable. He increased his spiritual exercises, ever faithful to his morning meditation. Each morning he assisted at Mass and received Holy Communion as often as he was permitted. The time over from study and class he devoted to spiritual reading or spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or before the altar of Mary, the Mother of God.

Work and prayer were the means Paul used to safeguard his innocence of soul. His modesty, his candor and his pleasing holiness, even at an early age, was a presage that one day he would become a great servant of God.

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL RETURNS WITH HIS FAMILY TO CASTELLAZZO - HIS YOUTH - AN EXTRAORDINARY GRACE - HIS FERVOR

1709 – 1715

About the year 1709, Paul's family returned to Castellazzo. Our young Saint lessened neither the number nor the fervor of his spiritual exercises. Although sheltered at home, still he was going to live in the world at that age when the youthful imagination is very active, when impressions are so easily made and when the heart is so easily stirred. Illumined by grace, Paul learnt that the lily of innocence blossoms only among thorns and nourished by the dew of heaven. Austerity, prayer, angelical modesty, flight from the world, constant study, assiduous labor in helping his father; such was the rampart which protected his virtue; and such was the summary of his life from his fifteenth year to his twentieth year.

In a life of such fervor and piety, it would not be surprising if there was mention made at this age of a vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life. But Paul had such an exalted [image] of the dignity of the priesthood that in his humility he considered himself unworthy to aspire to it. Later, as we shall see, he accepted this honor only through obedience. His only desire was to escape from the world and hide himself in a desert, in an inaccessible retreat, and live there like the hermits of old. His yearning for solitude was not to be satisfied, no doubt for this reason: being the eldest of the family he believed that his parents had need of him.

Paul never allowed himself to be carried away by his youthful fervor, but guided by a rare wisdom, he placed himself entirely under the direction of his Pastor. The voice of his spiritual director was for him the voice of God.

Thus, he waited in silence the providential hour. It was soon to come. We now enter upon that solemn moment which is an epic in the spiritual life of our Saint. When God has some great design for a soul, He first begins to prepare it through the purifying waters of humiliation. He confides his extraordinary missions only to souls of perfect purity and of deep humility. In this way God prepared Paul to be a vessel of election by adorning him with precious gifts, in order that he might become an instrument of the Divine Mercy. We will relate how this grace came to Paul, the grace which we will call a preparation for the designs that God had for him.

Paul was about 20 years of age. One day he was present at an instruction given by his Pastor, a religious of the Order of the Servites of Mary. A sudden and clear light shone in the depths of his soul and made him realize his own misery and nothingness. Paul, always so innocent, always so virtuous, saw himself as the greatest sinner. The intense emotion that this thought aroused within him made him shed abundant tears. "When God," a spiritual writer tells us, "by a ray of His light makes known to a soul the great purity that he requires of it, He also gives it a great knowledge of its own imperfections. He inspires it to examine those defects closely and to search its more secret

imperfections in order to discover whether they be sinful, whether they be natural. Would to God that sinners wept for their greatest sins with the same intensity of sorrow that the innocent soul weeps for its least imperfections" (*Sufferings of Jesus Christ*, by Alleaume, 1. Ch. 3).

From this extraordinary grace there follows a deep mistrust of self, together with an absolute detachment from all creatures and a burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This divine inspiration demands an unfailing fidelity to the voice of heaven. If it is faithful, it can mount to the very heights of sanctity. If unfaithful, it can sink to the lowest depths of misery. But finding in Paul the fruitful soil of a docile heart, this grace produced abundant fruit.

Established in this region of light, the holy youth resolved to give himself to God more than ever. He felt an interior change which he in his humility called his "conversion", and which was, in truth, merely an increase of virtue. Many other saints have been proved and tried in this crucible at the time God was about to confer upon them an extraordinary mission.

Paul imagined, therefore, that up till this day he had done nothing at all for God. He could only see his soul as defiled by the stain of sin. Wishing to be cleansed from all his past offences, he cast himself at the feet of his Pastor and by a general confession revealed the faults of his whole life. Light faults they were, but Paul detested them as though they were the most heinous of crimes. In the excess of his sorrow, he shed bitter tears, and taking a stone he struck his breast so violently that the flesh was all bruised.

More than ever, he devoted himself entirely to the contemplation of the Sufferings of the Savior and endeavored to make himself like his Divine Model by severe mortifications and penances.

Rarely did he sleep in his bed. One of his sisters, Teresa, noticed this. Seeking to know where he spent the night, she questioned Paul. Wishing that God alone would be the witness of his penances, he would not disclose his secret. Teresa had often seen him in the evening climb to the hay loft with his brother, John Baptist. She suspected that they slept there. One day when the brothers were away from home, she examined the loft and found there some bare boards on which had been placed bricks and a crucifix. She declared this on oath at the Processes of Beatification. A second witness testified that Paul slept very little and then only on bare boards with a stone or a brick for a pillow. For the remaining hours of the night, he would meditate on the cruel Sufferings of Jesus Crucified.

After a short, uncomfortable sleep, the two brothers arose, even during the severe months of winter, and spent the rest of the night in prayer. Meditation inflames love, and love makes the lover desire to resemble the loved. With the cross in one hand and an instrument of penance in the other, they offered their innocent bodies as living victims, engraving on their flesh the wounds of the scourged Body of Jesus Crucified.

On one occasion their mother was awakened by the sound of blows of penance. It was

in the middle of the night. "O my God," she said to her daughter with tears in her eyes, "this sound makes me sick at heart!" Another time their father surprised them whilst they were striking themselves with a leather whip. He could only stop them by shouting, "What are you doing? Do you want to kill yourselves?" Such was the fervor of Paul when inflicting these penances upon himself that even his brother, quite as fervent as he was, had often to snatch the instrument from his hands. Often Paul arose earlier than usual and stole away so as not to disturb his brother; he began his prayer alone, speaking to God of the love that burned within his heart.

On Fridays his penances were more severe and his fasts more rigorous. For his meal he would only take a small piece of bread, and this he begged from his sister on his knees; the bread he moistened with his tears. As for drink, one witness assures us that it consisted of a mixture of vinegar and gall. His sister had suspicions of this and surprised him one day with the bottle of gall in his hands. "What are you doing with that?" she said to him. Paul fled in silence. He kept it in a small earthen vessel which he carefully hid away. But after Paul had left home, his sister struck it with a broom while sweeping the house and the vessel was broken into pieces, "A truly marvelous thing," says Blessed Vincent Strambi. "Hardly had this vessel been broken than the room was filled with a strange perfume which amazed Teresa and the others in the house. The girl gathered up the pieces carefully, examined them and saw the traces of the gall which the servant of God had kept in it. Moved by this new manifestation of her brother's penance, she took a piece of the jar to one of her aunts, Rosa Maria, a choir religious of the Convent of Saint Augustine. She also perceived the odor of a fragrant perfume. By this marvel God showed how pleasing to Him were the penances of his servant in honor of the Sacred Passion of His Son.

Thus Paul and his brother spurred each other on in the practice of penance. A touching spectacle which God and the angels contemplated with love, but which the sensual and worldly person fails to understand: these young men trampling underfoot the pleasures of the world put greater zest into their search for suffering as others in the pursuit of pleasure. Let us not believe that Christian mortification is lacking in charm. The soul is exalted and ennobled in proportion as it detaches itself from the things of sense, whilst it lowers itself and becomes vile when it is a slave of pleasure. And from the Cross, which it embraces, comes a happiness more intense than all the joys of this earth.

By the generosity of their sacrifices, these two chosen souls were filled with a shower of heavenly consolations.

It is the springtime of sanctity. God draws the soul by the infinite sweetness of His love, leading it to drink at the source of holy joy and divine delights. The earth then disappears from sight. It seems that the soul has wings. It flies, or rather it is carried by a breath from on high, to the very threshold of heaven. Assuredly, this is a state which is very attractive. But it is only the beginning of the spiritual life. If it lasted all the time, sanctity would become easy, merit would be less rich, the crown less beautiful and the perfect man would never be formed. There comes a moment when it is necessary to pass from Thabor to the darkness of Calvary, to experience the aridity of the desert, and to suffer the darkness of trials and tribulations. Paul knew this. He knew that earth was

not a paradise in which to rejoice with Jesus Christ, but an exile in which to suffer for Him.

Therefore, when these ineffable delights inundated his soul, he humbled himself, realizing his own nothingness, and drew closer to the thorns of Christ Crucified, redoubling his mortifications and his acts of virtue.

After his return to Cremolino, he became a member of a Confraternity. He observed its rules with exacting fidelity. The Church was the place of his predilection. Every spare hour of the day or night, he spent there, modest and recollected before the Blessed Sacrament. Every morning he assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He received Holy Communion at least three times a week. He recited the Divine Office with the priests in choir or spent the time in meditation. His visits to the church were so frequent and so prolonged that, according to the testimony of a religious, it was said, "If you want to find Paul, go look in the Church."

Of all the days in the year, one was particularly dear to him – Holy Thursday. He spent the whole day before the altar of repose where the God of Calvary was enthroned. With tears in his eyes and love in his heart, he followed his Divine Savior through the sorrowful scenes of the Passion. O night! Thus spent at the Tomb of the Savior! O night of darkness and delight! O night of suffering and love! What graces Jesus showers upon souls that watch and suffer with Him.

Assisting one evening at the office of Tenebrae, which is sung during Holy Week, at the words, "Christ became obedient unto death," Paul felt himself burn with the desire to imitate Jesus Christ. He made a vow of obedience, taking for a rule the words of Saint Peter, "Be subject to every creature for God's sake" (Peter 2:13). From that moment he not only obeyed his superiors but also his brothers and sisters, and even those who sought to command him. Thus, unable to resist, for the love of God, the will of others, he became the most lovable and the gentlest of men.

The composure of Paul in the Church inspired devotion. Always kneeling on the floor without any support, his arms folded before his breast, his appearance showed the liveliness of his faith and the depth of his humility. His modesty attracted the attention of Countess Canefri, who came every year from Alessandria to spend the summer months at Castellazzo. Inspired by such a subject of edification, she asked the sacristan who this young man was. When she returned to her palace, she conveyed her impressions to her husband. "Doubtless," she added, "this young man is meditating on some extraordinary resolutions; great things will be heard of him."

Paul was so absorbed in God as he knelt before the altar that he appeared to be deprived of all sense of feeling. One day, when he was before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed solemnly in the Capuchin Church, a heavy bench fell on his foot. Paul, insensible to the pain, did not move. His companion, who relates the incident, says Blessed Vincent Strambi, seeing that the foot was bleeding, made Paul aware of the injury. But the Saint, without a word and without the slightest movement, continued in his deep recollection.

After the ceremony the companion wanted him to go into the Monastery to have the injury attended. The servant of God replied, "These are but roses. Jesus has suffered far more than this. By my sins I have deserved greater sufferings."

What was the strength that sustained the young Saint in his austerities? What was it that protected him from the seductions and the snares of the world? Love for Jesus Crucified and the frequent reception of the Sacraments. One fervent Communion was a preparation for another still more fervent. Each Communion inflamed his heart with an ardent desire to be still more united with the Eucharistic Jesus, Thus, he could say later to his confessor, "In those first years Our Lord filled me with hunger for two things: for Holy Communion and for suffering."

CHAPTER THREE

SEVERE TRIALS - PAUL BECOMES A SOLDIER - HE RENOUNCES AN HONORABLE MARRIAGE AND AN INHERITANCE FROM HIS UNCLE - HIS ZEAL - PRODIGIES

1715 - 1719

It invariably happens that, after an extraordinary grace from God, there can be expected attacks from the enemy of salvation.

Whilst Paul in the fervor of his life tasted the sweetness of divine love, the devil assailed him with horrible temptations. Doubts against faith invaded his soul; no longer was there serenity of spirit; no longer interior sweetness, but trouble, agitation and perplexity. Has he offended God, his Sovereign Good? Has he truly driven away these thoughts, which war on him the more violently, the stronger his efforts to dispel them? Not knowing how to escape from them, he fled to the Church. There, before the Blessed Sacrament, resting his troubled head on the altar rail, he poured out his grief at the feet of his Divine Master. We do not know how long this trial lasted, but on the Feast of Pentecost, when it had reached a climax, and he was the more ardently beseeching the help of Our Lord, he felt his soul elevated to a very high prayer. The Divine Spirit poured into his soul abundant lights which dispersed the clouds of doubt. Never from that time did the brightness of his faith become dim.

These lights of the Holy Spirit, at the same time, illumined in his heart a fire of love for Jesus Crucified, together with a lively desire to immolate himself for the glory of His Sacred Name.

Sometimes God enkindles in the soul a thirst for immolation without manifesting to it at the beginning the nature of the sacrifice required. We see an example of this in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. The Seraphic Patriarch, St. Bonaventure relates, perceived in a vision a magnificent palace filled with sparkling swords stamped with the seal of the Cross, "Whose are these arms and whose this enchanting palace?" he asked. "They are for you and for your soldiers," a voice replied. As his mind was not yet capable of penetrating divine secrets and of raising itself from the contemplation of the visible things to the understanding of the invisible truth, he believed that he was called to fight under the standard of an earthly king. He made preparations to set out when the same heavenly voice made him understand that he was to fight under the standard of the King of Kings.

And so it seemed to Paul that God was asking of him a great sacrifice. He, too, felt that he was called to fight for His Lord, But when, where, how? He did not know.

Whilst absorbed in these reflections, he learnt that the Republic of Venice was making preparations to fight against the Turkish army by sending a formidable army across to Europe. The Vatican had also spoken, a powerful voice which has often aroused the world and saved Europe from the barbarian Ottoman. Pope Clement XI had published

two Bulls, in which he invited Christian princes to form a League against the infernal enemy of civilization and of the Cross. The Holy Father, alarmed at the peril which threatened Christianity, was not content with merely giving money and equipping the vessels of the State with arms, but he pleaded with the faithful to appease the anger of God by penance and to beg the help of God by public prayer.

"This is without doubt," Paul said to himself, "the battle to which God is calling me. To fight for Jesus Christ; to be a martyr for the faith; to shed my blood for such a holy cause!" Such thoughts made his heart beat faster. Without delay he set out for Grema in Lombardy to enlist as a volunteer. Behold, Paul as a soldier! Trained in the ways of the army, ready to march against the enemy of the faith. In this new life the young soldier did not forget God. One day in prayer at a church in Crema (1716), Our Lord made him understand by one of his clear and certain inspirations that He was calling him to a higher and a holier army - the army of the apostles of the Gospel.

God had spoken; Paul delayed no longer. He asked and obtained an honorable discharge and returned to his own country.

On the way, at Novello, he received the hospitality of a childless couple. They were advanced in years, wealthy and renowned for the practice of Christian virtue. They soon discovered in this gentle and noble traveler a treasure of virtue hidden under the veil of his modesty. They were so delighted with him that they decided to adopt him and to leave to him all their wealth. When they spoke of their intention, Paul refused; he wished to have no earthly ties to withhold him from consecrating himself to the service of God.

On returning to his family, the ex-soldier resumed his spiritual exercises and awaited the hour when God should manifest to him his special vocation.

Paul knew that obedience is the surest way to fulfill God's designs. That is the reason, after having made a general confession of his life, he placed himself entirely under the direction of his parish priest.

This priest, amazed at the strange path through which the soul of his penitent was passing and wishing to discern what principles animated his actions, subjected him to a most severe trial. The inventive mind of this priest was always finding new ways to humiliate and mortify Paul. When Paul went to the sacristy to make his confession, the stern director sent him away, telling him to make his confession in the church. He left him sitting there for hours. Although Paul was the first to arrive, the priest would only hear his confession after the others had been heard. What a welcome he would give him. "Well, are you going to begin?" he would say to him sharply. When the humble penitent accused himself of those imperfections, the inevitable dust which settles on the holiest of souls, the director scolded him as though he had been guilty of the gravest sins. Another time, we must admit, this director, naturally austere and hard, exceeded the limits of discretion. He went so far as to send Paul away from the altar rails, refusing to give him Holy Communion, treating him as though he were a public sinner. He chose

this occasion to humiliate Paul when there were a great number of people in the church. It was more than a mere humiliation for the Saint. It was a deep wound to his love for the Eucharistic Jesus. However, he resigned himself to this mortification in silence, immolating to the love of God his burning desire to receive Him, without going to another church to receive Holy Communion.

Another time the Saint was praying in the choir of the church when he felt the delights of divine love so gladden his heart that he shed abundant tears. To conceal this heavenly favor, he covered his face with his cloak, but the implacable director ran up to him, snatched the cloak away with violence and contempt, saying, "Is this the way to carry on in the church?"

Naturally Paul was of a lively character, but very sensitive. But for the love of Jesus Crucified, he never refused to drink the bitter cup of humiliation. His natural inclination, and the suggestions of the devil, tempted him, "Leave this director and seek another." But Paul replied, "No, this confessor is good for me; he makes me bow my head."

At the time of the year when everyone abandoned themselves freely to the enticements of pleasure, Paul would go to the Church and pray before the Blessed Sacrament, offering his prayers in reparation for the many sins committed against God. One day he was passing a house where a family feast was being celebrated. His Parish Priest, seeing him, thought of an entirely new kind of trial. He called him into the house. With his usual severity he commanded him to take part in the dancing. Nothing was more contrary to the virtuous sentiments of Paul. What an unexpected penance. How could he fulfill it? How could he reconcile his vow of obedience with his natural repugnance to such a pleasure? But God Himself undertook to free him from this embarrassment. For just as he was about to obey as the orchestra sounded the first notes, the music suddenly stopped. All the strings of the instruments had snapped. The surprise was extreme. All clearly saw in this the Hand of God. The celebration soon ended. Paul was now at liberty to leave for the church. From this time the Parish Priest had no doubt that God had special designs upon this young man.

But a further trial awaited the servant of God, one that would reveal his complete detachment from all created things.

His Parents, as we have already said, though little favored with the gifts of fortune, had to rear a large family. Their hopes rested on Paul, whose filial piety had always proved itself by his unbounded devotion.

One of his uncles, a priest, Christopher Danei, wished to help the family, if not by restoring it to its former affluence, at least that they might enjoy a modicum of comfort. And with this in mind he arranged, with the permission of the parents concerned, a marriage for Paul. The young lady chosen was rich in the goods of this world and adorned in soul with the splendor of Christian virtues. The success of this proposal seemed assured when the priest promised to leave all his property to his nephew Paul. All that now remained was to arrange an interview at which Paul would agree to the arrangements. But the Saint, who had given himself unreservedly to God, refused these

attractive offers that he might keep the affections of his heart for God alone. In answer to the entreaties of his uncle, he replied with respect and reverence that he did not believe that these were God's designs.

But the priest, no doubt acting upon the idea prevalent at that time that the eldest child of a family is designed by Providence to carry on the family name, told Paul that it was essential for him to accept for the sake of his parents. This marriage would raise them from the poverty into which they had fallen. But Paul still refused. Then every member of the family joined their entreaties to those of the uncle. But Paul remained determined. The uncle attributed this refusal to the modesty of Paul and, exceeding his authority, both as an uncle and as a priest, bade his nephew to accompany him on a visit to the home of the young lady. A slave to his vow of obedience, Paul reluctantly followed. The example given by Saint Francis de Sales in a similar situation was repeated. The modest young man did not so much as even raise his eyes from the floor. They left without any decision being made. But in spite of this failure, the uncle was determined to triumph at any cost.

It was a cruel persecution for Paul. Contrary emotions surged within his heart. On the one hand his strong desire to answer the call of God and on the other his loyalty to his family. In this sorrowful perplexity he implored the help of heaven. God heard his prayer in an altogether unexpected way. His uncle fell ill and died, leaving to Paul all his property that the affair he had arranged might succeed. The rich heir, once again free, in the presence of the Vicar Forane, renounced generously this inheritance. He wanted nothing of these possessions except a remembrance of his uncle - a breviary. And turning to a Crucifix, his eyes filled with tears, he exclaimed, "O Jesus Crucified. I protest that of this inheritance I choose only the prayer book. You alone do I desire, O my God, my only Good."

The generosity shown by this incident proves that evangelical poverty was no less dear to him than purity of heart, and that he associated in a common esteem and equal love the two sacred texts of Scripture which promise a heavenly reward for the practice of poverty and purity. These were the two wings that raised him above the common realities of the things of earth and which were the powerful aids to arouse a greater zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

We have already seen how Paul, as a child, was a shining example to his young brothers and sisters of the virtues of the love of God, love of parents and love of his neighbor. We know that he would gather them each day in his room and read to them from some spiritual book, and that he used to inspire them above all with a tender devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ. Soon the holy, but restricted limits of his family, could not contain the apostolate of Paul. Wider fields were needed.

Hardly had he joined the Confraternity of which we have spoken than he was elected president. His pleasing manner and amiable virtue won for him the election, although he was only twenty-four. At the meetings one of the duties of the president was to give a spiritual exhortation to the other members. Paul did this so well and spoke with such grace and sincerity that his words penetrated all hearts. His fame soon spread, and

soon the whole town wanted to listen to his words. Every Sunday he explained the catechism to the children.

The success of these first efforts afforded a wider scope for his zeal. Paul used his influence to form a young men's association, the members of which possessed a desire for solitude and prayer. Occasionally, they would go for a walk into the country. His friendly talks and animated conversation inspired them to despise the things of the world and to love virtue. Some of them, according to the testimony of our Saint, practiced virtue in a heroic degree.

He taught them how to meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ and directed them along the sure and speedy way of perfection. Eight of them joined the Servites of Mary, some entered the Augustinians and others became Franciscans.

Our Saint was also solicitous for the poor and the sick. To obtain for them prompt and regular attention, he organized an active group of charity workers in which he enrolled his youthful companions. He aroused their zeal both by word and by example. He could often be seen offering alms to suffering members of Jesus Christ and on his knees before them in an attitude of profound veneration. If they were seriously ill, he never left their sides. Day and night he watched over them, caring for the needs of soul as well as those of the body. When death called them, the charity of Paul offered them a last and precious alms - his prayers. He then accompanied them to their last resting place. Infectious corpses, which few would volunteer to touch, Paul was the first, like Tobias of old, to place upon his own shoulders. His heroic example inspired his friends to imitate him. Looking into the grave, he read there, as in an open book, the nothingness of the things of the earth. One day his reflections on the vanity of the world made such an impression on one of his companions that he hastened to embrace the Cross of Jesus Christ in the austere life of the cloister.

Paul was not content merely to encourage in the Catholic youth a zeal for acts of charity and the practice of piety, but he resolved to banish the scandals which young libertines were giving. This was not easy. But the grace of God brought success to the zealous efforts of His servant. God gave him the power to read consciences and even to search into the depths of hearts. If he came into contact with a sinner, a strange odor revealed to Paul the state of that person's soul. He would say secretly but with complete assurance, "My brother, you have committed such and such a sin; you must go to confession." Astonishment and shame seized the culprit who knew that only God could have revealed the secret. But Paul, with all the sweetness of his charity, would encourage him, teach him the dispositions necessary for making a good confession, recommend a kindly confessor, so that the sinner might wash away in the Blood of the Lamb his horrible stain of sin.

Those who responded to the voice of the Saint received abundant graces from God. Those who rejected his advice were often punished in an extraordinary way. Paul foretold, with the certitude of a prophet, that the wrath of God would descend upon them. One young man, named Damian Tarpone, was a scandal to the inhabitants of Castellazzo. Paul gently advised him to mend his ways. "Take care, my friend," he told

him. "If you continue in your sinning, you will most certainly die a miserable death." The young man completely disregarded the warning. Some months afterwards, in a field near the banks of the river Bornida, his body was found gashed with dagger wounds; he had been murdered during one of his nightly escapades.

A father who grieved over the misconduct of his son begged Paul to lead him back to the path of goodness. Our Saint spoke to the young man with a tender charity, telling him to ask his father's pardon. "Me! Ask pardon of my father!" He exclaimed, "Never?" "You refuse to ask pardon of your father?" asked Paul. "Very well then, in a short time you will die." A few days later, although the young man had been strong and healthy, the words of Paul were fulfilled. The unfortunate lad was dead.

Having prophesied with certainty divine chastisement, Paul was looked upon by all as a saint. Wherever he appeared, all were filled with that fear and reverence which gives such power to men of God.

Some surprising reforms were accomplished: conversations possessed a character of decency and refinement that was lacking before. Other deplorable abuses, which priests had condemned in vain, entirely ceased.

Paul was told one day that two foreigners in the town were without food and shelter. They were French women, poor in body and degraded in soul; they were not Catholics. Paul's zeal and charity was immediately aroused. He begged his parents, for the love of Jesus Christ, to afford them kindness and hospitality. Leading back to God these abandoned souls, bringing back lost sheep into the fold of the Church was a work to which he could not be indifferent. He converted one of them and assured her of the grace of perseverance. He found a place for her in the convent of Saint Martha at Alessandria.

Such were the beginnings of Paul's apostolate. He was then in his twenty-fifth year.

What virtues already acquired! What charitable works already revealed! These first years, the first flowering of the soul, were sweet memories that never left him.

What a high regard we must have for the holiness of Saint Paul of the Cross even from his youth. Yet, we will see him in his old age, when he had climbed the mount of perfection, the summit of the Cross, regret that his last years lacked the zeal and the intensity of the days of his youth.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEW SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS - GOD PREPARES HIM FOR THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE PASSION - TRIALS - SERIOUS ILLNESS

1719 - 1720

Paul's director was, we have already seen, his Parish Priest, This director, discovering in this saintly young man extraordinary graces which are always the sign of God's special designs upon His chosen souls, wisely believed that the direction of Paul should be entrusted to other priests more experienced in the ways of perfection than himself. Divine Providence thus guided Paul to Father Jerome of Tortone, a holy Capuchin in the monastery at Castellazzo.

The new director possessed a supernatural wisdom which no natural quality can replace. He soon recognized our Saint as one of those great souls that God predestines to attain the heights of sanctity. He undertook, therefore, to guide him along the pathway of perfection. His first step in fostering Paul's burning desire to remain always united to Jesus Christ was to give him permission to receive Holy Communion daily. Happy in having found such a wise director, Paul offered fervent thanks to God and abandoned himself with greater fervor to serve Him. To avoid the esteem and the praise of men, he would receive Holy Communion and spend his hours of prayer sometimes in one church, sometimes in another. The most solitary used to attract his modest piety. Henceforth, free from all obstacles, 'docile' to secret lights of grace, he quickly advanced to the highest degree of divine contemplation. This amazing progress astonished Father Jerome, who, suspicious of his own 'lights' and fearing that he might prove an obstacle to the work of the Holy Spirit, sent Paul to consult a servant of God as renowned for his holiness of life as for his zealous apostolic works and a rare gift in the direction of souls - Father Columban of Genoa, also a Capuchin, of the monastery of Ovada.

The road was long, for Ovada was 20 miles from Castellazzo. Paul, in obedience to his director, went there often and always on foot. He felt himself, it is true, secretly attracted to Father Columban because of the divine inspirations he received and his kindly words of encouragement.

It was the beginning of the year 1718 before God began to reveal to Paul the nature of the work of which he would be the Founder.

God infused into his soul a certain attraction for the sacrifices He had prepared for him. An attraction, vague and indefinite at first, began to influence him, an attraction that became more clearly defined as time passed. It could be called a kind of initiation directed by God who leads the soul to its goal with an infinite sweetness. We do not pass from the darkness of night into the brightness of day, but into the dawn at first; then dawn prepares the eye for the splendor of day. O the wondrous divine action on souls! This attraction, understood as coming from God, enables a Director, enlightened on the mysterious workings of grace, to recognize a call from on high. When a vocation

begins to appear, a good director is essential to a soul; otherwise, the soul would easily be misguided through the director failing to recognize the workings of God,

Our Saint revealed to Father Columban his first 'lights' regarding the new Congregation to be founded. At one time it would be a burning desire, a distinct taste for solitude, another time a secret inspiration to gather companions; at another, a living desire to go barefooted and clothed in a poor habit. To all this, the wise director listened attentively, examined everything with diligence and prudently judged that these lights really came from heaven. But let the Saint tell us himself how God was leading him little by little in the way of his vocation in a truly marvelous manner. These inspired pages, which were written under obedience to his confessor and which reveal the inspirations of heaven, radiate a charm which we desire the reader to enjoy.

"May the Name of Jesus be blessed! I, Paul Francis, a poor and unworthy sinner, and the least of the servants of the 'Poor of Jesus', about two years after the infinite goodness of God had called me to repentance, one evening when I was passing the river of Genoa, I noticed a peaceful little church, situated on a mountain above Sestri, called Holy Madonna of Gazzo. At the sight of this, I felt a keen desire to live in this solitude. I told my spiritual father about it. I was not certain of what God willed me to do. That is why I thought of another thing, to relieve myself of family ties, that I might be able afterwards to take myself away."

"But the Sovereign Good, who in his infinite goodness had other plans for this wretched worm of the earth, did not permit that I should be free at that time. When I was about to entirely withdraw myself from family and friends, He arranged new difficulties; their only affect was to intensify my desires. Sometimes the thought came to me, also, to gather together companions to live in community and to instill in souls the fear of God. That was my most burning desire, but as for the plan to bring together friends, I had little hope; nevertheless, it remained fixed in the bottom of my heart."

These first lights gave Paul only an outline of the holy work. He redoubled his prayers and mortifications and begged God for still more bright lights that He might with certainty recognize His most holy will. It was not very long before the signs from heaven became more frequent and more clearly defined.

At times the Lord spoke to him by an interior voice, making him understand that the work He was assigning to him was great, difficult and to be accompanied by intense suffering. At other times He would draw Paul to Him in a rapture of ecstasy. "Soon you will see Me," He told him, "and what great things you must suffer for My Name." One day, when he was praying fervently before the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lord said to him, "My Son, he who approaches Me approaches thorns."

Let us listen again to the words of the Saint, "While at prayer, I saw God with a scourge in His hands; it had cords like a discipline. On it was written the one word, 'Love'. At the same moment, Our Lord raised me to a very high degree of contemplation. My soul understood that God wished to scourge it, but with the scourge of love. I flew to embrace and to kiss it. Every time that God has favored me with this vision soon there

came to me a very 'sensible' tribulation. I was certain that this would happen because God was granting me the gift of wisdom."

Paul was to be himself an apostle and to form other apostles; he was called to a most difficult life, to be a martyr of the apostolate. If he wished to communicate a boundless devotion in sacrifice, to embrace sacrifice with an untiring zeal, an ardor which would astonish the people, two things were necessary: to understand perfectly the infinite mercy and the infinite justice of God. Mercy - Paul understood through the revelations of the Passion of Jesus; Justice - Paul would understand by experiencing the weight of God's hand of justice.

This vision of love, which we have just related, was followed by another, still more terrifying, the vision of hell. It is attested in the Processes of Canonization. Our Saint endured only for an instant the horrible pains of the damned. An injury to his leg kept him in bed. Suddenly, his expression became one of agitation and concern, the loss of the use of his senses, and loud cries burst from his breast - it sounded like a jumbled mass of scoffing words and cries of bitter despair. His brother John Baptist and his sister Teresa came running to arouse and to quiet him, and were themselves overcome with fear. When little by little Paul regained the control of himself, with an expression of terror still depicted on his face, he said, "No. Never will I tell what I have seen." He called his confessor, Father Jerome, and talked with him for a long time. His sister Teresa, moved by curiosity, could not resist listening at the keyhole and heard him cry out, "Oh! Father Jerome, what a long eternity."

Later, the Saint himself confided to a person that at this time he had been transported in spirit by the angels into hell and, there, in fear and trembling with terror, he had seen the everlasting punishment of the damned.

When one has felt the eternalness of hell and the everlastingness of Calvary, one has learnt all: sin and its malice, the soul and its rewards, God and His justice and mercy. From this moment is molded the apostle of the Passion. He will henceforth labor unceasingly that souls might be cleansed in the life-giving Blood of Jesus Christ and delivered from the chastisement which he himself has seen.

But at the very moment when this extraordinary manifestation of God made the presence of his two enlightened directors really necessary, they were suddenly taken away from him. Fathers Jerome and Columban, following the Chapter elections of the Province, were moved to other monasteries. To have a regular director from whom to draw spiritual guidance, Paul placed himself under the direction of the Canon Penitentiary of the cathedral of Alessandria, Don Polycarp Cerruti, a doctor of theology and Canon Law. This is what our Saint said about him later in one of his letters, "I inform you that two priests have joined us. Moreover, four subjects have been sent to me from Lombardy by my old confessor, who is a Canon Penitentiary of the cathedral of Alessandria and who guided my poor soul while I was still in the world. He has tried them, and I am well able to trust myself to the recommendations of this servant of God; he is a man of wide experience and very learned."

Paul revealed to his new director an exact account of his soul. Hearing these revelations of a world quite new to him, this priest, full of wisdom, and it may be that he feared deception or it may be that he wished to lead his penitent on a sure path of humility, appeared not to do anything. He even treated Paul with great severity. He would only hear his confession after all the others, making him wait the whole morning. The holy young man had come fasting, walking a distance of four miles. When Paul told him of his lofty aspirations and his holy desires, instead of advising him and guiding him through these uncertainties of soul, he rebuked Paul and condemned everything as the imaginings of a delirious mind.

The reader must have noticed already that Paul's usual subject of meditation was the Love of God and especially the Passion of Christ, in which shines forth most brilliantly the flame of love. In prayer, raising himself at the beginning to the goodness of God, his thoughts would remain fixed there, just as the eagle looks upon the brightness of the sun; sublime contemplation, where the burning flames of his love found sweet repose. But the Penitentiary seemed to want to guide Paul in a way altogether different from that along which God was leading him and which both Fathers Jerome and Columban had approved. He accused him of presumption and commanded him for the future to meditate on sin, death, judgment, hell, heaven or any other subject suitable for beginners in the purgative way. What a difficult trial for a soul which God had already raised to a high contemplation. But Paul submitted with all the simplicity of a child; sustained by solid virtue and overcoming his natural repugnance, he gained the victory over himself.

He began to meditate on sin. "Consider, my soul," he asked himself, "what sin is, the offence it gives to God, etc." But Our Lord, who takes delight in docile souls and souls who are really dead to themselves, rewarded him for his obedience. He enlightened him interiorly, filled him with heavenly favors, suspended the operations of his understanding and drew him to Himself with a sweetness and with an irresistible force. By a rapid flight of soul, Paul mounted to the highest regions of faith.

But how can we adequately relate his martyrdom of soul? On the one side he wished to follow in the path mapped out for him by his director; on the other side God was leading him invincibly along higher paths. This was a painful struggle, which only increased the torments of his love. The wound was too deep; nature yielded to it. Paul became seriously ill and was in danger of death. But Our Lord wished to deliver him, and so he gradually regained his strength and vigor.

During the raptures which he experienced in prayer, God continued to reveal to him, but only indistinctly, the future Congregation of the Passion. In a vision that Paul saw, God showed to him a tunic, black in color, and repeated to him interiorly, "My son, he who embraces Me, embraces thorns." This was, so it seemed to Paul, a gentle invitation to fulfill the desire which he had been thinking of for some time, that is, to go and spend his life in silence, penance and solitude. But the direction which had been placed upon him did not afford any solution, and he lived always in painful uncertainty until God should favor him with a signal manifestation.

Obedient as always, he continued to meditate on the last end of man. When his thoughts were about heaven, more than ever he felt himself enraptured in God. He heard these words of Our Lord clearly in the interior depths of his soul, "My son, in heaven the blessed will not be united to me as a friend is united to friend, but as a piece of iron is totally and completely penetrated by fire." At the same time, through the divine light, illuminating his soul and elevating his understanding, Paul had a very deep knowledge of the manner in which the blessed are transformed in God. He saw God in the light of God and loved Him with all the fire of charity that God communicated to him with the splendor of his glory. He also heard words concerning the mystery of the glorification of the blessed, sublime things that human words are powerless to express,

We can without difficulty explain for ourselves the motives of this heavenly vision.

Were not Paul and the Congregation to have as their special mission the preaching of Christ Crucified? God then, wishing to show the theme of Calvary as the only way to the glory of heaven, was pleased to make the same revelation to Paul of the Cross as he made to the great apostle of the Gentiles, who gloried in naught but the Cross of Jesus Christ, preached it eloquently to both Jews and Gentiles, and was raised by the Lord into heaven, where he heard secret words which it is not given to man to speak (II Cor.12:4).

CHAPTER FIVE

BISHOP FRANCIS MARY DE GATTINARA - THE BLESSED VIRGIN APPEARS IN THE HABIT OF THE NEW INSTITUTE - PAUL RECEIVES THE HABIT FROM THE BISHOP

January 1720 - November 1720

The Penitentiary, “this learned servant of God,” as Paul called him in the letter which we have already mentioned, at last recognized in the humility and the constancy of his penitent a generous soul, and conceived such a high esteem for him that he even went so far as to look upon him as a saint who would one day be raised to the honors of the altar.

The signs of heaven were so manifest that he could not doubt that God was calling Paul to found a new Institute. He must, then, consider the wisdom of putting him in touch with the only competent authority on the matter. He must discuss this young man with the Bishop. It seems probable that the latter had heard of Paul, this holy young man whose virtues spread the good odor of Jesus Christ, not only at Castellazzo, but also in the neighboring districts and even at Alessandria, for everywhere people were speaking of the sanctity of his life as something quite extraordinary.

Before continuing with our narrative, we must pay a tribute of gratitude to the learned and holy Bishop who was chosen by God to lay the foundation stone of the Congregation of the Passion. Monsignor Francis Mary de Gattinara, of a noble family, was born at Pavia in 1658. He was one of those rare men whom God gives to the world for the good of souls.

Of lofty intelligence, noble and generous in heart, he trod underfoot the vanities of the world and the delights of the paternal home, and consecrated himself at the age of sixteen to the service of God in the well-known Congregation of Clerics Regular of Saint Paul, called the Barnabites. Diligent study and holiness of life made of him a zealous worker of the Gospel. He possessed all the qualities of a great Christian orator, and, above all else, he had a consuming love for souls. In him one did not see any other desire than that of winning them for God. His zeal, in spite of himself, was often revealed in tears. This eloquence of the heart appealed to the heart and would conquer the most hardened sinner. All his sermons were accompanied by so abundant tears that they used to say in the manner of a proverb, “Why does Father Gattinara shed so many tears in the pulpit? Is it perspiration or tears?” As a reward for his zeal and virtue, or rather for the greater advantage of the Church, Pope Clement XI in 1706 named him Bishop of Alessandria, and Pope Benedict XIII in 1727 transferred him to the See of Turin.

This elevation only served to reveal and to render more glorious the virtues of this holy Prelate. “Greatness,” says Bossuet, “far from weakening goodness, serves only to give it opportunities for expansion as a public fountain is erected that its beauty may be admired by men.” A true model of the Good Shepherd, his first care was for his priests, the most precious portion of his flock. He never ceased to animate them with the priestly

spirit by his words and still more by the example of his own saintly life. To the work of the sanctification and the salvation of the souls of his priests, he devoted much time and zeal. Father of the poor, he disposed of his possessions that he might alleviate their distress and encourage them to bear with patience the burden of daily life and thus become nearer to Almighty God. When all these were gone, his love for them forced him to complain that he had not more to give. It is impossible to relate all the treasures of consolation that he poured into the hearts of the unfortunate. But even that was not sufficient. Like his Divine Master he went to the limit of charity and gave his life for his flock. The year of 1743 was a year of terrible war, followed as so often happens by pestilence and famine. The Bishop understood that this was the hour for the supreme sacrifice. Imitating the example of Charles Borromeo of Belzuince and all the other great servants of God towards suffering humanity, he offered himself as a holocaust for the deliverance of his people.

He ordered a solemn procession of penance, in which he desired to assist despite his advanced years. On returning to the cathedral, he spoke to the distressed flock with all the tenderness of a father. At the conclusion he raised his eyes to heaven and pleaded that if divine justice was not yet satisfied, its wrath might fall upon the shepherd that the sheep of the flock might be spared. God was ready to accept the victim. While the Bishop was still speaking, he felt himself attacked by the pain that would consummate his sacrifice. A few days had scarcely passed before the holy prelate received from the hands of God the crown which his heroic charity had merited. Such then was the illustrious Bishop, destined in the plan of God, to clothe Paul in the humble tunic of a Passionist.

The pious youth submitted wholeheartedly to the Bishop, as to God Himself and made a general confession to him and confided to him all the lights which he had received from God. The prudent Bishop, after listening with rapt attention to all, commanded Paul to place in writing the innumerable communications that God had given him. When Paul presented this intimate manifestation of his soul, the Prelate easily recognized in it the divine seal; he was much moved by it and, bathing these mystic pages with tears, exclaimed, "Here indeed is the Father of Lights."

What was then the nature of these heavenly secrets which made the pious director weep with emotion? Paul tells us himself:

"Last summer - 1720 - I neither remember the month nor the day, not having noted it. I only know that it was harvest time, last summer, I say, on a day of the week on which I had just received Holy Communion in the church of the Capuchins at Castellazzo. I was deeply recollected. I left the church to go home to my family, and as I was walking along the street my spirit of recollection was as deep as though I was still at prayer. When I was near the house, I was raised up in God; my contemplation became even deeper; all the faculties of my soul were plunged into the Sovereign Good while all created things disappeared from my thoughts; and my interior was filled with heavenly sweetness. Suddenly, I saw myself clothed in a tunic; a white cross on the breast; under the cross also in letters of white, the Holy Name of Jesus. At this sight, at these words, the sweet emotion of my soul overflowed into streams of tears. A little later, still raised in God, I saw that someone was presenting this holy tunic to me, adorned with the Holy Name of

Jesus, the white cross; this tunic was black. I embraced it with ecstatic joy. When it was presented to me, I did not see any corporeal form, but I saw it in God; the soul really knows that it is God who is acting, because He Himself makes it understand by interior movements and by the lights which He poured into the soul, in a manner so sublime, that words are inadequate to explain it. What the soul then hears is something so exalted that it neither knows how to express it or to write about it. To understand it better, I will say that it is a kind of spiritual vision as God, in His goodness, deigned to give me several times when He wished to send me some particular trial.”

Truly, this young man, still in the world, is already speaking the language of Teresa and John of the Cross; one recognizes in it the same Master.

The Saint continues, “After the vision of the holy tunic and of the sacred sign, God gave me a desire, an increasing attraction to gather companions and to found, with the approbation of the Holy See, a Congregation which would have for its title: “the Poor of Jesus”. After this, God imprinted in my mind the form of the Holy Rule which was to be observed by the Poor of Jesus and by myself, His lowest and most unworthy servant.”

One day while in prayer, Paul saw the Blessed Virgin, who held in her hand the holy habit, as he had seen it before, only in addition to the word ‘Jesus’ were these two words: XPI PASSIO. Then suddenly he saw himself clothed in the self-same habit. By this he understood that the great work to which God was calling him must be carried out under the patronage and the powerful protection of the Blessed Virgin.

These marvelous visions present such a character of truthfulness that a mind, however little versed in the things of God, must recognize at first glance the workings of the hand of God. Nevertheless, to prove the truth of what we have related about our Saint, let us say a word on the nature and the effects of these visions.

“If in the blackness of the dark night,” says Saint John of the Cross, “a brilliant light shines through, immediately you see, clear and distinct, the objects that were hidden from you in the thick pall of darkness; then, this light disappears, and you find yourself in the darkness as before; but in your memory remains deeply engraved the objects you have seen.” That is what occurred during these heavenly visions. Always hidden in the secret darkness of faith, the divine sun of the intelligence, which is Truth Itself, makes the soul feel by a living light that it is in Him, or, as our Saint says, in “the immense”; and at that moment He discloses to it all the things that He wishes to reveal to it. These things remain imprinted on the soul with such certainty that it is impossible to doubt, even after that divine light has been withdrawn. In speaking of his visions, Paul said, “What I see in my mind, I hold by the sublime light of faith, more certain of it as if I had seen it with the eyes of the body.”

He has given the reason that his eyes can be deceived by some illusion, while in these visions, as God had made him understand by infused knowledge, all error is impossible. For we shall add with St. Augustine, it is the unchangeable Truth Who, in an ineffable way, enlightens the understanding (Lib. XVI. De Civitate Dei, C. 6.). Every time, when the disappearance of this light has left a man in darkness, that is to say, with all the weaknesses of his human nature, he is able to experience repugnance and

discouragement, which are caused by the greatness and by the difficult of the enterprise, or by the deep realization of his own nothingness; also, he is subject to perplexity to doubts; no, not concerning the authenticity of these divine revelations, but as to the interpretation to be given them, on the most opportune time to carry them out, and finally by the fear that his own unworthiness might prove an obstacle to the works of God.

Now, such was the state of mind of Paul after the vision which we have just described. The Bishop, to whom Paul had given a faithful account, was examining everything, but with discretion and reserve, which maturity of judgment demanded. It is because of this that Paul still remained irresolute, restless, undecided, and sometimes he even considered the idea of consecrating himself to God in an Order approved by the Church.

One day, when he had retired into the country and was walking along a lonely road more than ever disturbed by such a thought, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him. She was clothed in the black tunic; the white sign on a black background on her breasts. The sign had the form of a heart surmounted by a cross, and in the midst of this were traced the nails of the crucifixion, the instruments of the Passion

(The Inscription is Greek-Latin: *JESU XPI PASSIO*, The Passion of Jesus Christ. XPI, Greek monogram of the Name of Christ, comprising three capital letters: 'X' is our 'CH'; 'P' is our 'R'; the symbol above indicates an abbreviate word.)



Mary, bearing upon her face the imprint of sorrow, which she had without doubt on Calvary, addressed these words to Paul, "My child! You see how I am clothed in mourning. It is because of the sorrowful Passion of my beloved Son, Jesus. You are to found a congregation in which all the members will cloth themselves in black and morn continually for the Passion and Death of my dear Son." Then Blessed Mother vanished.

This vision left in the heart of the Saint such an impression of love and good will, that, years after, he was still moved by the remembrance of it and could not prevent himself from crying out, "Oh! What beauty! What beauty!"

From this time doubts disappeared from Paul's mind; now he clearly saw the purpose of God's directions towards himself. At the same time he understood the angelic purity that should distinguish those who would one day be clothed with the holy habit which the Immaculate Virgin had consecrated by being herself the first one to wear it.

That all these visions and revelations came from God, the Bishop had no doubt. Not content with imploring for himself the lights from the Heavenly Father, he wished to consult the masters of the science of the saints, particularly Father Columban of Genoa, for whom he had the highest regard. The latter then lived at the monastery of Portedecimo, not far from Genoa. We have already seen that this Father approved of the spirit of Paul, whom, in Jesus Christ, he loved as a son. Seeing in all these marvels the finger of the Holy Spirit, he hastened to assure the worthy Bishop, with prayers, to clothe at once in the holy habit of the Passion this chosen one of the Lord.

We have a letter from this religious, written to the Prelate on the 25th November, 1720.

After having mentioned by the way that Paul had passed through all the degrees of prayer and was endowed with the gift of prophecy, he continued, "Through your most illustrious Lordship, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation had deigned to console my poor heart. I have spared no pains to lead souls to perfection, but, today – infinite thanks to the divine goodness - I see with great joy how easy it is for God to enrich suddenly the poor; for today, Paul Francis has been clothed - so I think - in the holy habit. I thank your most illustrious Lordship for this blessing most sincerely and humbly..."

This great director of souls, then, recognized that Paul's Master in the spiritual life was none other than the Holy Spirit Himself.

The will of God manifested itself with too much *éclat* for the Bishop to hinder in any way its accomplishment. He also ordered our Saint to prepare himself to receive the habit of the Passion, similar in design and color to the one revealed to him by Our Lord and His Most Holy Mother. What can we say of Paul's happiness at these tidings? Nevertheless, this was only a momentary burst of joy. Was not his vocation to become an image of Jesus Crucified?

For thirty-three years the Divine Savior had desired to drink of the bitter chalice which His Father had prepared for Him, but on the eve of the great sacrifice, His soul was troubled and sad. He felt Himself subjected to all the repugnancies of human nature. Paul had also ardently longed for the day when he, too, would immolate himself for God and for souls in union with the Victim of Calvary. But when that hour came, he, too, experienced nothing but sadness, weariness, dejection and distress. He has himself pictured in writing, years later, his interior combat. He wrote of his own struggles to a young man whom he was directing in order to encourage him to follow his religious vocation.

"You will be happy, my dear friend," he told him, "only if you are faithful in fighting and in conquering, not allowing yourself to pay attention to the natural feelings of the heart, but to look intently on the face of Jesus Crucified who, by a special favor, calls you to follow Him. Behold, He is the One who holds the place of father and mother, and all things. Oh! If you only knew the assaults which I had to endure before embracing the Passionist life, the extreme repugnance which the devil aroused within me, the tender affection towards my parents, who had placed all their hopes in me. Interior desolation, sadness, fear, all told me that I could not bear it. The devil put into my mind that I was the victim of delusion, that I could serve God in another and far better way, that I was not suited for this life, and many other things that I pass over in silence.

"What was the most painful of all was that I had lost all feeling of devotion. I was arid, tempted in every way, even the sound of ringing bells made me writhe; everyone appeared to be happy except myself. To conclude, it is impossible for me to explain all these terrible struggles. I was especially assailed when I was preparing myself to receive the habit and to leave the poor home of my parents. All this is the truth; but there are many other things which I do not know how, neither can I explain them. Courage, then, my friend; the Lord will give the victor a hidden manna and a new name."

The courage, which he desired to inspire in this young man, Paul himself had found in his constant fidelity to grace. It was in this way that he remained always united to the Divine Redeemer. It was thus that he had triumphed over all the assaults and had found the secret of his victory and was thus able to accomplish the sacrifice with intense joy.

The saintly Bishop became the first benefactor of Paul, the first of the Poor of Jesus Christ. Through the charity of the Bishop, Paul bought some heavy, rough cloth and dyed it black. He had desired to vow himself to God on the same day as Our Blessed Lady was consecrated to God in the Temple. But as the Feast of the Presentation fell on a Thursday that year, he decided to make the offering of himself on Friday, the day most appropriate for the work to which he felt himself called. Mary's Feast served him as a preparation.

He received Holy Communion with great fervor in the morning, visited all the churches of Castellazzo, then he cut his hair as a sign of his renouncing the world. In the evening, he presented himself to his family to say farewell to them. In humility he fell upon his knees, before his father and mother, brothers and sisters, weeping before him; he asked pardon for all his faults and, according to his own expression, for his bad example, then begged the blessing of his parents and their permission to consecrate himself entirely to Our Divine Lord. These Christian parents, worthy of the Patriarchs of old, resigned to the holy will of God, tenderly embraced this son, so dear to them, and with tears in their eyes, gave both their blessing and their consent.

Happy at having overcome the first and most difficult step, Paul recited the hymn of thanksgiving, the Te Deum. To implore the divine mercy he also recited the Miserere.

It is possible to remain unmoved at the sight of this intimate and touching family scene? The sublime struggle between nature and faith; but that in which faith triumphs, nature becomes sweeter and stronger. Doubtless, the sacrifice is heart rending on both sides, but for both parents and child the crown will be the more beautiful. Could we not say that these young heroes of the primitive faith, blessed by aged fathers, are setting out to win the palm of martyrdom? Jesus Christ Himself, according to a pious tradition, on the day before His sacrifice, kneeling at the feet of His Blessed Mother, sought her blessing and consent to go forth to the Cross. The savior of the world wished, by His example, to teach all Christian parents that in uniting themselves to the generous sacrifice of their children, they would one day partake of their eternal glory in the kingdom of heaven.

The next day Paul left for Alessandria. The cold was so severe that he greatly feared whether his physical strength was hardy enough to withstand the austerities of his new life. This was another attack of the infernal enemy. But the young lover of the Cross, redoubling his efforts, arousing his courage and placing all his confidence in God, continued along the way.

At Alessandria, he was informed that the Bishop had left for the country and would not be returning that day. But the servant of God replied that the Prelate would return. Indeed, he returned as Paul had foretold. When the latter saw Paul, he immediately made preparations himself for the ceremony which he carried out in his private chapel,

Kneeling before the altar, the Saint pressed to his heart the cross of the Master,

promising Him to live ever crucified to the world. The Bishop blessed the black habit of the Passion and, piously moved to tears, he clothed his spiritual son.

He would not permit him to wear the sacred sign on his breast; he judged it prudent to wait until the Holy See had given its approbation to the new Congregation. ‘

This event, which always marks an era in the history of a Religious Order, took place on Friday, 22nd November 1720, at the same time that Jesus Christ, dying on the Cross, offered His Blood as the price for the redemption of the world.

CHAPTER SIX

FORTY DAYS RETREAT - WRITING THE RULES OF THE INSTITUTE - APPROVAL OF THE RULES BY THE BISHOP

November 1720 - February 1721

As soon as the soul, generous and trusting, has, despite the struggles of its whole nature, surrendered itself completely in sacrifice, the tempter withdraws, the angels come near and God bestows upon it an abundance of grace and consolation.

Upon wearing the holy habit of the Passion, Paul felt completely renewed interiorly. He seemed clothed with “the new man.” Fear and darkness vanished; peace, joy and the light of heaven reigned within his soul; he desired nothing except to serve God by following in the steps of Jesus Crucified.

The Bishop ordered him to write the Rules of the Institute of the Passion, according to the idea that had remained with him after the visions, of which we have spoken, and to prepare himself for this great work by a retreat of forty days. Then, exhorting him to follow with constancy the new vocation upon which he had entered, he gave him his blessing. But the problem now arose, where should Paul live whilst fulfilling this command, this work upon which the future of the new Institute would depend? What place or rather what sanctuary offered sufficient scope for the operation of the Holy Spirit? He knew of a solitary place under the stairway behind the sacristy of the parish church of St. Charles. With the Bishop’s permission he went there to await, as in another Cenacle, the descent of the Holy Ghost.

The room was of a triangular shape on the ground floor, narrow, damp and comfortless; the rays of the sun never entered it. The small window gave but little light. (This venerated place was restored by Archpriest Gosti some years after the Saint’s death. After his Beatification an altar was erected, which remains even to this day.) The sufferings which resulted from these conditions were increased by the habit, or rather the hair shirt which the Saint wore. His head was bare and his feet did not have even the meager protection afforded by sandals. A few vine clippings, a handful of straw in a corner on the bare ground served for a bed, where fully clothed he took but a short and uncomfortable rest. At midnight, numb with the cold, he arose, for winter was severe in this mountainous country. He went to the church, recited Matins and Lauds, and spent two hours in prayer. In the morning he served the Masses and received Holy Communion. Several times during the day he took the discipline unto blood and spent long hours at prayer. For food he had only a piece of bread received as an alms and only water for drink.

It was by a life of similar austerities that Paul, like Benedict in the Grotto of Subiaco, like Ignatius in the cave of Manresa, separated from all contact with the world, prepared himself to receive from the hand of God a sacred code that would one day govern a new generation of apostles.

He must wait; this obscure corner was to be the arena of one of those interior dramas in

which heaven and hell, God and Satan, were to struggle for a soul. Who will lead us into this dreary cell that we might witness this heroic struggle? None but the young athlete himself. We have a precious document, a diary written by himself in obedience to the wishes of the Bishop, which reveals to us the diverse phases through which God was leading him. We will study it, and allow the Saint himself to tell us the story of those days.

During the long hours of prayer, he remained continually upon his knees. His body, tormented with the cold and weakened by fasting and vigils, cried out for some alleviation. But Paul, relentless with himself, persevered in prayer, resisting so vigorously the demands of the body that he trembled from head to foot until all his bones ached. This heroic fidelity was not without its reward. Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, Furnace of Love, Source of Light, made him taste the unspeakable joy of suffering and a gentle repose in the Sovereign Good during Holy Communion. Then he desired further sufferings. "The cold, the snow, the ice," he cried out, "seem to me treasures, and I desire them with great longing, saying to my beloved Jesus, 'Your sufferings, O God of my heart, are a pledge of your Love!' Then I remain rejoicing in Jesus with great sweetness and peace, without any movement of the powers of my recollected soul."

At other times the Eucharist inflamed his heart with a fire that consumed him with love. Often, this Bread of Life fortified and strengthened even his body. On such an occasion he would cry out, "O infinite mercy of our Sovereign Good! This marvel, according to the understanding that God has given me concerning it, comes from the great strength that this Bread of Angels communicates to the soul and which, as a consequence, is felt in the body."

Sometimes, however, his prayer was filled with importunate distractions; His soul, centered on God, was not disturbed in its tranquility, but nourished itself, according to his own expression, "with the holy food of divine love." This is how he explains it in his simplicity, "It is, so it appears to me, like a child in the arms of its mother. He keeps his lips to the breast; he drinks the milk; and all the while his hands, his feet, his head are continually moving, but he does not cease to drink the milk because his lips are still at the breast. It would be better if he remained quiet, yet he continues to take the milk. It is thus with the soul. The will is the mouth; it does not cease to drink the milk of holy love even though the memory and the intellect are agitated. It would certainly be much sweeter if they remained tranquil and united. I do not know how to explain it otherwise. Our Lord has not shown me any other way."

From these words that might have been written by St. Francis de Sales himself, we see that our Saint received the infused grace of an extraordinary prayer. For the degree of prayer of which he speaks is one of the most elevated and precedes that which is called by the masters of the spiritual life, "the inebriation of love." Paul gives us to understand that he passed through this and the other degrees of high contemplation, since he speaks of the faculties as being tranquil and united." Our Lord, at times, left him in a state of aridity and interior desolation; his soul then, so he says himself, felt as it were enslaved in impenetrable blackness. The evil spirit, renewing its attacks, tried his hardest to turn him from this holy project; he aroused him to impatience and anger. He

even suggested the most horrible blasphemies against the goodness of God. True, it was only like a breeze that passed over his mind, but still it broke his heart and tortured his soul. He called upon the name of Mary, his sweet Mother, and begged Our Lord to deliver him from these infernal suggestions.

From the other trials, aridity and sadness, he did not ask to be freed. He was even afraid of deliverance. Thus, he wrote to the Bishop, "When this sadness and these afflictions - I do not know how to describe them - come upon me, I feel plunged into an abyss of misery. I feel that I am the most miserable and the most desolate of men on earth, and yet my soul embraces them because it knows that such is the will of God and that these are the precious pearls of Jesus. I say, then, with St. Teresa, "To suffer or to die."

It was at this time that his brother John Baptist visited him; the brother was still desirous to be his companion in this new life. The Saint in his humility had such an esteem for him that he believed himself unworthy to have such a brother. In a spiritual conference with him, Paul revealed the secrets of his heart. But he gave no indication of his sufferings for fear he should be seeking the consolation of having a sympathizer. "Let us fear," he added, "to be deprived of our sufferings more than a miser fears the loss of his gold." He had learned well the value of suffering in the exercises of contemplation. "This is what God gave me to understand," he said to his director. "The soul that God wishes to draw to a very close union with Him through prayer must travel, even in prayer itself, the way of suffering; of suffering, I say, without sensible consolation. In a sense the soul no longer knows what it is; nevertheless, by a very high infused understanding it realizes that it is still in the arms of the Heavenly Spouse, nourished with the milk of his infinite Spouse. I still knew, yet in the secret depths of my soul when I was enduring some particular suffering, that God would give to the victor the hidden manna of which Sacred Scripture speaks. The hidden manna, that most sweet food of holy love by which the soul experiences deep repose with its sweet Spouse in prayer,"

It can be seen how God, by this passive prayer, endeavored to take possession of his soul.

The Saint adds, "I wish that the whole world could realize the great grace that God offers. When He sends sufferings, and especially suffering without consolation, then the soul is purified as gold in the crucible and becomes beautiful and pure. It flies to the Sovereign Good to be transformed happily into Him without even perceiving it." Speaking then of the difficulties the devil puts in the way of his contemplation of the divine perfections, he compares the soul to a rock in the middle of a raging sea.

Struck by the waves, the rock remains immovable, impervious to the water, and the storm, when it has abated, has only served to make it more beautiful and to have cleansed it from the stains that soiled it. "The devil," the Saint adds, "jealous of this sublime state of a soul in prayer, seeing it caught up in the powerful hands of God, seeks to trouble it somewhat by temptations, at other times by distractions, or by deceptions and insidious suggestions. He has no other purpose than to draw it away from God. These waves of thought can, for an instant, obscure the contemplation with which God has favored the soul, but the suffering of this struggle purifies it as the waves

of the sea, whipped by the storm, purify the rock.”

The more abundant the divine favors Our Lord bestowed upon Paul, the more unworthy he considered himself. One day during prayer, penetrated with a profound sentiment of humility, he formed the desire to be the last of men and the scourge of the earth. He begged Our Lord, through the intercession of His Blessed Mother, to give him the perfection of humility, beseeching Him with tears to be taught what was the degree of this virtue most pleasing in his eyes. Then, he heard in his heart the divine Voice which said, “When you cast yourself in spirit beneath the feet of every creature, even under the feet of the devils, then you are most pleasing to Me.”

From this time he had a deep understanding of the virtue of humility. Here is the lesson that he gives us about it, “I learnt that when you cast yourself into the depths of hell, under the feet of the devils, God raises you up to Paradise. Just as the devil wished to exalt himself above the heavens and was cast down into the depths of hell because of his pride, so the soul that lowers itself into this abyss makes Satan tremble and confounds him, and the soul is exalted by God to Paradise.” Thus, Paul acquired that lowly opinion of himself that we admire in the lives of those saints that God wishes to raise to sublime heights. Paul never ceased to regard himself as a bottomless abyss of iniquity and misery.

Thus, a superior light, dispersing in his soul the darkness of self-love and pride, disposed the Saint for divine union. The bond of this union in a soul which hides its life in God with Jesus Christ was especially the Crucified Humanity of the Eternal Lord. Jesus Crucified, the only object of Paul’s thoughts and affections, inspired in his heart an ardent desire for suffering even to the extent of sharing in an ineffable manner the torments endured by the Divine Master in His Sacred Passion.

“When I speak of Jesus and His torments, I say to Him, ‘Ah, my Sovereign Good, when You were scourged, what were the sentiments of Your Sacred Heart! O dear Spouse of my soul, how afflicted You must have been by the sight of my great sins and ingratitude. O my love, would that I could die for You! ...and then I sometimes feel that my mind can say no more. I seem fixed in God with the sufferings of Jesus communicated to soul. At other times I feel that my heart is breaking, that my soul is crushed...it remains thus languishing with great sweetness mingled with tears, penetrated with the sufferings of Jesus. Sometimes, too, it understands all that is passing within it and dwells in God with this contemplation of love and sorrow. All this is very difficult to explain and appears ever new...”

One morning after Communion, the hermit of St. Charles was tasting the delights of heavenly love when he was ravished out of himself; he was given to understand the unutterable happiness which, in the clear vision of God, proceeds from beatific love. What a divine torment was this revelation for a soul still in exile upon earth. Indeed, drawn by the irresistible beauty he had seen, Paul could no longer live here below; his life was naught but a martyrdom; his body felt as though it were a heavy chain that he wanted to break asunder so as to be united to God in an eternal embrace of love. No, the soul could not bear its exile unless God tempered the ardor of its love or at least gave it the universe that he might pour into it the waters that surrounded his heart.

What zeal animated Paul from this time. For a single soul he would willingly have sacrificed everything, even his life. What was his grief at seeing innumerable souls eternally lost because they have failed to benefit by the Blood of the Passion. Then came to his mind the great means of salvation that the apostolate finds in the association. To gather companions, to keep the same rule, to work together to save the souls that were in danger of being lost forever. This was his ambition. "He saw already a legion of apostolic men, whom to have as his spiritual sons he regarded himself as unworthy, and of whom he would be the servant; he saw them going forth from their solitude, appearing to the world as living images of Jesus Crucified and with the light of the divine word rendered more efficacious by their lives of heroic virtue, dispersing the darkness of error and tearing asunder the bonds of sin. He counted the sinners converted. He counted, too, the pure souls that would take their flight to Calvary to preserve their innocence under the shadow of the Cross.

Magnificent dreams of the apostle, which he wished to see realized as soon as possible. For this purpose he asked God with intense fervor and tears if it were His will that he would write the Rule of the Poor of Jesus.

On 28th November, the seventh day of his retreat, whilst praying after Holy Communion and beseeching the intercession of the blessed Virgin and all the saints, there suddenly burst upon him a brilliant light from the glory of the Lord. He saw heaven opened. He saw, prostrate before the throne of the divine Majesty, the Blessed Virgin, the angels, the Saints and especially the founders of the Orders, who all begged Our Lord to establish the Institute of the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ. This vision showed him the favorable acceptance given to him in prayer and assured the success of work in which all heaven was involved. He shed tears of joy and praised God, who for the glory of the Cross, deigned to use such a vile instrument, such a miserable sinner.

With confidence in God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, he began to write the Rules of the new Institute. Although he had never read the Rules of any other Order, he wrote with such rapidity and ease that it may be said that he wrote as though there was a voice dictating to him. We must not be astonished then, as we said in the Introduction, that they should possess both a just discernment and accomplished wisdom. Begun on the tenth day of the retreat, the Rules were completed on the fifteenth, and during that time He omitted none of his exercises of piety.

Having related those visions in which, as he himself says, he was inspired as to the form of the Rules, he spoke this of the Passion, the foundation and crown of the new Institute. "Ah, my dear brothers, the mere remembrance of Friday is sufficient to make those who are filled with true love die. Friday! Is this not the day on which the Incarnate Lord suffered for me, even to sacrifice His life on the infamous gibbet of the Cross. Also, know my brothers that the principal motive why we are clothed in black, according to the particular inspiration given to me by God, is to be in mourning for the Passion and Death of Jesus. Never let us fail, then, to have a continual and dolorous remembrance of the Passion. Let each of the Poor of Jesus endeavor always to teach everybody how to mediate upon Jesus..."

"I, Paul Francis, poor and miserable sinner, the most unworthy servant of the Poor of

Jesus, have written this Rule in the parish church of St. Charles at Castellazzo. This retreat had been assigned me by Most Rev. Mgr. de Gattinara, Bishop of Alessandria, on the day of my clothing. I began to write this Rule on 2nd December, 1720, and finished on the 7th of the same month. Before writing, I said Matins and made my mental prayer; then I arose confidently and began to write. The infernal enemy did not fail to assail me, suggesting repugnancies, raising difficulties. But since I had been inspired by God for a long time, and since I had received the command, I began the work with God's help. Let it be known that when I wrote I wrote as quickly as if someone was in a professor's chair dictating to me. Now, I have written these things that all may know that it was a particular inspiration from God. For of myself, I am only sin and ignorance. Moreover, I submit everything to the judgment of my superiors.

"May the Blessed Sacrament be praised and honored by all, on every altar in the world.

Paul Francis, unworthy servant of the Poor of Jesus."

The Rules were now written. The Saint continued his retreat, still filled alternately with suffering and joy. On December 26 he was at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, when, thinking of those who had the misfortune not to believe in the Real Presence. He brought to mind the countries where the so-called Reformation had banished the Catholic Faith. England especially came to his mind. On 29 December, during his meditation on the Passion, there came to him the vision of this island, formerly the land of the saints. He felt irresistibly drawn to pray in a special manner for this kingdom, for which he would shed his blood, begging God to disperse the darkness which embraced it and to make its former faith flourish once more. This fervent prayer for the conversion of England he continued throughout his life.

We will see later, during the course of this Life, how these first ideas of the Saint took on a more precise character and became illumined with more shining light.

On the last day of his retreat, 1 January, 1721, the Saint received a foretaste of that happiness destined for him as a reward for his love of Jesus Crucified. Whilst he possessed in his heart the God of the Eucharist and while the tears flowed copiously from his eyes, he was intimately united to the Sacred Humanity of the Word and penetrated, according to his own expression, "by a very high and sensible knowledge of the Divinity, as if his soul was absorbed in God." He understood and tasted "the marvels of sweetness beyond human words to express." Thus, plunged into the Infinite a thousand years of this happiness would have been for him but an instant.

Paul left his solitude, his soul glowing and transfigured. He hastened to place the Rules of the new Institute in the hands of his Bishop. The Prelate, admiring the operations of the Holy Spirit immediately approved them. But in such an important manner, he had to follow the dictates of prudence. He wanted the advice of the great servant of God whom we have already met, Father Columban, so skilled in discerning true inspirations. He had the Saint set out for Genoa; it was almost 40 miles away and the winter was a severe one. He would have to cross the Apennines, which at this time of the year, were covered with snow. The crossing was so slippery and dangerous that even the most daring would scarcely have dared to attempt it. It had happened that men have been

crushed under an avalanche or blown into crevices by the raging wind.

Animated by obedience and without hesitation, Paul set out. He walked through the ice and snow, bare-footed, bare-headed, and clothed only in a habit that afforded but little protection against the biting cold. To fulfill the Bishop's will the more promptly, he travelled, day and night, crossing over the rocks and precipices of the dangerous mountain. As well as the extreme cold there was also the danger from wolves; often he saw them prowling around him. His only safeguard against the dangers on every side was his Crucifix, which he carried at his breast. If in the morning at sunrise he felt some joy in his sufferings yet his fear increased as he watched large portions of ice break away on the top of the mountain and slide down slowly on to the path over which he had to walk. At last he reached the summit on the memorable night of the Epiphany, frozen by the cold, worn out with weariness, almost fainting from hunger.

But God never abandons those who trust in Him. The Saint met some policemen, and according to his custom asked for alms on bended knee. Seeing this poor youth almost dead from hunger and the cold, and in this humble posture before them, they had pity on him and helped him to restore his strength. Paul never forgot this kindness and ever after showed a special affection towards the police. On missions he gave every care towards the needs of their souls, repeating that they had helped him in an hour of need.

During the course of this journey through the populated districts, insults and mockeries were many. It was in the midst of continual attacks and unbelievable fatigue that he reached Genoa where he was to receive the most bitter sarcasm. To all these outrages Paul answered by acts of humility within the depths of his soul. He gained so much profit from opprobrium that he could say later, "I must admit that these mockeries and derisions did immense good to my soul."

But our pilgrim was at the height of his joy when he saw again his priestly friend, who was also delighted to meet again his son in Jesus Christ, now clothed in the habit of the Passion. What was Father Columban's opinion about the Rules? No document gives us any account. But we cannot doubt that this holy and learned Religious, who had done so much to help in founding the new Institute, saw in the Rules the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For, when Paul returned to Alessandria, they were fully approved by the Bishop.

Like this holy prelate, like this wise director of souls, are we not also astonished at the marvels of grace, love and perfection wrought in the hermit of St. Charles? Oh, how quickly a generous soul, completely abandoned into the hands of God, arrives at the heights of sanctity. Why does the youthful Paul appear to us already at this height? Is it not because he delivered himself wholly and entirely to Jesus Crucified and generously and heroically he threw himself into the bosom of the Divine Will?

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HERMITAGE OF THE TRINITY – THE HERMITAGE OF SAINT STEPHEN – FIRST COMPANIONS OF THE SAINT – BEGINNINGS OF THE APOSTOLATE

FEBRUARY – SEPTEMBER 1721

Solitude, the joy of which Paul had already experienced, continued to attract him. A tiny hermitage near a poor church, three miles from Castellazzo, was the first place where at the order of the Bishop, Paul took up his abode. There, cut off from all contact with the world, he spent almost a fortnight in deep contemplation and severe penances. From evidence brought forward at the Processes, it appears that later in this solitude, the devils appeared to him under the visible form of monstrous beasts. We shall see later on that during his life he saw many such apparitions. As they occur, we will only just mention them, keeping a full account of them for a special chapter in order to avoid repetition.

Paul was not destined by God to work solely for his own sanctification. He was to be a great apostolic worker. And yet he had not, it is true, the priestly character. But, in the history of the Church, we see how simple religious labored in the apostolate. Saint Anthony and the hermits of the Thebaid went to Alexandria in Egypt to fight the disciples of Arius; Saint Ephrem and Saint Francis of Assisi, even though deacons, preached with a saintly eloquence. Besides, the apostolate was one of the principal points in the Rule which Bishop de Gattinara had recently approved. The Bishop then realized God's designs on Paul and saw for himself the zeal of the new Religious. So that he might be available for the work of saving souls, he transferred him (on 25 January) to the church of Saint Stephen, quite near the town, and ordered him first to teach catechism to the children in the parish church of Saint Charles. Paul was so delighted with his new retreat that he wrote, thanking "his beloved father in Jesus Christ." "I can say nothing to your illustrious and vary reverend Lordship except that your charity has secured for me in this solitude a veritable paradise. Although your generosity seeks no reward, I am sure that the infinite goodness of our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, will reward you abundantly. A place more suitable, more sacred, more withdrawn from the noise of the world, I could not find without going into the desert. I am hoping that if I co-operate with the grace of God, in this solitude, He will speak to my heart..."

The first to come and share the austerities of his life was his brother John Baptist. To join the two recluses came a young man named Paul Sardi. Our Saint had a high regard for this recollected young man and admired his perseverance in prayer and his prolonged fasts, saying of him, "A saintly soul." The two postulants ardently desired to be clothed in the habit, and they prepared themselves for their clothing in this hermitage, which can be regarded as the cradle of the newly born Congregation. In this solitude these shining examples of virtue and perfection were molded.

They had for their use a narrow room; the only furnishings were a Crucifix, a discipline hanging on the wall and a mattress studded with rows of short tacks. As all these could not sleep in this small room, Paul Sardi used to return home each evening. John Baptist often remained with Paul; then who would sleep on the poor bed? The two brothers

could not agree; each wished the other to use it. Then to settle the argument, the two hermits, after praying for some time in the Church, would sleep on the bare floor in a kind of crypt under the high altar.

On the wall outside the hermitage, Paul hung a small basket bearing the words, "Alms for the Poor of Jesus." From these offerings he would only keep a little dry bread, which he ate but once a day with his companions; the rest he gave to the poor. This meager food seemed too rich; Paul thought of binding himself to an even more rigorous fast. He wrote to the venerable Bishop, ever his devoted confessor, about the matter. "I have been thinking of eating only once every two days, but for the time being I shall wait for a clearer inspiration from God; then, I will refer it to your illustrious Lordship so that, if you accede to my request, you may give it your blessing."

Often, when the day was far spent, our hermits had taken no food. On one of these days, their good father, Luca Danei, came to see them. Finding these admirable young men exhausted, pale and trembling with the cold, he asked them if they had had anything to eat. They were forced to admit that they had taken nothing as they had received no offerings from the people. Touched by their extreme poverty, he told them he intended to send them some food. They thanked him for his kindness, but begged him to leave them to Divine Providence. But using his authority as their father, he ordered them to obey him and to eat all that would be sent. Then he returned home and set about obtaining food, which he sent to them. On that day the Poor of Jesus enjoyed a sumptuous meal - the reward of fasting and obedience.

When the Saint left the hermitage, he was usually accompanied by one of his young companions. He would walk recollected with eyes cast down - angel of modesty. He greeted everyone that he met with the words, "May Jesus Christ be praised."

It happened that on the first evening Paul settled at Saint Stephen's, he told the Rector that the Bishop had ordered him to teach catechism to the children and that he intended to begin this work on the following Sunday. As it was then the season of worldly entertainment, the time did not seem opportune to the Rector. He said it would be better to wait until Lent, and then the children would come in greater numbers. Paul humbly accepted this advice, but while praying after his return to the hermitage, the voice of the Savior severely reproached him, telling the young apostle that he did not have time to delay the work of God. When Sunday came, Paul took his Crucifix and went through the streets of Castellazzo, ringing a bell and calling out, "Catechism in St. Charles Church!" At his call, they ran from all directions, not only the children, but men and women hastened to the church.

Paul devoted himself to this holy labor with a zealous ardor. All hearts were moved; instructions and very soon his little talks brought forth unhopd-for fruit. Such success made the Bishop's heart rejoice. Because of the great influence which his reputation for sanctity had given Paul, even in his own country, the wise Bishop did not fear for the good of souls to derogate from the usual custom in the Church. He ordered this Religious, who was not even a sub-deacon, to go into the pulpit and explain to the people the truths of faith and to preach on the Passion of Christ.

God blessed the work of Paul from the outset and showed that it was through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the Bishop had made an exception for this man to whom God had granted so many extraordinary gifts. A large congregation attended and was so enthusiastic that when Paul returned to St. Stephen's, great crowds followed him, never weary of seeing and of hearing his words. There, before leaving him, the crowd sought further words of wisdom. The Bishop wished Paul to conclude this period of worldly pleasures by a solemn Triduum. Paul willingly obeyed.

At the close of the day, carrying a large Crucifix, he would go around the streets, followed by many singing hymns. In this way he invited the people to listen to the divine office. When Paul was in the pulpit, the Church was always filled to overflowing. Seeing this new preacher, very poorly clothed and lean of countenance, but animated by a burning charity and hearing his words, now terrifying, now consoling, the congregation was moved and would plead for divine mercy. The devil, jealous of the power of this man of God, attempted one day to disturb the congregation and disperse their feelings of sorrow by stirring up a possessed person. The Servant of God readily perceived the evil spirit's maneuver and commanded the possessed one to remain silent. The devil kept quiet. Overcome with terror the people cried out, "Grace! Mercy!" This power over the devil made the apostle's efforts still more effective and the days of dissipation became days of prayer and penance; no more dances and parties; no more of those amusements which can be so dangerous; yet the people were all contented and happy. But a still greater effect of the Saint's preaching was the reform in morals. The women dressed modestly and would never dare to enter the church unless they were dressed in a manner becoming and had their heads covered. To strengthen the devotion of the people and to ensure their perseverance, the Bishop ordered the young apostle to continue his preaching during Lent.

On Sundays Paul left his companions the task of teaching catechism to children. When it was finished, the Servant of God would enter the pulpit, explain the teachings of the Church clearly and simply to the people, then concluding with a practical example, especially taken from the Passion of Christ. He would inspire them with a hatred of sin and a love of virtue. Several times during the week, to the women during the day and to the men at night, he would speak about his Institute, preach on the Passion of our Savior and exhort them to meditate on the Passion, a practice of which all are capable, They would sing a hymn which he had composed himself, a touching account of some scene from the Passion.

During that Lent a complete change was noticeable in the town. People returned to God; hearts that had rejected the grace of God were opened wide to the gifts of heaven; hardened sinners were converted. Two well-known inhabitants of Castellazzo, both named Maranzana, were consumed by a deep hatred of each other to the great scandal of the town. Parsons, priests, religious, in a word, everybody had tried at times to reconcile them. However God had reserved this victory for Paul. These two men went to St. Stephen's one evening to hear the preacher. One of them was noticed by Paul Sardi, who immediately conveyed the news to the Servant of God. He centered the sermon on Christ on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

The deep love of his Savior so animated Paul's words that they penetrated even these

hardened hearts and finally put an end to their hatred. When devotions were over, the two went separately to the Saint's cell where, surprised at meeting and each realizing why the other was there, they embraced and were both filled with joy at their reconciliation. Paul exhorted them to go to Confession then and there, and to put an end to the scandal they were to receive Holy Communion together. In the morning at the parish Church of Saint Martin, an edifying sight for the city and a great triumph for the Saint, these two men, before such deadly enemies, were seen side by side at the altar rails to receive together the Sacrament of peace and of love.

One day a quarrel arose among a group of men, trouble was imminent for the quarrel gradually became more heated and blows were near. Paul ran up and, kneeling in their midst, held the Crucifix before them and begged them for the love of Jesus Christ to make peace. Immediately the dispute was settled and each went his way in peace. How great were the works of reconciliation between enemies of souls with God that the young apostle accomplished during Lent.

Holy Week came and then more than ever Paul's compassionate love for Christ Crucified took possession of him. He could not speak without experiencing strange emotions; his voice was choked by sobs.

On Holy Thursday he placed a heavy cross on his shoulders; a crown of thorns on his head; the thorns so deep that the blood streamed down his face. He visited each of the churches in Castellazzo and prayed before the altar of repose. As he walked through the streets, before the eyes of all, he imitated Christ's bloody walk through the streets of Jerusalem.

The fame of the new apostle soon spread through neighboring districts. The Marquis de Pozzo, who already had met Paul and admired him, wanted him to evangelize the dioceses of Retorto and Portanuova. The Bishop was asked to send Paul, and after Easter the Saint went to give missions in these districts. Here, too, the people came in crowds to gather round the missionary. On one day a large crowd, who in order to get to the church, had to cross the River Orba, which was swollen by the melting snows. They were in a small boat and some distance from the shore, when they were suddenly carried downstream by the swift current. The boat was on the point of sinking when, amid the cries of distress from those in the boat and from those who stood on the bank watching the heart-rending scene, Paul, who had been notified of their plight, ran up, blessed them with his Crucifix and obtained for them the unhopd-for good fortune of reaching the bank in safety. This event increased the people's veneration for a Saint who was as powerful in his works as in his words. So, on these missions, he reaped abundant fruits.

He closed the missions with processions of penance, in which very distinguished people took part. The Marchioness de Pozzo walked bare-footed. The missionary carried on his shoulders a heavy cross which the holy lady had the consolation of keeping. It is still kept as a precious relic in the castle of the Marquis de Pozzo.

After this apostolic harvest of souls, Paul returned to acquire fresh spiritual strength in solitude, in prayer and in penance. His heart received new vigor from the Tabernacle

and Calvary, never ending sources of strength. By this close union with God, he was constantly strengthened for his apostolic labors and the austerities of the common life. However, whenever charity demanded it, Paul did not hesitate to leave this contemplative life, which he loved so dearly. Whenever he had sick parishioners, he would hasten to console them, performing humble little services for them and often, by his prayers, brought about a restoration of health.

One of these, named Joseph Lorgo, was in such a weak condition that he could not swallow any food. Paul visited him and, after preparing a little drink, told him that he would find it an excellent remedy. He had scarcely tasted it when he regained his strength and health, regarding the cure as a miracle obtained through the prayers and the merits of the Servant of God.

At Castellazzo was a man named Andre Vegetto, who, while Paul was staying at the hermitage of St. Stephen, used to take him a little wood to make a fire. But Andre injured his leg and gangrene set in. Paul's gratitude led him to visit him. After speaking words of consolation, Paul asked to see the wound, which as the bandages were removed gave off a most unpleasant odor. At first Paul could not suppress his repulsion; but on seeing in this wound the Wound of Christ Crucified, he told the sick man to turn away. Then the heroic Servant of God kissed the wound. Vegetto saw him and, quite overcome by this act of heroic charity, admired the Saint. Paul begged him to tell no one of what he had done. The following day the doctor found that the wound was cured. On the following day the sick Andre left his bed and was able to walk easily and freely. Andre could not keep his secret; he spread the news of his astonishing cure far and wide. He even went to Retorto to tell the Marquis de Pozzo, who was already aware of Paul's sanctity and of the great works it was accomplishing.

We relate another incident, though it is not so famous. One day Paul, after crossing the river at Barmida by the ford, noticed that his feet were covered with slime and mud. A pious woman named Thecla Gambarotta offered him a cloth. Paul believed that he should accept this charitable offer, wiped his feet on the cloth and then returned it to Thecla, who went on her way. On her way to Barmida, she decided to wash the cloth in the river. To her astonishment she found it as clean as though it had never been used. On one corner remained a small stain to testify to the reality of the miracle.

The hermitage of St. Stephen's had become the refuge of all who had need of advice, encouragement and consolation. People of every walk of life came there - even priests and religious. Paul welcomed them and honored them with that loving kindness and reverence peculiar to the saints. Sometimes, in all simplicity, he would invite them to partake of refreshments, and he would offer them, irrespective of their rank, his meager provisions. To any noble personage he would offer bread and garlic. One morning, during a visit from the Marchioness de Pozzo, he set down on the table an onion and some lettuce leaves, together with the bread he had received in charity. The pious woman willingly accepted, considering it an honor to sit down at the table of holy poverty. Another day, when the Servant of Jesus Christ was speaking of God to a young man of noble family who later became a priest, one of the Saint's benefactresses brought him a roll seasoned with oil and salt. Receiving it thankfully, he offered it to the young man. To encourage him to share it, he took a little piece. When they had eaten,

the young man, with a smile, asked him if there was anything to drink. Paul smiled in return and pointed to the well, saying, "There we have an inexhaustible supply."

These traits seem of little importance, but does not one feel pleased to see the charm of amiability mingled with the seriousness of life in the lives of the saints?

At this time our Saint had the misfortune to see the number of his little company diminish. Paul Sardi fell ill; his health could not withstand the austerities of such a life; he was forced to leave the man whom he regarded as a father and for whom he felt a tender affection. Raised later to the priesthood, elected Canon of the College of Saints Peter and Dalmatius at Alexandria, he never ceased to lead an exemplary life. After Paul's death, he testified at the Processes of what he had seen and heard at the hermitage of St. Stephen's.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEPARTURE OF THE SAINT FOR ROME - MARY'S MYSTERIOUS APPEAL - MONTE ARGENTARIO - HIS RETURN TO HIS OWN COUNTRY

September - November 1721

It seems to me that Jerusalem and Rome should play an important part in the work of our Saint. Jerusalem: the Passion of Jesus Christ; Rome: the divine authority which communicates to everything with which it comes in contact the fruitful germ of life and immortality, and without which every work is fruitless and dead.

Continual contemplation on the Sufferings of his Savior had inspired in Paul the desire to see Jerusalem and water with his tears the ground bathed by the Precious Blood of Christ. How fortunate he would be if he could only sit at the Holy Places and say, "This is where Jesus knelt in His agony; this is where He was betrayed by a kiss. ...here is the Praetorium, where He was scourged and crowned with thorns...and the hillside reddened by His Blood! ...There, Calvary, where He hung on the Cross, at the foot of which stood the Mother of Sorrow." Paul was convinced that at the scene of the Passion his heart would be bursting with love and his thirst for suffering would be quenched at the "Fountains of the Savior."

But at this time a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was impossible, especially for one of the "Poor of Jesus." Therefore, he had to sacrifice his desire and submit to the will of his director. Thus, it was that instead he resolved to go to Mt. Varallo.

To his Bishop he wrote, "Since I am unable to go to Jerusalem, where my beloved Jesus suffered so much for me, I would like to make the pilgrimage to the mount of Varallo." What then was there at Mt. Varallo which would compensate for a trip to Jerusalem? At the end of the valley of Sesia, on the Swiss border, rose, surrounded by mountains, a hill on whose summit was a chapel consecrated to Our Blessed Lady. In this church, at the foot of a little grotto, is an imitation of the Holy Sepulcher. On the side of the hill, covered with rich verdure and interspersed with paths, are thirty-eight chapels, scattered here and there, representing in rich bass-relief the mysteries of the Death and Resurrection of Our Divine Lord. These solemn and august images are wrapped in profound silence, except at times of prayer, when the resonant singing of the songs of the Seraphic Patriarch, St. Francis, seem to rival the beauty of nature in praising the omnipotent Creator. No other place, apart from Jerusalem, could hold a greater attraction for Paul.

We have been unable, much to our regret, to find any full reports of this pilgrimage. But what beautiful things there remain for us concerning his journey to the Eternal City.

A heavenly inspiration drew Paul to the center of Catholicism, to the heart of the Faith. In that year (1721) Innocent XIII was elected Pope. For many years our Saint had been longing to cast himself at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to place in his hands the Rules of his new Congregation. His director also understood that, for the great work that was to be done for God, this trip was necessary, so he gave his approval and

blessing. The Bishop gave his saintly penitent letters of recommendation. After stating that he had clothed him in the habit of the Passion, he recommended him to the charity of all, calling him a young man "*Praeclaris virtutibus coruscantem*."

Confident that he was doing God's will, the religious of the Passion generously sacrificed his dearest ties: fatherland, parents, brothers and sisters - he left all for God. Amid the tears shed by his family and the people of Castellazzo, Paul, with renewed courage, set out for Genoa, possessing nothing for his voyage except an abounding trust in God. Here, he was welcomed by a noble and pious knight who afforded him hospitality and paid the cost of his voyage. Before he left this town, John Baptist, who could not live separated from his brother, went there to join him, begging him with tears in his eyes to be allowed to accompany him. But Paul, still unsure of God's plans in this matter, advised him to return home. "Very well," said John Baptist as though illumined by the light of prophecy, "go on, but you will find no rest without me." He returned to Castellazzo while Paul set out for Rome.

On 8th September, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the wind suddenly dropped and the vessel remained motionless at the foot of a huge promontory. "Monte Argentario," exclaimed the sailors. Hearing the mention of this name, Paul felt his heart beat the faster. He recalled those pleading words, "Paul, come to Monte Argentario. I am alone there." When he realized that the calming of the waters and the stopping of the ship on such a day off Monte Argentario had not happened merely by chance, but that Mary was calling him again and inviting him to serve her Divine Son in that place. The sailors went ashore and began to gather wild figs. Paul carefully examined the mountain. On the side, looking out to the sea, he could see several grottos or little cells, like honeycombs hollowed out in the rocks. At that moment he felt a gentle uplift of his soul to God and an indescribable charm attracted him to this solitude.

In the evening a light breeze sprang up and the ship was able to continue on its voyage. Paul was still experiencing a deep fervor. "Feeling like this," he thought to himself, "I could go to the ends of the world for the love of my God."

The following day the ship arrived at the port of Civitavecchia. Sailors and passengers had to go into quarantine. The Servant of God was destitute and the health officers, out of pity, gave him two baroques with which he bought bread. While there he spent his time (in the right form) following the Rules which he had written in the sacristy of St. Charles. At certain hours he instructed the people at the leper hospital, or he would devote these hours to spiritual exercises. When the quarantine was over, he set out for Rome.

In the evening, worn out by fatigue and hunger, he approached a village inn and begged alms for the love of God. For a meal he had only very little and this he received from a Spaniard who was as poor as Paul himself. At daybreak he continued his journey. He had been walking for many hours when the great rounded dome of St. Peter's, which seemed from a distance to be isolated in the middle of a desert, came into sight. This gave him renewed strength, and he had scarcely reached the gates of this great city when he fell upon his knees and reverently kissed the ground that had been watered by

the blood of the Prince of Apostles and of many other martyrs. He entered the city by the gate called Cavallegeri.

What a sight lay revealed before his eyes. The magnificent colonnade which surrounds the Vatican Square; the two fountains spraying water high into the air; the magnificent obelisk which sings the triumph of the Cross and the everlasting reign of Christ the King; to his right the most august palace in the world, the Vatican; and opposite, St. Peter's, that incomparable Basilica. All these splendors of the faith deeply moved his soul and seemed to say to him, "Behold, the pillar and the ground of truth" (Tim, III, 15).

Quite absorbed by these deep thoughts, he went and knelt before the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. While he was praying there, his soul suddenly enveloped in darkness, a foreboding no doubt, of the trials awaiting him in Rome. After a long and desolate prayer, he went outside and once in the streets of the city he had to suffer the raillery of many people who mocked at his habit, which was so very poor, and also at his bare feet. But there were charitable people at hand who told him of the hospice of the Holy Trinity, which provided for pilgrims, where the Roman nobility, of whom more were priests than laymen, perform humble services to the poor of Jesus Christ. In this hospice it is the custom to wash the pilgrims' feet. Imagine, then, Paul's surprise and confusion when he saw kneeling at his feet one of the most illustrious Cardinals of the Society of Jesus, whose humility and charity edified all. After washing his feet this Prince of the Church gave him an alms and encouraged him to trust in Divine Providence. But Paul, after thanking him for his gift, besought him in all humility to give the alms to a more deserving pilgrim.

The following morning he assisted at Mass, received Holy Communion and, after a long thanksgiving, went to the pontifical palace to beg an audience with the Holy Father. But his request was rejected by one of the palace servants, who said to him in a tone of withering scorn, "Be off with you; we have too many evil doers coming here each day." Paul received this refusal without a murmur. In fact, it even made him rejoice for he believed that he was being treated as he deserved. But it was not in vain that the Evangelist stated, "He that humbles himself shall be exalted." On that very scene where he was so humiliated, he will one day witness his glorification, the greatest that man can receive.

The Servant of God understood that the hour determined by Providence for the accomplishment of His work had not yet come, and he returned in silence. Feeling his strength failing, he came to a fountain and sat there eating the bread that had been given to him at the Hospice of the Holy Trinity. A beggar, seeking an alms, appeared before him. Paul hastened to share the bread with him, saying, "My brother, let us eat this together."

Paul was alone, a stranger in a strange city, unable to obtain, in spite of the Bishop's recommendations, an audience with the Sovereign Pontiff. He was there alone, forsaken, scorned!

Seeking consolation over the failure of his mission, he visited St. Mary Major's to pray before the image of the Blessed Virgin, venerated in the Borghese chapel. (In a side

chapel there is a painting of Mary and Son that tradition attributes to St. Luke as the artist.) There, he felt surge in his soul an assurance that one day his hopes would be fulfilled; there he made a vow to propagate devotion to Christ Crucified, the vow that distinguishes the Congregation of the Passion from all other religious Orders. Then, just as he was placing his future Congregation under the patronage of his heavenly Mother, he heard, deep down in his heart, a new appeal of Mary from Monte Argentario. With arms outstretched she offered herself as a haven of rest to this poor pilgrim, who was rejected by all.

A boat was ready to sail from Rome to Civitavecchia, and the captain charitably received him on board. The Saint offended one of the passengers by his modesty, whereas the passenger should have had respect for the virtue of the Saint. This passenger, aroused to an insane fury, went so far as to hurl torrents of abuse upon Paul. But, again, he endured all in silence, his only regret being the scandal given to the sailors. When the boat anchored at Fiumicino, the saintly traveler boarded another ship. On it he was made the object of a thousand outrages, which he welcomed as precious treasures, saying to himself that all had the right to treat him thus. After going ashore at Saint Severus, he had to walk to Civitavecchia, where finding neither food nor lodging, he spent the night under the portico of La Sanita. The following day he went on to Corneto, where he was warmly welcomed by the Augustinian fathers. The following night he stopped at Montalto, where a charitable priest gave him hospitality. The next day he continued his journey, hoping to reach Monte Argentario that same day.

However, the country through which he had to pass was nothing but a vast, arid land, parched by the sun, strewn with bushes and thick with numerous insects. Marshes made the air heavy and unhealthy. There were no built roads, only rough paths which continually crossed each other, leaving an inexperienced traveler very uncertain of the correct path. Paul walked all day, stifled by the foul air and exhausted with fatigue, having had nothing to drink but a little water which tasted nauseous. He continued his journey without finding any human help. To add to his anxieties, he was no longer strengthened by the interior consolations which had formerly made his sufferings sweet. Bodily weariness and desolation of spirit were overwhelming him. The approaching darkness further increased the horror of these desolate regions. Perceiving a shepherd's hut, he went there to seek shelter and cast himself down upon a bundle of straw to rest his exhausted body. The night was one of cruel sleeplessness.

After other trials no less painful, he finally arrived at Portercole, a town situated at the foot of Monte Argentario. The Bishop gave him a hearty welcome and told him that there was a hermitage on the mountain which had previously been the Monastery of the Augustinians under the title of "the Annunciation." Paul was eager to climb to the summit of the mount, taking with him for provisions nothing but a little bread - alms of a charitable priest.

Let us follow the Saint and gaze with him on the beauty and richness of nature in that solitude, which was in perfect harmony with his spirit. Henceforth, this mount will be of the greatest interest to us, for there we will be the eye-witnesses of such holy and sublime things as happened on Alverna to the Patriarch of the Passion. We will rejoice in knowing of all those happenings in detail.

It is a huge promontory which broadens and rises as it projects into the Mediterranean Sea. The sea, forming a gulf, encloses a natural harbor at the extremity of which is the famous Portofino, overlooked by a rise on which Fort Monte Filippo towers. From the shore of the sea the mountain changes from green to other shades. Several types of trees, sea-cherries, whose bright red is in contrast to all the strawberries, strips of turf, clumps of myrtle with little purple berries, lentisks, which thrive on stony soil, together with rosemary, lavender and other fragrant plants which are pleasing to the eye and invite all to enjoy their perfume.

On the opposite side of the promontory, the scene appears more vague and indistinct. From the mountains and hills of Scarse the view leads into a valley where, formed by a strip of land which separates it from the sea, is a majestic lake divided into two. At one end of this division is the town of Orbetello, surrounded by the sea on all sides. The mountain, which sweeps down into those azure-tinted waters and which is covered by bush and forest, makes a very picturesque scene. Here, it rises unto cliffs, ridges and hills; there, it stretches out in gently sloping plains or the forest gives way to green meadows and small chestnut groves.

It is amid this lost garden of beauty on the second terrace of the hillside, not far from a stream of crystal-clear running water, in the middle of the scattered ruins of an old monastery, stands the humble hermitage of the Annunciation, adjoining a little garden surrounded by a trellis on which the grapes were ripening when the Saint arrived.

The beauty of nature and the profound silence of the desert gently elevated Paul's soul to the contemplation of the divine beauty of the Creator. He called this mountain "my sanctification," for it invites the soul to raise itself from the things of earth and to dwell upon the beauty of God. Such a name certainly is appropriate for, since the beginning of Christianity, it has seen flourish under the shadow of its oaks prayer, fasting and saintly virtues. Saint Gregory the Great, in his Dialogues, made mention of the saintly hermits on Monte Argentario. He relates that one of them, on his way to Rome to visit the tomb of St. Peter, Prince of Apostles, raised to life a dead man in the presence of a sub-deacon named Quadregisimo.

Monte Argentario was also one of the places which the noble Fabiola used to visit during her holy pilgrimages which, according to Saint Jerome, she would cross the islands, pass over the Etruscan Sea and penetrate the most hidden shores, especially where lived communities of hermits, whose needs she would willingly supply. On this mountain Paul was destined to continue the sacrifice of praise and love which those hermits of old used to offer. When he reached the hermitage, Paul found nothing but a few little cells, a poor and unadorned damp church and a tattered picture of the Annunciation.

The poverty and dereliction of this sanctuary only served to make it more attractive and sacred to him. Mary's image, a reminder to him of the invitation that she had so many times extended to him, made him determined to settle in this chosen spot to share there the solitude of his Heavenly Mother.

For several days he enjoyed sweet consolation, but still he did not experience the tranquility and peace of mind that follows the accomplishment of God's plans. Then, he remembered the words his brother had spoken to him at Genoa, "Very well, go on, but you will find no peace without me." He decided to return home and bring John Baptist along with him to share together this holy solitude. However, wishing to be sure that he could live in the hermitage, he thought it best to obtain the necessary permission from the Bishop of Soana, under whose jurisdiction was the Church of the Annunciation. He went down to Orbetello, there to find shelter for the night. He stood on the square of St. Francis de Paul awaiting a charitable host whom Providence would send along.

A Religious Minim, touched at the sight of the young man so poorly clad, ran to tell his Superior, who hastened to offer the shelter of his monastery to this 'Poor of Jesus.' The Superior treated him with tender charity. Paul soon realized that this Father Guardian was a man of great sanctity and deep learning, and later on chose him as his confessor.

From Orbetello the servant of God headed towards Pitigliano, the usual residence of the Bishop. Passing through this deserted country, uncertain of the way, he begged on bended knee the help of his Guardian Angel. From that time onward the path that he chose was always the right one.

When the day was far spent, he reached Monciano, a large village in the marshes of Sienna. Meeting a priest, he humbly enquired of him where he would find the Pastor. "The Pastor? I am he," the latter replied sharply. "What do you want?"

"I wish to beg of you shelter for the night."

"Oh," replied the priest who met so many pilgrims, "it only needs one to cause injury to a hundred people."

"I am capable of any crime but, with the grace of God, I hope I will never have the misfortune to commit any," replied Paul,

Humility possesses a hidden charm which softens all hearts. Touched by this reply, so modest and yet so prudent, the priest received Paul into his house and treated him with every kindness and consideration,

The following day at Pitigliano, the Saint learned that the Bishop was at Pienza. In spite of his weariness, he had to walk more than fifty miles. The Prelate, Bishop Fulvio Salvi; welcomed him kindly and granted him the permission he sought.

The Servant of God then passed through Foscana, begging his bread along the way. This journey was marked like so many others with many sufferings and insults. Often finding no shelter, he was forced to sleep on the hard ground.

Finally he arrived at Pisa and took a boat down the Canal to Leghorn. On this trip he was again treated harshly by two passengers who should have recognized the virtue of the Saint. They ridiculed his strange clothing. To understand the meaning of a religious habit and the high perfection of which it is a symbol, one must possess the very same

gift of faith. Humble Paul, without uttering a word in reply, never lost his peace and serenity, so absorbed was he in the remembrance of the outrages suffered by the Savior during His Passion. A nobleman defended him. "What are you doing?" he said to them. "You are insulting this poor servant of God. Who knows how he appears in the eyes of heaven." This praise, which seemed inspired by a holy prophecy, caused the humble religious more pain than the insults he had just received.

At Leghorn Paul went to seek lodging in a hospice called the 'Oratory of the Dead' where a bed is provided for the poor. For food, he begged from the shopkeepers. A Jew gave him a few sols, which enabled him to buy a little bread and wine, half of which he kept for himself. The next day, after assisting at Holy Mass, he walked to the port. There, before a crowd of people sitting beside a fountain, he ate the rest of his bread. "The embarrassment made it an exquisite joy," he himself said, when relating the incident.

A Genoese captain gave him free passage. Because he was poor, there was assigned to him one of the most uncomfortable berths. Paul had to be content with nothing to eat but the scraps left over after the sailors had eaten.

They were again quarantined at Genoa.

Seen from the harbor, beautiful Genoa, especially at eventide beneath the clear Italian sky, presents a magnificent scene. The gardens, perfumed by the fragrant orange trees and beautiful flowers, the sound of many water fountains, whose music is never silent, the gleaming marble palaces, the joyous sound of festive songs, the brilliance of the thousands of lights reflected in the water, all these things delight and enrapture the youthful eye. Paul, in spite of continual austerity, was not insensitive to the beauty of this scene. But he held before his mind the contrast of these enchanting scenes to the image of the bleeding figure of Christ Crucified.

CHAPTER NINE

BISHOP DE GATTINARA CLOTHES JOHN BAPTIST IN THE HABIT - HE GIVES THE BROTHERS PERMISSION TO LIVE ON MONTE ARGENTARIO

1721 - 1723

Paul set out for Alessandria. Joy surged in his heart. After many hardships and trials he was again in the presence of this holy Bishop, who welcomed him as a dearly loved son. The Servant of God gave a detailed account of his experiences. He explained how he had found the holy mountain to which Mary had called him. Speaking of the inspiration he had received, that his brother join him in the life of solitude, he begged the Bishop to clothe John Baptist in the habit of the Passion and to allow them to live on the mountain. The Bishop deeply regretted the loss to his diocese of a Saint and an apostle, but he could not doubt but that Paul was being guided by the Holy Spirit, so he gave them the permission they sought. He was convinced that the work of God would flourish in God's good time.

At this news John Baptist leapt for joy. For a long time he had ardently desired to consecrate himself to Christ Crucified. The Bishop clothed him in the habit on 28th November, 1721, the Octave day of the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin. At the ceremony Paul wept for joy. The two brothers spent the severest winter months at the hermitage of St. Stephen, leading saintly lives that edified all. The reader will easily understand this from the outline we have already given.

Winter was gradually yielding to spring. The brothers, impatient to taste the delights of solitude, were preparing to depart. The news of their departure was soon spread about. It reached Castellazzo, and the people there deeply regretted that they were soon to lose their dearly loved father. "Never again will we see our holy teacher, never again will we see him who has guided us along the way of salvation," they cried out in sorrow.

Their father and mother, though resigned to God's will, were nevertheless deeply afflicted at the coming parting. Paul, who also felt as though his heart would break, consoled his parents as well as he was able. He spoke to his brothers and sisters and left them with spiritual counsels for the good of their souls. We quote his own words to show the fervor of his charity.

"May the peace of Jesus Christ, which surpasses all understanding, ever dwell in our hearts."

"Dearest brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. I, Paul Francis, your brother and a most unworthy servant of the Poor of Jesus Christ, a poor and a great sinner, feel obliged to act upon the inspirations that God gives me, to leave home and retire into solitude, that I may invite not only human beings but even the lowliest of God's creatures to weep with me for the many sins, and to sing the praises of God whom I have so grievously offended. Before setting out for this retreat in solitude, I believe that I should leave you, my brothers and sisters, some spiritual maxims that you may day by day advance with great fervor in the love of our good God.

“In the first place, keep the Commandments of God perfectly. Have a filial fear of God who is so worthy of our love, who has created us from nothingness and who has redeemed us on the Cross. Know, my dear ones, that the more tenderly a child loves its father, the more it fears to offend him or even to displease him. A holy fear will be a restraint that will prevent you from falling into sin. Love God, our loving Father, with a burning love; have the greatest confidence in Him; let all your actions, your words, your sighs, your pains and your tears be a holocaust offered to His divine love.

“To increase in this divine love, receive the Sacraments frequently. Go to the altar rails with this intention of allowing your soul to be inflamed by the fire of holy love. Ah, my dearest brothers and sisters, I will say nothing to you about your preparation for Holy Communion. I know that you will make it as fervently as you can; but always remember it is the most sacred act that any human being can make.

“Often visit the Church and adore there the Blessed Sacrament and make a visit, too, to the altar of the Blessed Virgin. Never allow a day to pass without spending a half-hour, or at least a quarter of an hour, in meditation on the sorrowful Passion of Our Lord and Savior.”

“Keep always before your mind and in your heart the agony of our Crucified Love and know that the greatest saints who are now enrolled amongst the blessed in Heaven triumphed in holy love by this means. Love the Mother of Sorrows with a filial and a tender love; be devoted to her Immaculate Conception, to your Guardian Angels, to your patron saints, and especially to the holy Apostles.

“Often make ejaculations and let them come from the bottom of your hearts, such as these, ‘Oh, my God, would that I had never offended You. Hope of my heart, let me die a thousand deaths rather than fall into sin again. My Sovereign Good, inflame my heart with Your holy Love. He who loves You not, knows You not. Oh, that the whole world may come to love You, O infinite Love. When will my soul be penetrated through and through with Your love.’

“In times of pain and sorrow say, ‘May Your holy will be done, O my God. May all my afflictions be willingly accepted from Your hands. Precious sufferings, I embrace you and press you to my heart. You are the pearls of great price that my God has given to me. Precious suffering. O dear hand of my God, I kiss you. Blessed be the holy rod that strikes me with such love. Ah, most tender Father, it is good for my soul that I am humbled.’

“You can make these little ejaculations at any time; when walking or working, or even when in the company of others; for even though men surround you, they cannot occupy your heart. It is the heart that procures great good for your soul, even though you are engaged in the most engrossing occupations.

“Each day read from some spiritual book and fly from bad companions as you would from the devil himself. Be obedient even in the smallest thing commanded by our father

and mother. Obedience is a heavenly jewel. Jesus, through obedience, lay down his life for us upon the wood of the Cross.

“Have a tender compassion for the poor. Be just to all men. If you have any debts, pay them at once; if you cannot, ask for time humbly in which to pay them. Humble yourselves before all for the love of God.

“Lastly, I beg of you to remember always the commandment of love that Jesus gave to His disciples on the night before he went to His Death: ‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.’ What divine words. Love one another, my brothers and sisters, love one another. Remember that you will never be pleasing to God unless you love one another. May there never be any dissension among you; but if perchance a bitter word should escape you, calm yourself at once and do not continue to speak, lest anger should rule your heart.

“So, I leave you in the sacred Wounds of Jesus, under the maternal protection of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows; yes, I leave you there, both you, my brothers and sisters and all the family. I beg the Blessed Virgin to bathe your hearts in her sorrowful tears so that she may impress upon your hearts a continual remembrance of the sorrowful Passion of Jesus Christ and her own Seven great Sorrows. I beg of her to obtain for you perseverance in holy love and strength and resignation in suffering. Receive, therefore, as your powerful Protectress, the Mother of Sorrows, and never neglect your meditation on the sacred Passion of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May God, in His infinite mercy, shower upon you all His holy grace. Pray, too, for me.

“Thanks be to God and Mary, ever Virgin.

“Your most unworthy brother,

“Paul Francis, the least of the Poor of Jesus.”

Here, we have a plan for living a truly Christian life; the keeping of the Commands of God; hatred of sin; frequent reception of the Sacraments; devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, to the Passion of Christ and to the Sorrows of Mary, to the angels and saints; the efficacious practice of ejaculatory prayer; visits to the Blessed Sacrament; spiritual reading; love of the poor and love for the virtue of justice; and all is crowned by the perfection of the great commandment of charity. He leaves them in the adorable Wounds of the Redeemer.

On the first Sunday of Lent, they went to Holy Mass, and they were filled with the same sentiments that filled the Heart of Christ when He was led by the spirit into the desert; this was the Gospel of the day. Then the brothers set out for their solitude and seclusion on Monte Argentario. They took a ship at Genoa and soon arrived at Civitavecchia. But they were obliged to remain there until the Wednesday of Holy Week. They set out for Portofino for they wished to receive Holy Communion there the following morning. But when evening had come, they were near Lake Burano, fifteen miles from the mountain. In this deserted place it was impossible for them to find their way in the dark through wild bush and along unmade tracks. They could find no shelter to protect them from the cold night air; neither did they have any food; but they lay upon the ground under the feeble protection of a bush, and when they awoke in the morning, their clothes were soaked with the dew. As the first streaks of the coming dawn lightened the sky, Paul

and John Baptist, their bodies weak from hunger and exposure, but their spirits burning with the desire to receive their Lord in Holy Communion, ran rather than walked to keep the Pasch with the Savior. They arrived at the Church in time to assist at the Solemn High Mass. After they had received Holy Communion, they forgot their fatigue and their weariness and were strengthened to endure those that were yet awaiting them. The Pastor, who saw them in the Church, was impressed by their modesty and fervor, and made them stay with him during these holy days of Holy Week. After he had provided a meal for them, they returned to the Church to pray before the Altar of Repose. Paul knelt before the altar as motionless as a marble statue; he remained there on his knees, his heart dwelling upon the cruel sufferings of Jesus Christ; he remained there, all that day, throughout the night, and all the following morning until the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession for the Mass of the Presanctified.

After the solemnities of Easter Sunday, they went to Orbetello to ask permission from the military Governor to live on Monte Argentario. At that time the General was a Spaniard, Espejo y Vera. He had already seen the brothers as he was coming out of the church. He asked them who they were and where they were going. Paul answered modestly and humbly, "We are two poor brothers, whom God has inspired to do penance on Monte Argentario." The General, impressed by their appearance of holiness that marks the saints, gave them permission. At once they set out for Pitigliano, where they first received the blessing of the Bishop and then hastened towards the solitude of the hermitage of the Annunciation.

At long last they were able to devote themselves to the contemplation of divine things. They commenced a life that was more angelic than human. Each day they would spend many hours in the little chapel in prayer or singing the Divine Office. Then, at a set hour, they would take a solitary walk into the forest, where under the shade of weathered old oaks, or in the secret recess of some hidden grotto, they allowed their souls to be elevated to God by faith and by the inspiration that rugged and austere nature surrounding them could give. That they might not be absorbed in vain or useless reverie, they set their minds firmly on the meditation of the "days of old" and the "eternal years", and mercilessly scourged their innocent flesh unto blood.

Paul slept on the bare ground and John Baptist upon a table.

At midnight they arose to sing Matins and to spend up to three hours in the prayer of God. Then they took a short rest. But the Saint, hearing the nightingales greet the morning with song, believed that he was thereby invited to praise God and would continue his prayer. When the sound of the rumble of drums from the fortress of Monte Filippo came to his ears, he would say, "See with what care the soldiers guard the walls of their fortress. And you, a soldier of heaven, what should you not be doing for the royal kingdom of your soul..."

Thus, it was that everything around him was a means of raising his soul to God, and Nature became for him a school of virtue. On Fridays it was his habitual custom to have tears as his bread. And the better to unite himself more perfectly with the Sufferings of Christ Crucified, he had devised an ingenious instrument of penance: a piece of iron

with many sharp points. This he would wear from early Friday morning before Matins until Saturday morning.

All these acts of penance seemed but little to the fervent hermits. During the novenas that they made in preparation for the greater feasts, they would increase their penances and mortifications. After the feast of the Epiphany, in honor of Our Lord's forty days in the desert, they would bury themselves in a profound solitude, not even speaking with one another. For the rest of the year, they spoke but seldom to each other that they might have the more time to commune with God and to listen to His voice.

How did they manage for food? The only food that they had brought with them was a few biscuits and a few dried raisins that had been given to them at Pitigliano. Rather than leave their solitude to beg food for themselves, they preferred to live on roots and wild herb. But the Author of Life, the Mover of all hearts, after He had tested their constancy, inspired a woman of Orbetello to provide them with a quantity of broad beans, which they received with sentiments of deep gratitude. Very often they did not bother to cook them but eat them as they were, but softened with water drawn from a fountain alongside of the hermitage. The hunters and the charcoal burners, who heard their voices raised in chanting the praises of God, spoke of them in the neighboring districts as the two saints whose austerities were astonishing.

From this time they were never wanting in benefactors whose generous offerings were more than sufficient for their needs. But nevertheless, they practiced a rigid abstinence, taking only a tasteless soup or bread and water. It was almost a banquet for them when on Thursdays and feast days they usually took a little sour wine. Their life in the desert can be summed up in a few words: silence and solitude; prayer and penance. But while using these means to sanctify themselves, they were also learning the great art of sanctifying others.

A soul that is really aflame with divine love cannot contain itself for long.

It becomes eager to communicate its love into the hearts of others. And so with our two hermits, it was not long before they went out from their solitude on the mountain to carry with them heavenly graces for the inhabitants of the neighboring towns.

On Sundays and feast days Paul would walk along those tracks, covered with sharp thorns and rough stones, to Portercole. (It is well to remember that the brothers wore neither sandal nor hat nor mantle until after the approbation of the Rules, as we shall see later.) With the permission of the Pastor, he would gather the curious people around him after Mass and use the occasion to instruct them in Christian doctrine. As he began to describe a scene from the Passion, his words would be so full of unction and sincerity that the people were greatly edified. Paul would then tell them how to meditate on the Passion.

John Baptist would go to the other side of the mountain and instruct the people there. At the foot of the mountain, there was a small chapel alongside the huts of the fishermen. This place, because of the shelter it afforded to ships, soon grew to importance and was known as Port San Stephano.

CHAPTER TEN

THE BROTHERS ARE CALLED TO GAETA - THE HERMITAGE OF 'OUR LADY OF THE CHAIN' - PREACHING - MISSION OF CHARITY TO CASTELLAZZO - PILGRIMAGE TO ST. JANUARIUS - NAPLES - RETURN TO GAETA - CALLED TO TROIA BY BISHOP CAVALIERI - MONTE GARGANO - SAINT MICHAEL -THE HOLY YEAR - THE BROTHERS IN ROME

1723 - 1725

The extraordinary life led by the two recluses in the wilderness and their unfailing zeal for the salvation of souls won for them the veneration of all. The people were speaking in enthusiastic tones of these two amazing men. And it was not very long before word was spread far and wide that on Monte Argentario lived two hermits in solitude whose sanctity of life recalled the early days of the Church.

The report of the austerities and the sanctity of the brothers inspired the Bishop of Gaeta, Bishop Charles Pignatelli, with an ardent desire to invite them into his diocese to labor for the spiritual needs of his flock. He wrote to Paul a letter in which he strongly besought him to come with his brother. "You will find here," he wrote, "a suitable place for your way of life, and you will be able to do much for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls" It was with regret that the Saint withdrew from his beloved solitude. But this invitation from the Bishop, was it not the call of Heaven? After he had placed the matter before the Lord in prayer, he believed that he should accept. Then, together with his brother, he sought permission from the Bishop of Sovana, Bishop Salvi, who, although loath to see them depart, gave them letters of recommendation in which he gave a brief account of their apostolic life.

"They call themselves the 'Poor of Jesus,'" he wrote, "and wear a coarse woolen habit without cloak, without staff or purse. They never wear, even on journeys, sandals or a hat. Their life is both contemplative and active, and they work for the spiritual good of souls."

Towards the end of June 1723, the brothers set out for Gaeta. We think that it was on this journey that they made the acquaintance of Cardinal Alvaro Cienfuegos, a Spaniard and a religious of the Society of Jesus. We have letters in which the illustrious Cardinal shows towards the Poor of Jesus a warm friendship and offers them some advice. He must have known of the holy project that was ever in the mind of Paul.

From the time of their arrival at Gaeta, they won the affection of all. It was enough to see the two servants of God to realize that all that had been said about them was perfectly true. Young men, still in the flower of youth, their appearance bespoke of angelic modesty, profound humility and an amiable austerity. They were clothed in a rough, coarse habit; around their waists, they tied piece of rope, from which hung a breviary, and on their breast they wore a Crucifix; their feet were bare. Everything about them spoke eloquently of their contempt for the world and their love of penance. Their words contained something indescribably gentle yet strong, which charmed the hearers, penetrated all hearts and inspired in them a love for virtue.

The Bishop was as delighted with them as though he had found a treasure. It was his desire that they stay with him at the palace. The two religious, through obedience, stayed there for some months, but their mode of life was the same as if they were in solitude. After a light repast and a short repose on the bare ground with the breviary as a pillow, they would go to the church and, on their knees before the Blessed Sacrament, would spend hours in contemplation of the infinite love of Jesus Christ. Their holiness of life edified the people greatly. But solitude was ever drawing them to itself. Their only desire was to live hidden from the eyes of the world. They obtained from the Bishop permission to retire to the hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain.

Situated upon a hill in the midst of olive groves, looking down upon the sparkling waters of the bay, and to the west of the promontory of Gaetam, nestled this hermitage of peace. The town was a mile and a half away. The hermitage was divided into many cells, so like a monastery. Attached was a small but devotional chapel dedicated to the Mother of God. At one time it had been occupied by the monks of Saint Basil - St. Nilus and his companions. But at this particular time, there were only a cleric and a hermit in possession of this holy sanctuary.

The Bishop himself often visited the brothers and was charmed with their conversation. He appointed a cleric named Thomas Ricinelli to provide for their material needs. The Poor of Jesus appreciated this gesture of kindness, but would only accept his services in acts of charity towards their neighbor, never towards themselves. They had espoused themselves to holy poverty and, therefore, were unwilling to depart from their usual manner of living.

Their life in this hermitage was a continuation of the austerities of Monte Argentario. A witness, who had watched them at close hand, testified at the Processes that he was astonished at their way of life, which was no other than a crucifixion of human nature. "I have seen them," he said, "take a short repose upon the bare earth with only a stone under their heads; each day was a day of strict fast for they would only take a little bread and water with soup made from vegetables or herbs, and always seasoned with mortification. If they had oil, they would go without salt; if they had salt, they would not take oil. Very often they sprinkled ashes upon their poor food to make it the more tasteless. At evening collation they would have three ounces of bread each and nothing else. When offerings from kind-hearted people were given to them, they would keep what was necessary for their daily needs and give the rest to the poor. When it happened that nothing had been given them, they would pass whole days without breaking their fast. Should any benefactor offer them a delicacy, such as meat or fish, they would graciously refuse, saying, "This is not for us." If they were not allowed to refuse, they would accept and then give it to the poor."

One day the Bishop thought to relieve the rigor of their fasting by sending them a delicacy. When this dish appeared on the table, Paul admired it and then said, "Let us first meditate upon it and consider if we are worthy of such delicacies, for it is delicious and very well served." Then he took it gently in his hands and gave it to Ricinelli, begging him to give it to the first needy person he met. This incident reveals to us that the spirit of the Lord had revealed to Paul hidden secrets. The priest gave the dish to a

poor man named Angelo. But Angelo saw that he was given a dish that he had not seen before and thought that someone was playing a trick on him. He refused to accept until he was assured that it was Paul's wish. With joy in his heart, he set off with the precious patè, promising himself a satisfying repast. But a jealous and greedy eye was following him. "The dish - all of it - not just a little... An irresistible temptation..." The hermit Biagio could no longer resist. Taking a short cut through the bush, he reaches the road and waits for Angelo and the precious dish. He then forces him to share it with him, taking a large share himself, which he ate in secret. After wiping his mouth, he returns to the hermitage quite confident that he had not been observed.

But on his arrival Paul stood before him with a severe and reproachful countenance and rebuked him severely for not having overcome this vile temptation. The guilty Biagio admitted his fault, to the astonishment of the other companions, who knew only too well that Paul could not have known of what had occurred unless God had made it known to him.

At the hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain, "the life of the two brothers" - these are the words of the witness whom we have quoted before - "was spent in prayer or in the reading of spiritual books in a small oratory that was above the door of the church. I can say in all sincerity that their life was a life of continual prayer."

Paul found a small grotto among the rocks that bordered upon the sea. In this recess he erected a statue of Our Lady. This secret refuge became for him a cherished sanctuary where he spent the time when he was free from the common observance, in which he communed with heaven, practiced severe penances and scourged himself so cruelly that the rocks of the grotto were sprinkled with his blood. There, the devil launched an attack upon his soul as furious as the tempest that raged upon the seas below. But Paul, far from abandoning this scene of solitude, clung to and plunged his soul into the ocean of the divine goodness. He, who calms the winds and the waves of the sea, calmed the tempest raging within Paul's soul.

The effects of the rigorous austerities on the brothers, Paul and John Baptist, could be seen in their emaciated appearance. But in this weakening of the body, the soul found greater strength; the more nature suffered, the more divine love filled the soul with heavenly delights.

When anyone called upon them in their solitude, they welcomed them with marks of gentle politeness, which is only the fruit of charity. Living themselves in the presence of God, they knew how to turn the conversation to spiritual things so that their neighbor might draw benefit from it and be led to the practice of virtue.

Not wishing to wander from the path of obedience, they placed themselves under the direction of a priest who was full of the spirit of God. To their Bishop, they had vowed an absolute submission.

The Bishop, happy at having at hand these servants of Jesus Christ whose lives were both austere and saintly, did not wish the heavenly gifts which they possessed to remain hidden in the loneliness of the hermitage. At his command, the two apostles

came regularly to the Cathedral to teach catechism to the children and to instruct the faithful in the truths of faith. At the first call upon them, they hurried at any hour of the day or night to the bedside of the dying; they attended them in all their needs, prepared them for the reception of the Last Sacraments and never left their side until they had breathed their last. Often, as we have seen before, Paul cured the sick by touching with his lips their hideous wounds.

A hero of charity, such as Paul had proved himself to be, was able to inspire in others an ardent zeal. The Bishop understood this. He realizes that there was no one more capable of influencing his seminarians with a high ideal of the priesthood than the Servant of God. So he invited him to give the retreat before ordination. This departure from the usual practice naturally fell in for much criticism. All were astonished that the Bishop should entrust a religious who was not a priest with the responsibility of preaching to young men preparing for the priesthood. But there were priests, renowned for their holiness and for their learning - and these were in the majority - who readily agreed with the Bishop's choice. They knew that Paul's words, filled with the Spirit of God, would have a salutary effect on this generation of future priests.

Paul obeyed. The ordinands, who listened to him as they would to a saint, gained much fruit from this retreat and the effect upon them more than justified the selection of the Bishop.

While the Saint was engaged in this apostolic work at Gaeta, news reached them that one of his relatives at Castellazzo was in danger of losing his soul. The only hope for his salvation was in the intercession of Paul and his brother. So concerned were they about this unhappy news that they did not hesitate to face the hazards of the long journey to go to his assistance. They set out in October of 1723.

No sooner had they arrived at Castellazzo, when John Baptist fell ill. They had to remain there. During this time they lived at the hermitage of Saint Stephen until March 1724. Paul reported to Cardinal Cienfuegos all that had happened. The Cardinal, kindness itself to the brothers, answered as follows, "Your very gracious letter would have filled my heart with joy had it not been for the sad news of the illness of your brother John Baptist. Nevertheless, I knew very well that all the visits of the Lord are dearly loved and deeply cherished by hearts such as yours...."

After they had accomplished their mission of charity, they prepared for their return. On the way to Genoa, the Saint prophesied to the mother of Archbishop Saporiti. This holy soul, who had seen the Servant of God in the Church and was deeply impressed by his holiness, greatly desired to speak with him. She told of her desire to her son the Archbishop, who replied that her desire was nothing other than curiosity. The mother maintained that she wished to satisfy her piety. It was said that she had a presentiment of the news that she would learn from her conversation with the Saint. Paul forewarned her that she must be prepared to face God in judgment on the next feast of Saint Joseph. Shortly afterwards, she fell ill and died on the day predicted by Paul. Archbishop Saporiti related the incident to an ecclesiastic who testified on oath at the Processes. "Some say," says Saint Vincent Strambi, "that this prophecy was made on another journey; be that as it may, it in no way lessens the truth of the prophecy."

On his return to Gaeta, Paul preached the Lenten course at the Cathedral. The church was filled to overflowing. The Apostle spoke with such eloquence on the infinite love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and of the cruel torments endured during His Passion that the tears and the sobs of the congregation mingled with the tears and sobs of the preacher. They said, "If this sermon of the man of God does not make saints of us all, nothing will."

After Easter, the brothers set out for Naples to be present for the feast of Saint Januarius and to venerate the relics of this great martyr. The Archbishop's secretary, D. Thomas Perrone, wished to accompany them. But because he was a poor sailor, he was afraid to travel by boat. Paul assured him that he would suffer no ill effects on the water, and thus the voyage was a happy one for all. The Servant of God, who seized every opportunity to win souls for God, made the pilgrimage an apostolate of charity. The sailors and passengers were so captivated by the fervor of his discourses that they regretted that the voyage to Naples was so short.

The two pilgrims were afforded hospitality at the home of the secretary's relative. On the day of the solemnity, their piety and recollection in the chapel was a lesson to all on how the relics of the saints should be praised. They were present for the 'liquification' of the blood of the holy martyr and kissed with reverence and devotion the reliquary. The ten days they were at Naples were spent in spiritual exercises, and they spread around them the good odor of Jesus Christ. Their holiness attracted all who thronged around them in great numbers to see them and to speak with them.

On the day before their departure, while they were waiting for a favorable wind at the house of the captain of the ship, the crowds again gathered around them to kiss their hands or their habit. As it was impossible to escape from these demonstrations of affection, which in their humility they fain would have avoided, they used the occasion to turn the hearts of all to God, recommending them to think often of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the women to practice Christian modesty, which is their most beautiful ornament.

When the boat had berthed at Gaeta, after a voyage sanctified as the one to Naples had been, the Archbishop's secretary offered to pay the expenses of the trip. But the captain of the boat refused to accept anything. He said that he had been very happy to have had the privilege of having as passengers on his ship these grand servants of God.

While the Saint resumed his life of solitude at the hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain, God was preparing for him one of the greatest of his favors. Once again, a Bishop would be the instrument of Divine Providence for the advancement of the work of the Institute.

The Diocese of Troia (Troja), in the kingdom of Naples, was at this time ruled by a Bishop of profound learning and eminent virtue. When he had recourse to the Holy See on matters concerning the welfare of his diocese, Clement XI answered at once. "We must grant the favors he seeks; his deep learning and his delicate conscience would not

permit him to seek anything that is not justified by authority or by precedent. Innocent XIII and Benedict XIII both called him a saint. This venerable Bishop was Bishop Cavalieri, an uncle of St. Alphonsus Ligouri. When the latter, as a young man resolved to consecrate himself to God, his father besought the Bishop to dissuade his son from his vocation, but the Bishop replied, "My dear brother-in-law, I have left the world and renounced my inheritance that I might save my soul. So, you see that I cannot persuade anyone not to follow my example. I fear that I would be damned if I were to do so." These words reveal to us the nobility of soul of a Bishop who had consecrated himself to God by the vows of religion before he had been raised to the dignity of the Episcopate.

He was an indefatigable apostle who had devoted his life to the salvation of souls. His own special devotion and the all-powerful driving force of his apostolate were Christ Crucified, the Blessed Eucharist, the Cross and the Mass. For a long time, he, too, had secretly favored the project that Paul of the Cross had planned - to found a Congregation of priests consecrated to the Passion of Christ. He knew by an interior light from heaven that God would establish such a Congregation in the Church. But who would be its Founder? Would it be himself or another? This he knew not. These were the secret thoughts of his soul when, by an admirable disposition of Divine Providence, these happenings enlightened him.

From the Kingdom of Naples unto the town of Troia, reports were noised abroad of the wonderful works accomplished by the Servants of God, Paul and John Baptist, and in particular their burning devotion to Christ Crucified and to Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. Towards these two unknown apostles of the Cross and the Tabernacle, the holy Bishop was strongly and affectionately drawn. Contemplating the good which these two apostles could accomplish for his own flock, he wrote them a letter, affectionate and impassioned, in which he besought them to come to him and to preach to his people. Before accepting the invitation of Bishop Cavalieri, the brothers thought it prudent to seek first the advice of their protector, Cardinal Cienfugos. He wrote to them on 1st August, 1724. "I am heartily in agreement with your proposed mission to the diocese of Troia, where the Bishop is a man of the highest integrity. I share the sentiments of this worthy Prelate, who is assured that God not only makes known his will by interior inspirations but at times manifests his Will by external means. I beg of you, with all my soul, to remember me always in your prayers, which are so pleasing to God. And I beg of Him, too, that He will bless you both and shower upon you His abundant graces."

Assured that they were doing the Will of God, and after they had sought the permission of the Bishop of Gaeta, who was unwilling to disappoint a Bishop of such outstanding virtue as Bishop Cavalieri, Paul and John Baptist departed for Troia. It is impossible to recount the sufferings of the brothers during this journey, undertaken as it was in the extreme heat of the month of August. John Baptist suffered from violent headaches, which afflicted him day after day, while Paul fell victim to an attack of fever. They were without food, without money; they were forced to beg for alms. But they received neither pity nor shelter. Only once did they receive any help, and that was two small coins. In spite of all these sufferings and privations, their patience and their fervor never lessened.

They could have shortened this long and painful journey by going direct to Troia, but in their piety they preferred to visit the sanctuary of Monte Gargano. They spent the night at the entrance of the miraculous cavern, which had been sanctified by the apparition of the Archangel Michael. There it was, whilst engaged in prayer that John Baptist heard these mysterious words, "*Visitabo vos in virga ferrea, et dabo vobis Spiritum Sanctum*" (I will visit you with a rod of iron, and I will give you the Holy Spirit). This was a revelation of what was awaiting them: incredible sufferings but mingled with heavenly consolations. It seemed that even from that time God had given them Saint Michael as a heavenly protector. Paul always had a great devotion to the Prince of the heavenly hosts. Towards the end of his life, the glorious Archangel appeared to him many times. One day when he appeared to Paul, shining as the sun, the Saint asked him if he would protect his soul and his Congregation, "I have always watched over you and the Congregation," the Archangel replied, "and I will never cease to do so."

Throughout this book we will see many proofs of his powerful protection and, at times, we shall see the gleam of his shining sword. Thus it is that Saint Michael is venerated as one of the principal patrons of the Congregation,

On their arrival at Troia, the Bishop received them to his arms and pressed them to his heart. His first thought was to give orders that in the palace the brothers were to be treated for their afflictions. But the Servants of Jesus Christ wasted no time before they began their exercise of devotion before the Blessed Sacrament. The holy Bishop, even though himself weighed down by infirmities, joined with them, as much as his strength would permit, in their spiritual exercises as his biographer relates. "And in addition," the biographer tells us, "the Bishop had the ineffable joy of seeing a great number of souls inflamed with love for the admirable Sacrament of the Altar."

Wishing to increase further the fruits that Paul's example alone produced, which was a sermon in itself, the Bishop entrusted to him, as other Bishops had done, the ministry of preaching. Paul, ever ready to obey the voice of Superiors and, accompanied by a companion, would go out at night and preach in the public squares and in the streets of the town. His voice penetrated the shadows of the night like the sound of thunder and awakened the sinner from his sleep of lethargy. The extraordinary results, flowing from this manner of preaching, encouraged Paul to continue the practice on missions.

At the episcopal palace, where the only decorations were pictures of the Sacred Passion, the brothers lived as though they were at home in their poor cells on the mountain of solitude. Had it been possible, they would have fasted more rigorously and practiced more severe penances, for they had before their eyes a Bishop, who shared in the sufferings of Christ Crucified, who usually took no other food than a little bread and fruit, slept upon the bare boards and treated his body with severity. Paul admired him greatly and regarded him as a saint and a soul especially dear to God. He opened his heart to him and manifested his soul to him, telling him of the inspirations that he had received from God concerning the new Institute of the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ. All this was enlightenment for the holy Bishop. Here, before him, was the Founder of the Congregation that he knew with a supernatural certitude would one day be born in the Church. Seized with prophetic rapture, like the aged Simeon in the Temple, he took Paul into his arms and sung his canticle, "This is a work entirely of

God... You will see great things... You will see the work succeed by secret and marvelous ways..." The Bishop confessed that he wished to lay down the burden of the diocese, to be one of the first to be clothed in the habit of the Passion, and that his most ardent desire would be to see founded in his own diocese the first house of this new Institute.

Paul gave him the Rules to read and begged him to examine them carefully and to make suggestions about them. After the Bishop had read them, he wrote as a foreword, "I have read with deep consolation the Rules that you submitted to me. I am filled with great longing to see them observed. The thought has occurred to me that perhaps the Savior, in this age in which He has committed the government of the Church to a saintly Vicar (Benedict XIII), who desires that the hierarchy be restored to its pristine honor and dignity, the thought has occurred to me, I say, that the Savior, through your work and that of those whom He has predestined to be your followers, wills that His cause and the fervent zeal of the One who holds His place upon earth be manifested before all men."

From this time, the Bishop looked upon Paul as his superior. He admired his rare wisdom and opened to him his heart and soul, giving an account of his prayer and the lights that he had received from God; in a word, he laid bare before the Servant of God his whole life. These two great souls harmonized together; they were as two harps resounding under the gentle touch of the Holy Spirit.

The holy Bishop pressed the brothers to receive Holy Orders, saying that such was the Will of God. This had been manifested to a person of great virtue whom he was directing and whom he had consulted on the matter of the new Congregation. "They will have," related this holy soul, "a great number of companions who will propagate the glory of Christ Crucified." Were it not for the poor state of his health, the Bishop would have made a journey to Rome and laid before the Vicar of Christ the plan and object of the new Institute that the Pope, Benedict XIII, might grant it approbation.

It was the Holy Year of 1725. Paul entertained the idea of making a pilgrimage to Rome to gain the Jubilee Indulgences and at the same time to cast himself at the feet of His Holiness the Pope. The Bishop did all within his power to prepare the way for the establishing of the Congregation. "He encouraged," says his biographer, "these two holy brothers in their ideals, recommended them to make the journey to Rome and seek the approbation of the Holy See upon their work. He provided them with letters of recommendation to many of the Cardinals and other personages of the Roman court."

The separation of these three souls was a sad one for all, united as they were by the closest bonds of charity. For six months they had been together. During that time they had served and praised God, living lives of sacrifice, as victims of love for the glory of the Crucified. But alas, they were never again to see each other on earth. Of this the holy Bishop had a sad presentiment. With tears in his eyes and sorrow in his heart, he bade them farewell and gave them his blessing. The brothers faced the long and arduous journey to Rome.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AUDIENCE WITH BENEDICT XIII - RETURN TO GAETA - THE SANCTUARY OF OUR LADY OF THE CITY – DEATH OF BISHOP CAVALIERI - RETURN TO ROME -THE HOSPICE OF SAINT GALLICAN

1725 - 1727

The brothers' first thought on their arrival in Rome was to visit the tomb of the Prince of Apostles. Before his tomb they prayed fervently. A Canon of Saint Peter's, who later became a Cardinal, Bishop Marcellus Crescenzi, was deeply impressed by their modesty, their recollection and their poverty of dress. He felt himself interiorly impelled to ask who they were, where they came from and what reason brought them to Rome. Paul explained the object of the Institute of the Passion and confessed that he had come to Rome for the express purpose of seeking approbation for the new Institute from the Sovereign Pontiff.

The Prelate perceived in the reply of the Saint humility of spirit and a maturity of judgment, and from that moment until his death he held the Saint in the highest esteem and looked upon him with the deepest affection. Many years later in a letter to Paul he recalled the circumstances of their first meeting. "I love to remind you," he says, "that our friendship began in the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Jubilee Year of 1725. I was a Canon there. When I first saw you and your brother, clothed as penitents, bare-footed, praying before the tomb of the Holy Apostles, I felt a strong desire to speak to you. I wished to know who you were and what was your vocation; thus it was that I asked you so many questions. And thus began our friendship. Later, you were presented to Cardinal Corradini, who became Benedict XIII of holy memory and who raised you to the priesthood. The origin of so grand a work was, then, your visit to the sanctuaries of Rome in your penitential habit."

From that day, as he himself relates, the Prelate never ceased to act as Paul's protector and to assist him in his holy work. He presented the brothers to Cardinal Corradini, who also treated them as his friends. This eminent personage of deep learning, with a heart of zeal and charity, a true father of the poor, realized the treasures of virtue that enriched the souls of these humble servants of Jesus Christ. He considered it a privilege to use his influence on their behalf.

The words of prophecy of Bishop Cavalieri were already beginning to be fulfilled, "The new Institute is entirely the work of God; it will come to light by secret and wonderful ways." We see two dignitaries, whom Paul did not even know, become the first instruments of Divine Providence in fulfilling His plans. Even greater things will be revealed later. They spoke to Benedict XIII about the brothers. The Pope was so kindly disposed toward them that he willingly granted them an audience in Saint Mary in Navicella.

The great day at last dawned; the day that Paul had longed for and prayed for; the day when he could prostrate himself at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, whose word alone would be sufficient to execute the designs revealed to him by God. It was early in the

morning when the two brothers arrived at the Church of Saint Mary in Navicella. There, they waited tremulously the solemn moment of their audience with the Holy Father. The Pope entered; they were presented to him, and through the eyes of faith they saw Jesus Christ Himself enter. They fell upon their knees and kissed his feet. Paul, as he related afterwards, was speechless; he could not utter a word; every thought had completely vanished from his mind. His profound veneration for the Vicar of Christ held him dumb and confused. But, reassured by the kindly words of the Holy Father, he regained his composure and outlined briefly the plan of the Institute of the Passion and then asked permission to gather companions for this holy work. The Sovereign Pontiff listened to Paul with paternal kindness. And Paul's demeanor, his words, confirmed the high regard he already had of the Servant of God due to the recommendations of Cardinal Corradini and Bishop Crescenzi. Without hesitation he granted to Paul, "*vivae vocis oraculo*", all that he sought.

In the Jubilee Year of 1725, a year of indulgence and pardon, the first approbation of Apostolic authority for the Institute of the Most Holy Cross and Passion was granted, an event truly memorable in the annals of the Institute because it recalls a blessing so long awaited and so ardently desired.

The brothers, Paul and John Baptist, sung a canticle of thanksgiving to Almighty God, to the holy Apostles and to the martyrs of the Eternal City. Then they returned to Gaeta.

They immediately made the news known to the Bishop of Troia, who rejoiced at the good tidings. It compensated him for the sadness he had born at being separated from his 'dear brothers', as he loved to call them. To them he replied, "Oh, how glad I am that you are able, with God's blessing upon you, to gather around you generous souls who are willing to imitate your way of life. I am not envious but '*aemulor Dei aemulatione*'; I am jealous with a holy jealousy of the Bishop of Gaeta who is privileged to have you in his Diocese but always '*in spem contra spem spero et confido*.'

What were his hopes? They were clearly seen in one of his letters. "If I might have the temerity to express my thought, I hope and I am confident that I will see in my diocese, before I die, some of your religious, provided that my sins are not an obstacle to this blessing." The holy Bishop had many searches instituted and many inquiries made for a suitable place for a foundation. In this new foundation, together with a priest who was disposed to accompany him, he wished to end his days, clothed in the habit of the Passion. In solitude he would dedicate his life to prayer, to penance and to spreading devotion to Christ Crucified. Paul would most willingly have granted him the consolation he sought of retiring amongst them and becoming one of his first followers, but very strong ties bound him to Gaeta, where, in the hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain, the setting was ideal for acquiring the spirit of the Institute. To this secluded spot disciples were beginning to come, who were desirous of consecrating themselves to the Passion of Christ. The first among these was a priest whom we only know by the mention made of him in the letters of Cavalieri, and then Ricinelli, the cleric of whom we have already spoken. Ricinelli kept the religious observance with the servants of Jesus Christ and so ardent was his fervor that he imitated their practices of penance. He was determined to remain always with them and longed for the day when he, too, would wear the habit. Now that the small family was constituted, Paul, to express the spirit proper to the Institute, which is solitude, called the

hermitage a 'Retreat'. By word and by example, Paul formed in solitude his first sons and inspired them to the imitation of the virtues of Christ Crucified.

It was at this time that a divine knowledge, a divine light, revealed to the Saint with a greater brilliance than on former occasions, the hidden secrets of souls and the knowledge of future happenings. The gift of prophecy was another divine gift that added another ray of glory of his sanctity.

A young woman about to be married (espoused) detached herself from the things of this world and seemed to spend the whole day in prayer. It was thought that she was favored with many heavenly consolations. It was even believed by some that the Blessed Virgin appeared to her and spoke with her. But one day this woman had a conference with Paul. Here was an opportunity to examine at close hand the reality of the spiritual graces attributed to her. It did not take Paul very long to discover that the unfortunate woman was being deceived by the devil. With paternal charity he told her that she was being deceived by the devil and traced out for her the real path of Christian perfection. The feeling of disappointment was general. But soon, however, this imaginary sanctity was recognized by all, and the truth of the judgment of the man of God shone forth with great acclaim.

There were some women who were anxiously awaiting the return of husbands from sea. Since they had received no word of them or from them for a long time, they believed that they had been shipwrecked. Tormented by anxiety, they came to the Saint seeking consolation and hope. Paul, calmly and tranquilly, told them that they had every reason to rejoice because their husbands, for whom they had shed so many bitter tears, were quite safe. He named the place where they were at that moment and consoled them that they would return home soon, bringing with them a valuable cargo. The joy of the women knew no bounds, especially when the truth of the prophecy of the Saint was fulfilled at the safe arrival of their husbands.

A similar fear brought other women to the hermitage. Paul, deeply moved, told them to return in three days' time. During that time, Paul and the whole community prayed fervently to God and it was revealed to Paul the whereabouts of the sailors. When the women returned he told them that their husbands had almost been captured by the Turks, but thanks to the goodness of God, they had escaped and now they would return to port in four days. On the fourth day the ship entered the harbor. The women rushed to the anchorage and the men, greatly excited and without being asked, began to relate how only a miracle had saved them from being captured by the Turks, who had chased them for a long time. Avoiding capture, they had escaped being taken off to Barbary as slaves. The women then related their story of how the Saint had foretold all this. All went to the hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain to thank God for so great a blessing. "It is to Mary," said Paul, "that you should offer your heartfelt thanks, because it was due to her powerful intercession that you were delivered from a peril worse than death."

These and other happenings no less extraordinary brought great crowds to the hermitage. The honor bestowed upon the religious and the innumerable visits of the people to them disturbed the sweet repose of solitude. To escape the acclaim of men, they decided to withdraw to a sanctuary called Our Lady of the City, situated in the Itri upon the highest summit of the mountain, the north of which borders the boundary of Gaeta.

Paul had to beg the permission of the Bishop to leave. He set out to serve, amid undisturbed peace, Jesus Crucified, close to the priests who guarded the sanctuary. John Baptist and Ricinelli accompanied him; the other novice had left the ranks of the new soldiers of the Cross. They had travelled seven miles before they arrived at the mountain, rugged and steep. They began the lofty ascent, and after a laborious climb they gazed upon the sanctuary nestling in a forest of gnarled oaks, which surrounded it on every side as a crown. Through the woods wound a winding path and within its folds were small chapels in which had been erected the Stations of the Cross. The church at this particular time, although very small, offered peace and recollection, and thus right from the first they were attracted to it. It had first been built beside a magnificent old oak which today rises behind the high altar, and which bears the image of the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus, the same image as that which was found upon the ancient tree, as tradition tells us.

In the depths of this profound peace, the servants of Jesus Christ were able to enjoy more freely the fruits of solitude, and they devoted themselves with an increased fervor to the contemplation of heavenly things. The chants of divine praise and the holiness of their lives sanctified this chosen spot, hallowed by the years and sanctified by divine worship.

They chose for their spiritual director, Dom Erasmus Tuccinardi. The new director, though he moderated the rigor of their penances, tested the solidity of their virtue that they might, without hindrance, run in the way of perfection. He took from Paul a discipline covered with blood, made of seven thongs of cord. At the extremity of each cord were leaden ball with six sharp points. He treasured it always as a precious relic. Quite often he made the brothers perform acts of heroic penance. He ordered them, for example, to carry huge logs of wood hewn in the depths of the forest. With a holy cheerfulness they raised the logs on to their shoulders and barefooted, as always, carried them along unmade, rough paths. Though overwhelmed with weariness and bathed in sweat, they performed their tasks with a holy obedience.

Sanctity has an irresistible attraction. The saints have fled the world into the barren depths of the desert, yet the world is determined to follow them. Soon, however, numerous pilgrims, desiring to see and hear the apostle of the Passion, climbed the steep slopes of the mountain. Paul, ever ready to leave God for God, received them with the amiability of the saints and inspired in the hearts of all devotion to Christ Crucified.

The two brothers, more united by the bonds of the spirit than by the ties of flesh, strove with a holy envy to surpass each other in the flight towards perfection. They had agreed to act as a guide for each other. One day some pious women called on Paul, who in speaking with them of spiritual matters, was so overcome with the ardor at divine love that the fire burning within his heart was reflected upon his countenance. He began to relate in all simplicity some of the graces that he had received from God. At that moment, John Baptist entered the room. As though surprised at this fault, he said in a severe tone of voice, "Ah, Paul, Paul! So this is your practice." Immediately breaking off the narrative and bowing his head in humility, the servant of God left them all to go to the church. This incident edified all those present.

Another time, in the presence of an ecclesiastical dignitary, John Baptist contradicted his brother in a matter of small importance. Paul, however, defended himself, but immediately perceiving his fault fell upon his knees and begged his brother's pardon.

They had scarcely spent two months in this sanctuary when they received word of the death of Bishop Cavalieri. After he had written the letter, which we have already quoted, the venerable Bishop, still wishing to found a retreat, entrusted to Father Crivelli, a religious of the Society of Jesus, the task of inspecting several sites and reporting to him on the one which he deemed most suitable. The Bishop wrote to the servants of God about his plans and expressed the hope that he would soon see them established in this place. "Chosen," he said, "by such a great man of God as Father Crivelli." But the Master thought the holy desires of his servant were pleasing to him, willed nevertheless to deliver him from the weariness of exile and take him to the eternal peace of his true home, Heaven. The holy Bishop was prepared for his approaching death by a divine warning. Shortly before he fell ill, he said with assurance, "I am soon to die...I am soon to leave this tabernacle of my body. One thing I have sought from God, and this alone will I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord through his mercy." He became seriously ill during first vespers of the patron feasts of the Cathedral, 19th July, 1726, and was soon at the point of death. Desiring to die in the Wounds of the Savior, he begged Bishop Ligouri, Bishop of Lucera, his intimate friend, to come to his assistance and to place upon his lips at the last moment of his earthly life the image of the Redeemer. During the last agony he was at peace; his friend, weeping over the loss of this great Bishop, offered him the Crucifix and suggested the last prayer, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The dying Bishop repeated these words with great effort and kissed with sentiments of profound love the image of Christ Crucified. He was heard to whisper the words, "My God and my all. Thus this chosen and blessed soul went forth to Heaven with the Divine Victim who would open for him the gates of paradise. It was 11th August, 1726.

At the moment of his death, relates the Saint, a servant of God while at prayer saw this holy soul take its place among the blessed in Heaven. Prostrate before the throne of the most Holy Trinity, this soul, after the first rapture of beatific love, pleaded with God for the establishment and the advancement of the Congregation of the Passion. The Divine Redeemer assured him that the petition would be heard. This servant of God was Paul himself, as witnesses at the Processes testified. Although the Saint was deprived on earth of an affectionate friend who had greatly desired it the glory of this lowly Institute, yet he had gained a powerful advocate in Heaven; his tears of sorrow became tears of joy. As love of Christ Crucified had united these two holy souls - Paul and Bishop de Cavalieri - so that there seemed to be but one soul in two bodies, the Passionists, the sons of Paul, would be able to call themselves the sons of this noble Bishop, and always regard him as one of their first fathers and recall with gratitude and love the remembrance of his work for the Congregation.

With the death of Bishop Cavalieri, Paul's hopes of establishing a retreat in the Kingdom of Naples vanished. This was one of the reasons why Paul set out for Rome. In the Eternal City religious Institutes, like seeds planted in their native soil, germinate quickly, send forth flourishing shoots and bring forth abundant fruit. Nevertheless, the Servant of God continues to live completely resigned to the will of God and to await the guidance of the Holy Spirit. On 14th September he left the sanctuary of Our Lady of the City with his brother and Ricinelli and set out for Gaeta, where he first sought the blessing of the Bishop before embarking for Rome.

We have seen the workings of Divine Providence in the foundation of the Institute. Illustrious and devoted patrons had been raised up for Paul, even amongst those in high authority. One of the most eminent, and the glory of the Roman purple by his charity towards the poor, was Cardinal Corradini. His life was devoted to the poor and the needy. With the assistance of a priest inspired by his charity, Dom Aemilius Lami, the Cardinal had obtained a house where he provided for a number of the poor, among these were lepers and others afflicted with equally hideous diseases. The priest cared for the wounds of the sick with a gentle kindness and with a still greater solicitude provided for the needs of their souls by instructing them in Christian doctrine. The Cardinal was not content merely to provide the house and to stand by and watch the heroic work of charity of others. He went even further. With money that he himself provided, together with what he obtained from the nobility of Rome, he was able to expand the scope of his work, and the small house grew into a small hospice, liberally endowed, which could accommodate forty or fifty. He visited the sick often. One day a close friend of the Cardinal visited the Hospice, another Cardinal, Vincent Orsini, Bishop of Benevento, who also showed a tender compassion towards the suffering children of Jesus Christ.

Such was the humble beginnings of the Hospice of Saint Gallican. Benedict XIII, formerly Cardinal Orsini, after his election to the Papacy, ordered a new Hospice to be built at the foot of the Janiculum Hill. At his time Paul and his companions came to Rome. Cardinal Corradini, whom the Pope had appointed as Protector of the Hospice, considered the arrival of Paul as providential, as sent by God to assist him in this work. He hastened to seek their co-operation. But this was not the vocation of the Saint. Would this not be to restrict to narrow confines the charity that surged within his soul, a charity that embraced the needs of the whole world? Had not God called him to be a universal physician towards the miseries of all mankind. But it is necessary for the apostle to see at close hand every kind of human affliction and to heal all, and it is in a hospital that he would gain this experience, for there one encounters degradation of soul as well as misery of body.

Paul understood all this and wholeheartedly agreed to the wishes of the Cardinal, for he was convinced that devotedness to the sick would in time bring down a special blessing upon the Institute.

God in solemn words has promised to test the faith of his servants. Ricinelli fell ill and was compelled to return to his native climate. Paul, who loved him as a son, was deeply afflicted at his departure, but consoled at the thought that he would soon return. Later, when this fervent novice desired to return to Paul at Monte Argentario, his mother, now advanced in years, kept him at her side at Gaeta. There he was ordained to the priesthood and was able later to testify on oath to the virtues of the Saint.

When the new building of the Hospice had been completed and the Chapel consecrated by the Sovereign Pontiff himself, the solemn opening took place on 8th October, 1726. A touching sight that would have astonished the Caesars of pagan Rome! The procession was far more glorious than the processions of Roman victors dragging behind their chariots captives in chains. Here, it is the suffering ones whose pains have been sanctified by Calvary who are the victors. The procession moved slowly, the sick and the crippled in carts, or carried upon their beds, or supported in the arms of others. At the head was John Baptist, bearing the royal standard of the Cross, followed by Paul, the priests and the Cardinals

singing hymns. The triumphal parade escorted to the palace of charity the poor, the sick, the crippled, the young and the old, those whom the Patricians of ancient Rome would have thrown into their fish ponds to fatten the lampreys.

The brothers devoted themselves to this work and saw in the sick the person of Jesus Christ Himself, according to the expression of the Saint. With gentle charity and paternal compassion, they taught them the truths of faith, disposed them for the sacraments and encouraged them to use their suffering as a means of sanctification, as well as attending to their bodily needs. Among other holy practices that Paul established was that of General Communion. He prepared them for this by a small retreat, and immediately before Holy Communion preached to them with words that enflamed their hearts with divine love.

The zeal of the brothers extended to the infirmarians; they taught them the secret of changing into treasures of merits their noble fatigue and weariness borne for charity and encouraged them to the practice of virtue. The Cardinal Protector had told them that they were to be vigilant and to see that the sick were not neglected in any way, nor that any unbecoming custom was introduced that could cause the ruin of even the holiest of works.

Very often to fulfill one's duty means to arouse opposition; and charity would have far too much charm if it had too much recognition. Consequently, abuse was the price that the brothers had to pay for their devotion to duty. In return they answered by silence and peace. "Happy," said Pau, "to have the opportunity of mortifying ourselves and of learning contempt of self." The persecution launched against them affected them but little, providing that the interests of the sick were in no way neglected. The more the brothers themselves had to suffer, the more they rejoiced. "We have here," writes the Saint, "a vine of inestimable value, or rather I should say the burning furnace of charity... May God be blessed." If Our Divine Lord would not allow a cup of cold water given in His name to go unrewarded, what then would be the blessings of heaven upon their many and great sacrifices. Already the Hospice has become a mount of sanctification and a veritable school of Calvary where they have learnt to love and to imitate Jesus Crucified. And when the sick went forth from the Hospice, cured of their infirmities, they went with a mind enlightened on heavenly things so that it seemed, according to a report of this particular time, they were coming from a retreat.

Paul and John Baptist had chosen for their spiritual director the prior of the Hospice, Dom Aemilius Lami, who although he recognized and admired the solid virtue of the brothers, yet wanted their virtue proved. On one occasion he set out for their use serviettes that had been used and soiled by the hands and the lips of those afflicted with disease. On another occasion, when the Marchioness de Vasto visited the Hospice, the Prior said to her, "Soon, you will see how virtue is practiced here." Calling Paul and John Baptist under some specious pretext, he severely reprimanded them before the Marchioness. Falling upon their knees before him, they appeared as though they deserved the reprimand and listened in silence; rising to their feet, they kissed the hand of the Prior and humbly withdrew, to the great edification of the visitor. It was because of their heroic virtue that the Prior loved the brothers so tenderly and affectionately and often repeated that they were the most precious treasures the Hospice possessed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BROTHERS ARE ORDAINED PRIESTS BY BENEDICT XIII - THE MASS OF THE SAINT - DEATH OF THEIR FATHER - LAST JOURNEY TO CASTELLAZZO - RETURN TO ROME - THEY LEAVE THE HOSPICE OF SAINT GALLICAN

1727 - 1728

Cardinal Corradini, the Superior of the Hospice, showed a special veneration and an affectionate solicitude for the servants of Jesus Christ. He admired the zeal with which they attended the sick and thought that there would be wider scope for their zeal if they were priests. But Paul and John Baptist, although they had been advised that such was the will of God, would never have dared themselves to aspire to the sublime dignity of the priesthood, so fully penetrated were they of its divine excellence.

The Cardinal called for the brothers and spoke of his desire. To their humility, he imposed his authority as superior and commanded them by virtue of holy obedience to prepare themselves for the reception of Holy Orders. He wrote himself to their Bishop, Msgr. de Gattinara of Alessandria, for dimissorial letters. This was the Bishop who had clothed them in the black habit of the Passion. The brothers' sole thought from this time was to prepare themselves with the fervor of the saints for ordination.

Instructed in solitude upon the great mysteries of faith, nourished by the Holy Scriptures, it only remained for them to study Theology, which was essential for carrying out their priestly duties. They applied themselves diligently to this study under the direction of Father Dominic Mary at Rome, a Franciscan religious and priest of Saint Bartholomew's of Tiber Isle. They received Tonsure from the hands of Bishop Baccari, Vice-Gerent, in the private oratory on 6th February, 1727, and Minor Orders on 23rd of February. On the 12th of April, a Friday, after a retreat in the Jesuit Novitiate of Saint Andrew of Monte Cavallo, they were ordained Subdeacons in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, and Deacons on 1st May - *extra tempore* by apostolic dispensation, after making their retreat in the house of the Lazarist Fathers at Monte Citorio.

On 7th June of the same year, the Friday of Quarter Tense in Pentecost, they were ordained to the priesthood in the Vatican Basilica by Pope Benedict XIII. At the moment of sharing in the eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ, their faces were radiant and the heart of the Pope himself overflowed with joy. When Paul was kneeling before him, he pronounced the solemn words in a voice throbbing with emotion, "*Accipe Spiritum Sanctum*" (Receive you the Holy Spirit), placed his hands firmly upon his head, rejoined them before his breast and, with words pregnant with emotion, added, "*Deo Gratias.*" Those last words are not part of the Roman Pontifical. Undoubtedly, the Spirit of God used his heart and his lips to render thanks to the Most High for having ordained a Saint, who a century later, in the very same Basilica, will be enrolled among the Saints. (Pius IX, who always had a special devotion to Saint Paul of the Cross, by a delicate gesture published the decree for canonization on 4th October, 1866, in the same chapel of the Vatican where the Saint was ordained priest.)

After the ceremony the Pope held an audience with the brothers, asked them many questions to which Paul replied with graciousness and reverence.

Paul is now a priest. He will take into his own hands the Blood of Calvary; he will offer the Holy and Immaculate Victim. What will be his fervor? How great will be his transports of joy and the intensity of divine rapture?

During his first Holy Mass, offered by hands so pure and spotless, the Divine Goodness lavishes such favors on this chosen soul that many years later even the recollection of that day brought tears of joy to his eyes. We do not know what the divine touch in the soul of Paul was on this day. But this we do know. On the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, he had a vision, and every circumstance leads us to associate it with his first Mass. It took place after he had celebrated Mass and was allowing his soul to express its sentiments by a fervent thanksgiving. Ravished in spirit, he heard the angels in emulation of each other singing, "In heaven. In heaven." A ray of divine light, penetrating into the depths of his soul, revealed to him the glory of the kingdom of heaven. Overwhelmed with delight, he saw the choirs of the saints, the hierarchy of Angels, the Queen of Heaven, enthroned higher than the Blessed by the radiance of her glory. He cried out, "Ah, what a vision..." one day when relating this vision. He also saw the source of all light which illumines the heavenly Kingdom, the Sacred Humanity of the Incarnate Word. It was also given to him to contemplate, in the midst of an ocean of light, the august Trinity, not as it is in Itself but in a "dark manner"; he penetrated so profoundly into the knowledge of the Infinite perfections of God, that he could say, "Oh, what sublime conceptions I have of the Power, the Wisdom, the Goodness and the other attributes of God. ...Depth immeasurable. ...Words cannot express it. ...The mind cannot conceive it." And last, the Holy Spirit showed him, among the abode of the Blessed, the brilliant throne prepared for him from the beginning of the world. With this, the vision ended; it had lasted for an hour and a half.

Who can realize the faith and the love of the Saint as he was about to say Mass. Although profoundly recollected in the holy mysteries, he nevertheless observed the rubrics minutely; for him nothing was of little importance in the worship of God. Little by little his countenance would glow and the tears would flow copiously from his eyes until the altar cloths were saturated. After many long years, his tears ceased to be so abundant, especially during the period of desolation and aridity. Then, they would flow only after the consecration.

What was the mysterious source of these tears? He revealed it later to his Religious Nuns and also to priests, "Accompany Jesus Christ in His Passion and in His Death; for the Mass is the sacrifice of the Cross renewed upon the altar. Before you celebrate Holy Mass, clothe yourself with the suffering of Jesus Crucified and carry to the altar the needs of the whole world." Our Saint pictured himself on Calvary at the foot of the Cross with the Mother of Sorrows and the Beloved Disciple, Saint John. He believed he could see Jesus Christ in His agony, suffering desolation and exhaustion for love of us. From this flowed those abundant tears, true blood of the soul, which he mingled with the Precious Blood and offered to the Eternal Father to appease Divine Justice and to draw down upon all mankind Infinite Mercy. The clothing of oneself with the sufferings of

Christ Crucified, before saying Mass, was a counsel he had more than a right to recommend, for he practiced it always throughout the whole of his life.

He would scourge his flesh with a discipline armed with sharp points and afterwards contemplate for a long time the sorrowful Passion of Jesus Christ; then, having united himself in body as well as in soul with the sufferings of the Divine Redeemer, he would go to the altar. After Mass was finished, he would retire to a solitary place, unseen by others, to express his love and gratitude to Almighty God.

He strongly recommended this kind of preparation and thanksgiving to his Religions. Commenting on these words of the Gospel, "*coenaculum stratum*", he said that this cenacle is the heart of a priest, in which purity should always shine forth and which should be aflame with faith and charity. He compared the heart of a priest to the sepulcher of Jesus Christ, a virginal sepulcher, in which no man had yet been laid. "It should be," he continued, "spotless and animated by a living faith, an unbounded confidence, a burning charity and a lively desire for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls." Solicitous for the perfect observance of the sacred rubrics, he corrected even the slightest fault, and was ever vigilant over the cleanliness of the sacred vestments, vessels and altar linen. "Everything pertaining to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," he repeated often, "should be worthy of the Divine Sacrifice, very clean, very neat and spotless."

More than once Our Divine Lord deigned to show, by a supernatural favor, how pleasing to Him was the Sacrifice which the Servant of God offered. In the Church of Saint Lucy at Corneto, Paul celebrated Mass, which was served by a person of nobility, Dominic Constantini. Shortly before the consecration, a little cloud of smoke, similar to that of incense, spread around the altar, and the sanctuary was filled with a fragrance unlike any earthly perfume. At this moment the Saint was raised from the altar about two palms. After the ecstasy had passed, he continued with the Mass and consecrated the bread and wine. Then, in the midst of this supernatural fragrance, with arms extended, he was raised again. All spoke of him as a Seraph at prayer. Amazed and overcome with this experience, Dominic Constantini returned home and related all that he had seen, glorifying God who is wonderful in his saints.

We now return with the Saint to the Hospice of Saint Gallican.

The two newly ordained priests, animated with a new spirit, employed themselves with an ever increasing zeal to the work of attending the sick and of providing for their spiritual needs. Still under the direction of the priest of Saint Bartholomew's, they continued their studies of Theology and Sacred Scripture. As priests, edification of others by example was not sufficient; they must instruct them upon the truths of faith and refute errors; they must be in the house of God "a shining and a brilliant light." John Baptist attained a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, and Paul acquired the art of eloquence that makes apostles powerful in word.

At this time they received an unexpected visitor. Their parents had not heard of them or from them for a long time and sent their brother Joseph to Rome. Joseph had great difficulty in locating them. Exhausted after his long and arduous journey, he fell victim to

the fever which caused him acute distress. With the pain becoming unbearable, he turned to his brother, standing at his side, and asked, "Father Paul, put your hand upon my head." Joseph was convinced that he could be cured by the intercession of his brother. But Paul, reading his thoughts, told him he should rather commend himself to God in whom alone we should have confidence. But yielding to the insistent pleas of his sick brother, he fell upon his knees, saying, "Well, then, have faith. A priest has the power to raise the dead to life." And laying his hand upon his head, he repeated the words from the Gospel, "They laid their hands upon the sick and they were healed." As soon as the Saint had spoken these words, the patient fell into a deep, restful sleep for more than two hours. Upon awakening the fever had left him.

On his return home, Joseph brought great consolation to all by the tidings that he had of the brothers.

But alas! Only too soon was joy to yield to grief; their father, Luca Danei, was dying. The aged father had been accidentally knocked over and fell heavily - a fatal fall. His first thought was to impress on his family not to harbor any feelings of resentment against the one who was the involuntary cause of his death. As for himself, he was completely resigned to the Will of God. He received the Last Sacraments, blessed his grief-stricken family, imploring of God a special blessing for his beloved wife. Anna Danei, with the fortitude that faith alone can supply at the hour of sacrifice, knelt by the bedside of her dying husband, recommending to God with prayers and tear the soul of him who would precede her into eternity. Thus passed away, in the embrace of Christ, a true model of a Christian soul, a father whose virtues had merited a saintly son. The sad news of death reached Rome on 16th August, 1727.

Austerity of life does not deprive the heart of feelings; on the contrary, it renders more affectionate and more loving because it has been purified in the fires of sacrifice; and the love of God conjoined to filial piety manifests a greater delicacy of feeling and sentiment than natural love alone can show. Saddened by the news, Paul and John Baptist wished to offer their heartfelt sympathy to their bereaved mother. She was now alone, deprived of her life-long companion and upon her shoulders fell the heavy responsibility of supporting a large family. How deep was her grief! The compassionate and understanding heart of Paul realized that a letter was not the best means of consoling one so heavily afflicted. But he had no alternative. Had he been free, he would have rushed to her side at once. But, as he had to wait, he wrote on the day he received the news, a letter in which was mingled the sadness of heart of a sorrowing son and the unfailing hope of a Saint:

"Live Jesus!

"Our Beloved Mother,

"Our sorrow is deeper than words at the news of the death of our father, a sorrow the deeper because we are not aware of the circumstances of his death. Ah, yes, we too have adored the most holy Will of God. We beg our Divine Lord to console us all in this hour of trial. Dear and venerable mother, rejoice, for our father is in heaven; of that we have the greatest confidence. Let the entire family share in your joy. I cannot write anything more. I will only say that we will hurry to you as soon as possible to render you every assistance for the glory of God. We only received your letter today, and now we

are going to seek permission to go to your side. We will consider what the best thing to do is. Then we will leave at once. We hope that it will be at the beginning of September.

“Pray for us. Tomorrow and the following mornings we will offer Holy Mass for the happy repose of the soul of our father.

“Your very affectionate servants and sons,

“Paul and John Baptist

“ROME,

“16th August, 1727”

This is the language of the saints. The heart is sad but faith adores and hope rises high by a ray of heavenly light. The first blow of sorrow is a crushing blow: the sons, sad at heart, had not the strength to speak about it. They will hasten to their mother; there, they will weep with her and encourage her to direct all to the glory of God and for the peace of the family. The son himself also has need of prayers, and these he asks of his mother. The priest will bear his sorrow with him to the altar, and there he will wash the departed soul of a father, so tenderly loved, in the Blood of the Lamb.

The Saint obtained permission from Cardinal Corradini and then set out with his brother. The journey took two months, long and fraught with hardships. When they arrived at Castellazzo, they were sick with the fever. Paul was too sick even to say Mass, and of this consolation he was deprived for eighteen days. Their presence was a great consolation to the mother.

They were not content merely to advise how the family matters should be put in order; they were more concerned with spiritual matters. Their words inspired in her that peace which can be gained even during times of trials. In December, before beginning their return to Rome, they repeated their holy counsels to their brothers and sisters, exhorting them to be constant in the practice of virtue and faithful in the service of God. Then, departing in the midst of the tears of all and the benediction of their saintly mother, they set out for Genoa to take a ship to Rome.

This was the last visit of the Saint to his home. Although he never returned there again, his solicitude for his family never lessened. His love for them was inspired by higher motives than those of flesh and blood; he had ever in mind their sanctification in that state of life in which it had pleased Providence to place them. Many years later the mother, whom we have already seen to be a soul of extraordinary piety, passed to her eternal reward. The Danei family, who never regained the fortune they had lost, found themselves in great difficulties. Paul could have obtained aid for them liberally by a two-fold title: that of Founder and because of the many and wealthy relations he had. But he had only the one desire; that his brothers and sisters imitate Jesus in His poverty and follow Him along that certain way, the way of Calvary. He exhorted them to love poverty and privation, just as a mother encourages her child to walk along a painful road, but one that leads to health and to life.

“Believe me, my beloveds,” he writes to them, “you are the most fortunate in the world; poor in the things of this life, you are rich in faith, and you will possess the treasures of eternity. Do you know why God permits you to be afflicted by so many miseries and lays heavy burdens upon your shoulders? Because He wishes you to be rich for heaven; by

this means he assures you of your eternal salvation. Suffering is only a passing thing and lasts but for a moment; but the happiness of heaven is everlasting. Tell me what would be your wishes were you to die this very minute? Would you wish that you had possessed untold wealth, which ordinarily speaking, leads to sin, and then to be cast into hell? Or rather, to have lived a life of poverty, as you have already done, and then to enter into the joys of heaven? Courage then. Courage. God, you may be sure, will never abandon you; He will always provide for you what is necessary.”

This is true love. This is the manner in which parents should be loved in God to help them to sanctify themselves in their state in life.

Paul was also concerned about the progress in virtue by his sisters and of the dangers surrounding them in the world. Their mother was no longer there to sustain them. He spoke of her, proposed her as a model of virtue, and recommended them to pray often, to remain in solitude, to be modest and to keep a guard over their heart and to fortify it by the practices of religion, which is the surest defense of Christian womanhood.

He wrote to the brother Joseph, whom he had cured by a miracle in Rome:

“My dear Joseph,

“I recommend to you most earnestly the care of our good sister. They should remember that they are more obliged than others to give good example and to sanctify themselves according to the recommendations I gave them when I was with them and that I sent to them in my letters.

“Let them live a retired life, fulfill their duties faithfully, be diligent at prayer and receive the Sacraments frequently. Above all, let them beware of the frequent visits of strange women to the home, no matter who they might be; though they might think that they are pious and holy, if they are too friendly and confide in any woman... Our Divine Lord, Our Blessed Lady, the Angels, the Saints, these are the real confidants of the soul. As for men, let them fly from them, as the Angel said to Saint Arsenius. I have the greatest confidence that our good sisters will become saints and will be an example to others.

“I know of poor people, living in the world, who accomplish great things for God, who never omit prayer, although they are heavily burdened, poor in earthly possessions and delicate in health. May they always be happy. May they know the truth, and may they escape the delusions of the world which surrounds them on every side.”

By his counsels and by his prayers, Paul sought to maintain in the Danei family the ancient traditions of faith and of piety,

One of his sisters, Teresa, the one who used to watch the secret penances of Paul and John Baptist, was venerated in Castellazzo as a saint. A virgin beloved of God, she walked in the footsteps of her holy brother and like him patiently endured constant pain. At one time she was ill in bed with the fever and suffered greatly. Paul, who loved this sister deeply, was at one of the Convents in the Papal States, many miles away, when one night Teresa believed that she saw him in a dream, clothed in the habit of the Passion and with a violet stole around his neck. Looking upon her with tender affection,

Paul blessed her. At this moment she awoke. The vision had vanished and, to her surprise, the fever had left her.

We have made this digression whilst the brothers were on the boat to Rome. They arrived at the Hospice of Saint Gallican in January 1726. But God was soon to call them elsewhere. They had been put to the test; the apostles are formed by charity, humility and patience; the hour has come when they will begin to tread the true path of their predestination, the path of a great apostolic vocation.

Paul and his brother had willingly hidden themselves from the sight of men in the obscurity of a hospital. Christian zeal seeks the shadow rather than the light, silence rather than the din of the world.

But how would God lead them to fulfill His plans? Paul is enchained by obedience, even by vow, to the beds of the dying. It seems that he has forgotten the promise God made to him about the foundation of the Institute. No, Paul has not forgotten. But as the just man lives by faith, Paul walked blindly along the path where God was guiding him, knowing that the works of God are secret and mysterious. God, by an unexpected happening, called the brothers from Saint Gallican to Monte Argentario, where the Congregation would make a small hut a fruitful beginning.

Paul and John Baptist fell ill; fever had sapped their strength and reduced their zeal to helplessness; Paul struggled heroically, but in vain, to remain faithful to his duties. He had to yield. The doctors feared that the brothers would fall victims to an incurable disease if they continued to breathe the unhealthy and fetid air of the hospital.

Cardinal Corradini was very concerned over this unfortunate occurrence. But an inspiration from heaven revealed to him the hand of God, who willed them to preach Christ Crucified. He delayed no longer. After discussing the matter with Bishop Crescenzi, he resolved not only not to place any obstacle in their way but to advance their work by every means in his power. He obtained from the Sovereign Pontiff a dispensation from their vow to serve the sick and also permission for them to celebrate Mass for one year until they had obtained a benefice, which the Cardinal intended to obtain for them as soon as possible. He called the brothers and on behalf of the sick expressed regret that their tender charity and untiring zeal must be spent in other fields. Finally, he told them that they were now free to obey the inspirations of God.

During the time of their testing, Paul had heard an interior voice saying to him, "To Monte Argentario. To Monte Argentario." At the same time an irresistible urge pressed him to pursue the work of the foundation of the new Congregation. He related this one day to a venerable priest. "When the Lord wishes some work to be accomplished for His glory, He never ceases to spur us on until the work is complete. I went to hide myself in the hospital of Saint Gallican, and the Lord drove me out by the force of compulsion."

Paul remembered the letter of Bishop Cavalier, of holy memory. This prelate, so well informed concerning him, had written that their work in the hospital was not according to the designs of Providence. That you should remain at Rome in the new hospice, I have the greatest difficulty in approving. I am of the opinion that this work is contrary to your

vocation and to that which the Lord has willed to reveal to you. We must hope against hope. *Propior est nostra salus quam cum credimus*. Abraham, the father of faith, at the very moment when he was about to sacrifice his son, believed that he would be the father of many believers. ...Jesus Christ, through the shame of the Cross, accomplished what was to the glory of His Father. Be constant and courageous in spite of every difficulty. I do not really know what I have written..."

The prophetic words, which the venerable Bishop wrote without comprehending their mysterious meaning and which were so accurately fulfilled, spoke divine inspiration. The ways of God are not the ways of men. He often leads the saints along those paths which, according to human prudence, are contrary to His designs for them. But in the works of God, what seems to be a fall is always a resurrection, as though His infinite power rejoices to restore the dead to life. With Paul, to whom the Lord had said, "You shall be the father of many apostles," the Lord deigned to bury in an unknown hospital and permitted him to be bound there by the vow of obedience. But Jesus Christ burst these bonds asunder through His Vicar, and Paul withdrew from Saint Gallikan, but not before he had received the powers of the Priesthood, that power which is indispensable for the fruitfulness of the apostolate, for the paternity of souls, and no less indispensable for the great work which God demanded of him. Is it not necessary that an apostle, to be fully equipped, needs the altar, the pulpit and the tribunal of penance?

The hospital, founded by the supreme authority of the Church, is also a new work. From its cradle it will attract attention, interest and universal admiration. In addition to the consecration of suffering, there will also be the consecration of holiness. For what can contribute better to this new prestige than the virtues of the Saint, who left there behind him an ineffaceable impression? Nay, more. It was there that was established the small Congregation of Clerics Hospitallers. Who helped to form them? Who laid the foundation of the spirit of charity and of sacrifice with which it is animated? Always, it will be Paul of the Cross.

And his own Congregation would find in the example of the Founder an eloquent lesson of charity. The Passionist, if he is fully penetrated with the spirit of his Institute, will be ever ready to go forth from his retreat to assist at the bedside of the dying, as the Founder never ceased to exhort his sons. "If on account of our sins," he said, "God should send a plague, I would willingly be the first to leave my solitude and go to the assistance of the plague-stricken. I would willingly remain at their sides until their last breath, even though it meant the sacrifice of my own life." Then, again, when during his old age, when his religious asked his permission to visit the sick in hospital, he said with a burning devotion, "Oh, what a harvest awaits us in a hospital. What good can be done there for the souls of the sick! With my blessing, go, and attend the sick. If I was not deaf and broken in health, I would willingly go myself. But God does not will it for me; I am content."

In this way Paul of the Cross bequeathed to his sons the priceless heritage of his charity.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MONTE ARGENTARIO - THE HERMITAGE OF SAINT ANTHONY - APOSTOLIC LABORS AT PORTERCOLE - PRODIGIES - NEW COMPANIONS - LIFE OF THE FIRST PASSIONISTS - THE SAINT IS ABANDONED BY HIS COMPANIONS

1728 - 1730

As the hart runs to the fountains of living waters, so the servants of God, Paul and John Baptist, hastened to Monte Argentario. They longed for the solitude of this peaceful place for already they had tasted of its charm. They ardently sought this mount which was destined by God to become the cradle of the Institute.

On their arrival at Portercole, a bitter disappointment awaited them. They learnt that the Hermitage of the Annunciation was occupied by a hermit. Not far away from this dwelling was another, dedicated to Saint Anthony, but in so dilapidated a state that it was not worthy for the celebration of divine worship. Returning to Monte Argentario, they humbly begged the solitary occupant of the Hermitage of the Annunciation to allow them to dwell also in that holy place, where, united by divine love, they would together serve their Divine Master. But the hermit not only refused but most emphatically declared he would not tolerate them on the mount. Without making any reply or without losing their peace of heart, the disciples of the Crucified saw in this refusal a manifestation of the divine will, and, discussing their position, decided to return to Castellazzo.

They went to Port San Stefano seeking a passage. Three ships were about to sail. The skipper of one took them onboard. At the rise of the first favorable wind, the three ships cast their moorings. Two were very soon out to sea and with sails unfurled were speeding rapidly along their course. But the third, on which the brothers were passengers, did not move. The sailors, realizing that their own efforts were useless, called the other two ships to their assistance. They tried to drag it along by means of a heavy cable but, though they strained to the utmost, the obstinate ship remained as immovable as a rock. Amazed and frightened at their plight, the sailors believed that a spell or a chastisement from heaven had been placed upon them. They were desperate. Just at that moment, Paul, who had been praying in the captain's cabin, climbed to the deck and assured them that they were in no danger. He said that there was only one reason why the ship could not be moved - himself. And the reason was that God wished him to remain and to make his hermitage on Monte Argentario. That his words were inspired by heaven was proved by what followed. Scarcely had Paul and his brother set foot on the shore when the ship began to move, and it speeded along the water as fast as the companion ships.

This extraordinary happening revealed to them that once again Divine Providence was guiding them. The servants of Jesus Christ, then, returned to the hermitage of Saint Anthony and resolved to suffer anything in order to fulfill the divine will. The hermitage was almost in ruins. On the ground floor were two rooms, one had been used as a chapel; upstairs were two smaller rooms; the roof was in such a bad condition that it afforded little protection from the wind and rain. Far from being discouraged, they began

to clean and tidy the ruins. The chapel, though it remained poor and humble, yet became a more fitting place for their spiritual exercises; though it lacked splendor, it was at least clean. The brothers then set out to ask for the necessary permission from the bishop of the diocese. In the preceding year, 1727, Bishop Fulvio Salvi, who held them in the highest esteem, had died, but his successor, Christopher Palmieri, was no less disposed towards them. He gave them permission to occupy the hermitage and also to say Mass there.

It was not long before the invigorating air of the mountain, the silence of the woods and the deep peace of soul and joy of heart had its effect upon body as well as upon soul. They could once again resume the exercises of religious life, such as we have already outlined: continual prayer, austere penance and the singing of the praises of the Lord by day and by night.

The neighboring inhabitants were overjoyed to learn that the two hermits, whose virtues they admired, had returned to live amongst them. But the hermit of the Annunciation was far from sharing in this joy. Though Paul tried in every conceivable way to placate him and to persuade him to adopt a just and Christian attitude, he continued to remain bitter towards them.

Some months later, God sent them a young Piedmontese, who wished to follow their way of life. He had heard the people of his State speak of Paul and resolved to consecrate himself to God under his direction. The Founder accepted him as a lay brother. After he had proved he was a suitable subject, he received the habit and became known as John Mary. The new Brother spent several hours in prayer with the Fathers, served their Mass and then attended to the work of caring for the meager needs of their poor household. Thus released from all worldly anxiety, the Fathers could devote more time to study and to prayer in order to be ready when the Bishop called them to undertake apostolic works, or God inspired them to works of charity.

During the Holy Week of 1759, at the time of his first episcopal visitation to Portercole, Bishop Palmieri, learning from the neighboring inhabitants their way of life and things more marvelous still than those rumored afar off, sent them to work for the sanctification of his flock. He summoned them and, after he had satisfied himself as to their learning, gave them faculties to hear confessions and to perform other priestly works. He also wished Paul to prepare the people of Portercole for their Easter communion.

The two apostles labored ceaselessly in their search for souls. The sweetness of their charity and the fire of their zeal attracted crowds of poor sinners, who laid the burden of their miseries at the feet of the missionaries of Monte Argentario (as they were already called). The sinners would return home with their hearts overflowing with joy and their minds at peace - that peace that comes from a conscience purified in the Blood of Jesus Christ - and resolved to preserve, cost what it may, the priceless treasure of sanctifying grace.

Even after they had returned to the hermitage, Paul and his brother continued their work for souls. Like the Good Shepherd, they went in search of lost sheep. The shepherds, the charcoal-burners, the huntsmen - poor people, all of whom had spent the great part

of their lives ignorant of the truths of faith, were the object of their zeal. Simply and affectionately, they spoke to them of God and of the soul. They invited them to come to the hermitage to receive the Sacraments. This humble apostolate was not without fruit. The missionaries often had the consolation of seeing some praying in their chapel, hearing Mass and even receiving Holy Communion.

From the neighboring districts, people of all classes were attracted to the hermitage by the amiable sanctity of the two hermits, some to recommend themselves to their prayer, others to seek advice for some problem and others to go to confession. All came away edified and consoled. As the journey was sometimes long and wearisome, Paul did not have the heart to send them away fasting. He would provide for them in naïve simplicity, even though they were people of distinction, from the impoverished resources of the hermitage. Several considered it a kind of devotion to accept from the hand of a saint these sacred offerings of holy poverty.

On Sundays they worked in the nearby towns. On Saturday night Paul would go down to Portercole. He had the key of the collegiate church, and there he would spend the whole night in prayer before the Tabernacle, begging Our Lord to fill those souls with grace to whom he would be preaching on the morrow. Early in the morning he strengthened his soul with the Blood of the Divine Victim at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass; then he would go into the confessional and purify the souls of sinners in the Blood of the same Victim and encourage them to bear their burdens with patience and resignation. After midday he walked through the streets, calling all to hear the word of God. They followed him – men, women, children and even the soldiers – to the church where he taught them the catechism. His eloquent words inspired in the hearts of all a tender devotion to Jesus Crucified.

As well as the time he spent upon these strenuous apostolic labors, he would often be seen sweeping the stairs, cleaning the church and the streets adjoining the church adjacent to the Blessed Sacrament. The Servant of God could, therefore, say with the inspired writers, “Lord, I have loved the beauty of your house.” Great was the efficacy of this minister of God, whose word was enforced by example. How many souls, sitting in the darkness of the shadow of the valley of death, were led to the regions of light and of life. Let an eyewitness, an officer of high standing in the army, tell us. “Seeing Father Paul, so poor, so detached from the things of the world, so modest in his mien and submitting for the love of God to all inferiors, all saw in him a true servant of the Most High, seeking only the good of souls, not heeding either fatigue or contempt. You joyfully received from Father Paul the seed of the word of God, and it produces such abundant fruit that the town of Portercole wins by its virtues the admiration of both the Spanish and the German troops. Both officers and soldiers attest that never in any other place have they found a more Christian town.”

Because the inhabitants were responsive to divine grace, God sometimes recompenses them in a marvelous way. If the saints are all-powerful in their assaults upon heaven, they are also a protection against the calamities of earth, as will be shown by a number of remarkable events.

One day an overcast sky darkened the town of Portercote. Heavy clouds masked together overhead and vivid flashes of lightning and deafening claps of thunder presaged a devastating storm. The people envisaged the ruin of their harvest. Seized with terror, they ran to the Saint, imploring his help and prayers. Paul exhorted them to confidence in God. With his crucifix he made the sign of the Cross in the direction of the approaching storm. At once the storm leashed its fury upon the terrified town, a storm so heavy and so furious that a cry rent the air, a lament for the destruction of the harvest. When the storm had ceased, all hastened to inspect the fields and vineyards. Their astonishment and joy on seeing the grapes hanging on the vines and the fruit on the trees, as though only a beneficial rain had fallen, was good to behold. Sometime later, in the very same district and at the time of a mission, Paul performed a similar miracle,

On another occasion, when the Saint was walking along the beach, he met a fisherman who with tears in his eyes told him that during the past four months he had not caught a single fish. To make matters worse, his nets had often been damaged and the upkeep of his men had forced him to fall into debt, which he had no hope of paying. With arms outstretched he pleaded, "Father Paul, I beg of you to bless my nets and the seas..." The man of God knelt down on the sand and recited the Litany of Our Lady. After he had blessed the sea and the nets with his crucifix, Paul told the fisherman to have confidence; God would not fail him. At daybreak the confident fisherman dragged his nets and the haul of fish was so great that it more than compensated him for the losses he had sustained during the preceding months. With his heart overflowing with gratitude, he immediately sent a parcel of fish to the hermitage, where the number of followers was gradually increasing.

In 1730 the youngest brother, Anthony - aged twenty - came from Castellazzo to visit the two servants of God. He brought Paul a letter and a generous donation from Marchioness del Pozzo, in whose territory the Apostle had preached, as we have already related. This pious lady confided to him the anxieties of her heart: death had deprived her of some very dear friends. Now she was begging Paul to offer some Masses and to console her by answering her letters. The Saint replied with such expressions of sympathy and understanding that, for the edification of the reader, we will quote from some of them:

"How heavy is your cross. Thanks be to our true God who holds you on your cross. O beloved cross. O holy 'tree of life' on which hung Life Eternal, I greet you, I kiss you and I press you to my heart. Ah, my lady, these are the sentiments which ought to animate us in the face of present trials. Courage! Courage! I imitate the valiant woman of the Book of Wisdom. From a crushing burden the lower faculties of the soul will shrink, it is true, but the rational part, the highest faculty of the soul, will enjoy a sweet repose on the bosom of God. Regard not the household cares and anxieties, nor other afflictions, but rather look into the face of our Crucified Love, our Jesus, the King of sorrows and afflictions. Be of good heart. Remain united to God. That you will not be able to apply yourself to prayer much, nor perform other exercises of piety for the present, I agree, but with unbounded confidence in Jesus Christ, I will give you a rule to pray always. 'He prays always who lives well.' Accept, then, with the eyes of faith this little rule, I beg of you, and remember the presence of God during all your actions. Do not force the mind

to the remembrance of God, your Love, your Good, but do it sweetly and gently... When God inspires a sentiment of love in your heart, let it linger there and feed upon it as the bee does the honey...

“Ah, my lady, when I realize that my soul is the temple of God, when I realize what God is to me, how my heart thrills. All affliction seems but sweet and light. This is a means to pray always; this is a grand truth which one learns through humility of heart. Live in the joy and peace of the Divine Majesty. Live consumed by holy love; live for Holy Love and in holy Love. Amen.”

Young Anthony, charmed by the virtues of the Saint and attracted by the delights of solitude, had no desire to leave. He decided to consecrate himself to Jesus Crucified and was admitted as a cleric. Soon after his acceptance, a Canon of great learning, called Angelo di Stefano, arrived from Gaeta. He asked to be clothed in the habit of the Passion. He brought Paul a letter from his former director, Erasmus Tuccinardi, who told Paul to expect a priest and a cleric. These arrived in September.

Such were the humble beginnings of the Congregation. The hermits of Monte Argentario were now seven in numbers: four priests, two clerics and a lay-brother. They walked full of fervor and courage in the footsteps of Jesus Crucified. Paul rejoiced before the Lord. Their first retreat was quite small and very poor, but upon it dwelt the hopes of the Founder. “The retreat is small,” he wrote to Tuccinardi, “but God is very good to expand it so soon, as I hope. Let us build on a foundation stone of priests.”

Paul desired that each of his companions should have reasonable comfort, so the two rooms on the upper floor were partitioned by curtains into little cells; they were so small that they barely contained the bed - few wooden planks and a bag of straw for a mattress. The tiny room downstairs was used as a refectory. A study, a little hut of thatch and foliage, opposite the front door, was the kitchen.

Thus this adapted place witnessed great and holy things. Rivers at their source on mountain tops are less expansive and impressive than on the valleys beneath, but they are closer to heaven. Monastic beginnings, so humble and so poor, are always the heroic times of the Order.

The austere life of Paul was very soon imitated by each of his sons. The Holy Spirit revived on Monte Argentario the marvels of the Thebaid; clothed like their holy Founder in a simple black habit of the coarsest cloth, they walked barefooted and bare-headed. Their food was of the plainest: vegetables, herbs and a little fish, which was given to them as an alms. Yet, often the quantity of these poor foods was not sufficient. To increase further the hardships of their heroic life, no condiment was used; they never used salt. The hermits never asked for alms; they were content with the spontaneous offerings of charity. Fasting was dispensed with only on Sundays and the principal feasts, but abstinence, only on the greatest solemnities of Christmas, Easter and the feast of the Assumption. On those days it was a banquet to have eggs and milk-foods.

Let us draw a picture of this angelic life from the words of a companion of Paul, a humble lay-brother, whose naive testimony, given under oath, possesses all the characteristics of the truth.

“At midnight we arose from our beds and went to the church. The Fathers chanted Matins whilst we recited the Rosary or other vocal prayers. After Matins, we spent an hour in meditation and on four days of the week took the discipline. After this those who wished could return to rest or spend the time in study or in some other useful employment. Early in the morning before dawn, they returned to the church for Prime and Tierce. An hour of mental prayer followed. The Fathers then celebrated Mass. After their thanksgiving, they devoted themselves to study or reading or writing. Then, taking their books with them, they went alone into the woods, whilst we remained at home to attend to our duties, working in the little garden, cutting wood or gathering herbs. About an hour before mid-day, all returned to the hermitage and said Sext and None in the chapel, followed by a light collation. When the meal was finished, there was a short recreation. After Vespers were chanted, each took his books and returned to the woods. At eventide they returned for Compline and an hour’s meditation, which was followed by the Rosary and in the winter months by an hour of study. A light supper was then taken. Every day was a fast day except on feast days... Indeed, by the life he led, Paul showed himself as a very austere penitent, an angel in the flesh.”

This witness, who had received the habit, was not able, on account of poor health, to persevere. The Saint, always guided by the Spirit of Wisdom, said to him, “My son, it is evident that you are not able to live this life. If your health improves, I will receive you again. But you will not return. Always have a filial fear of God and keep in the state of grace and remember always what I will now tell you. You will have a heavy cross to bear; if you carry it with patience, heaven will be yours.” “I returned to my family at Orbetello,” added the same witness, “and everything that Father Paul said to me came true and is still true.”

The saintly Founder was the soul of this humble family, whom he inspired by his word and especially by his example, for he excelled all by the fervor of his life, just as a picture of a great masterpiece surpasses in beauty and perfection the copies made by his disciples.

The humble Servant of God tried in vain to veil with secrecy the penances he performed above those defined by the Rule. Occasionally, however, they were discovered, and the manner of the discovery was in itself marvelous. Often at night, instead of going to sleep, he would steal from the house to a nearby grotto formed by rocks. There he would spend the hours of the night in prayer until the time for Matins, for which he would always be the first in the chapel. To avoid singularity, he slept like his followers on a straw mattress, but his bed was the hardest. Instead of a pillow he used a rock, which he thought in his simplicity was unnoticed by the others except the confidant of his soul and his rival in virtue, Father John Baptist. During the day the Saint withdrew into the forest to hide himself in the most deserted and most inaccessible places, where, unseen by human eyes, he could lay bare the secrets of his heart and impress on his innocent flesh the marks of Jesus Crucified. However, he was discovered by the shepherds. Sometimes they saw him praying on his knees at the foot of an oak tree, and at other

times they saw him mercilessly scourging his body under the rock in a place called "The Region of Saint Jerome." One of the shepherds once heard the rattling of chains. At first the sound terrified him. But plucking up courage, he crept little by little into the heavy thicket to find out the cause. There he saw the Saint cruelly striking his bare shoulders with a heavy iron chain. This formidable discipline, which was later known to be one of the instruments of penance used by the Saint, Paul, in his advanced years, threw away where none could possibly find it. "In order," he said, "that none of my children may be tempted to use it." But in reality he wanted to destroy this relic of his heroic acts of penance.

Another time, a huntsman noticed the bushes shaking violently as though a wild animal was snared. In expectation of a choice piece of game, he quickly loaded his gun, sighted and ready to fire, stalked silently and cautiously towards the bush. To his utter amazement, it was a man, none other than Paul himself, who was rolling on the thorns and his body was covered with blood.

Paul in the wilderness practiced many other austerities which Father Fulgentius - of whom we will speak soon - assures us will only be known to the world on the day of general judgment. The heroicalness of his penances was excelled only by his humility. He sincerely believed that he was the least of men. "Here," he wrote, "the others praise God day and night, but, as for me, alas, *'vir pollutus labiis sum.'* I am a man with profaned lips. My love for God is so flickering and feeble that it causes me untold sorrow." The lowly opinion that Paul had of himself was so deeply engraved in his heart that often, with tears in his eyes, he begged his religious to pray for him, accusing himself like a great and wretched sinner. He would throw himself on the ground at the door of the retreat to be trampled underfoot like the vilest creature of the earth.

With calm confidence the Saint was trusting in God for the means to extend the small hermitage, when a benefactor from Portecole came and offered to meet the necessary expenses. This gave Paul great joy in the Lord. Now, he had hopes that this small and poor retreat would grow into a grand retreat, a fruitful seminary of apostolic men. This was a further incentive to pursue the work of the new Institute. Already approved by Benedict XIII, who died on 21st February of that year, 1730, to gather companions, Paul hoped that his successor, Clement XII, would not be any less favorable to him, and began to seek Pontifical approbation of the Rules. He wrote to Bishop Crescenzi about it, who in his reply expressed his intense joy that his religious family was growing.

"Know," he added, "that I will always be happy to serve you and to cooperate in a work that is very dear to my heart. I have given your letter to Cardinal Corradini, who has been greatly edified and perfectly satisfied. His Eminence is also prepared to assist you in every way possible."

Grand hopes, but, alas, so soon to fall to the ground. God was about to test the faith of the Saint by harrowing trials. It was indeed to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of the venerable Bishop of Troia, who likened Paul to Abraham. The Lord had promised the patriarch a countless posterity, and yet He told him to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of his hopes. Paul had received a similar promise; but he, too, had to make a sacrifice - his first companions, the foundations of the Institute. In climbing to Calvary he added a new

trait in imitating the Divine Mastery. He, too, would be abandoned by his followers. With sincerity and fervor they had embraced the austerities of this life. But their hearts failed them; they had not the courage to bear the sufferings of the beginnings of the Institute. We must confess, however, a newly-born Order, having neither the glory of the past nor resources for the present, demands of its members an unassailable trust in the future; heroes of abnegation they must be; either they retreat from its demands or they advance to become great saints and to share in the glory of the Founder because they have united themselves with his generous sacrifice. As we see, men gloriously resplendent around Dominic, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola and all the other great Founders, like a pleiad of saints, so will Paul of the Cross be encircled by his own loyal and heroic followers.

But now, except for his two brothers, he was alone. His sadness at the departure of the others was further intensified by the apathy of the benefactor who, influenced by some malicious suggestions, withdrew his promise to extend the hermitage.

Paul accepted the blow without flinching, and he always leaned the more heavily on the Cross. He confided his troubles to Bishop Crescenzi, who replied that he ought not to be discouraged, for the hour of the Lord had not yet arrived. When the glory of God required it, the path would finally be opened for the establishment of a glorious work, but until that time arrived, Paul and his companions should devote themselves the more fervently to the new Institute. Paul abandoned himself totally into the hands of Providence.

"The ship," he wrote to Tuccinardi, "is storm tossed on the sea, without sail, without oar; but it is safe in the hands of the great Pilot, who alone will steer it safely to port. It is battered by winds and beaten by storms, but in that is manifest the power and wisdom of Him who holds the wheel. May Jesus Christ, who strengthens us to suffer all for His love, live forever. ...In the works of God, when things appear to be a hopeless failure, then it is that they are the greatest success. Pray for us that Jesus Christ may enable us to vanquish our enemies, though they are strongly armed against us. ...May the Holy Will of God be always done. ...Beg for us a perfect union with his divine will; that is the fundamental quality of a truly Christian life..."

In time of tribulation is to be found the true language of the saints. They bow their heads and adore; their eyes are on God and not on men. The enemies to which Paul refers are the devils. In his charity he did not recognize any other: the devils who raised up persecutors, the devils who raged against him, the devils who often appeared to him under horrible forms and rained blows upon him until his body was black with bruises.

In his humility Paul attributed the abandonment of his followers to one cause - his sins. But this new trial, heroically borne, would bear abundant fruit. God would raise up new sons in response to the fervent prayers and the bitter tears of his faithful disciple.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MISSION AT TELAMONE – CLEMENT XII CONFERS THE TITLE OF ‘MISSIONARY’ – APOSTOLIC WORKS AT ORBETELLO – THE BLESSED VIRGIN REVEALS THE SITE FOR THE FIRST RETREAT – OTHER MISSIONS

1730 – 1733

The apostolate of the Saint is about to shine forth in splendor; all that we have seen is only the prelude.

Paul is thirty-six. For more than thirty years he will labor unceasingly for the salvation of souls. The ever recurring theme in all his preaching will be Jesus Crucified; on the highest mountain, in the lowest valley, on the sea, from the bank of the river, in great cities, in humble villages, in hospitals, in prisons, on the scaffold, on the fields of battle, among the plague-stricken, to virgins espoused to Jesus Christ, to priests - in a word, wherever there was a soul to be saved, sin to be destroyed and the love of God to be inflamed, there he would preach. Nothing would restrain the fire of his zeal, neither the burning heat of the sun, nor the biting cold of frost and snow, nor the ravages of storms, nor bodily infirmity, nor the weakness of advancing years. Often exhausted, he would be imbued with a renewed vigor; his path would be marked by blood-stained footprints and every step would be a blessing on souls, a glory to God and a triumph for the Church.

To relate in detail his abundant harvest of souls would require many volumes; however, we will relate a sufficient number of facts to bring light on the life of the holy Apostle.

The Bishop of Soana, Bishop Palmieri, wept to see the state of his diocese. His people were leading evil lives. Also, there was the incursion of malefactors of every kind from the neighboring States who had fled in order to escape the just punishment for their crimes. Who could arouse these hearts hardened in sin? Who could break their sinful habits and lead them to God? The apostles of Monte Argentario! To the Prelate this seemed an inspiration. Moreover, he knew by experience that they were learned in the science of the saints and filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

In response to the Bishop's call, the two servants of God left the wilderness to preach, like John the Baptist, penance and, like the great Apostle of the Gentiles, Christ and Him Crucified. Their appearance alone was an eloquent sermon: their course habit, or rather hair-cloth, their bare feet, the rigorous austerity of their life, their deep but amiable holiness, their ardent words and burning charity. They would conquer even the most obstinate sinner.

The Bishop gave thanks to God because of the inspiration. Towards the end of 1730, he invited them to give a mission at Telamone, formerly the famous port of the Republic of Sienna, but now a small village with a population of one thousand. As the gentle but strong voice of Paul echoed in the town, people hurried from all the neighboring parts, for all were eager to hear, they said, the holy Missionary of Monte Argentario. Universal yearnings of soul, admirable conversions to God, abundant graces from heaven - such was the fruit of this mission.

One day the Saint was describing the eternal punishments of hell to a terrified congregation when a young woman walked into the church. "You," he exclaimed, "You, who cannot suffer the parsing pain of an aching tooth, how will you endure the everlasting torments which you have deserved." Throughout the whole of the night this young woman had suffered a toothache. To try and forget her pain, she had come to the church. His words, his expression, his gestures, penetrating to the depths of her soul, made a lasting impression on her and troubled her exceedingly. After the sermon she threw herself at the feet of the Missioner, made a general confession of her life, renounced the vanities of the world and even wished to consecrate herself to God by a vow of perpetual virginity. This young woman of the world, Agnes Grazi, belonged to a family of Orbetello, of the highest distinction, both by title and fortune. Although she lived a virtuous life, she was too solicitous for the pomp and pleasures of the world. She had come to her country residence only in search of frivolous distractions, and she found instead the pure joys of a heart dedicated to God. Hers was a chosen soul which the Lord was calling to high perfection. Henceforth, she regarded as her father the one who had brought her forth in Jesus Christ. Paul adopted her as his spiritual daughter and never ceased cultivating for heaven this flower of Calvary. We shall meet her again in this Life. God will use her as an instrument in one of the Founder's greatest works. Also, we will be permitted to point out, here, the means by which he directed her to the heights of holiness, the path that he himself deeply loved. We shall learn, too, of his eulogy upon this soul after her death.

The first care of a prudent director was to give her simply a rule of life, which provided for each hour of the day. In this rule, destined for a young person in the world, the gentleness, the discretion, the peace of mind and, at the same time, the element of seriousness and austerity contained in it, reveals the school of Saint Francis de Sales. We propose to give it in full; perhaps it will be useful for other souls. (An explanation of this rule was given in the spiritual conferences that he had with Agnes and also in the letters that he wrote to her. More than a hundred of them are preserved with the Passionists.)

1. In the morning, immediately on rising, spend about an hour in meditation, then make a spiritual communion.
2. Hear Holy Mass but, if some hindrance prevents it, bear it patiently.
3. The rest of the time before dinner do your work with your mind united to God and in holy silence speak when you are spoken to but with meekness, with a good grace and with charity.
4. A half an hour before dinner read a little and, if possible, remain recollected before the Crucifix for about a quarter of an hour.
5. Have your dinner in peace; practice a discreet mortification.
6. After dinner have some recreation in company with others, but always show yourself meek and charitable.

7. Work again until five o'clock or a little later, but always with your mind dwelling upon God; then, prepare yourself for meditation and at that exercise spend an hour.
8. Take your supper, then recreate for a time; retire to your room, make an examination of conscience, do some spiritual reading and say your night prayers. Then, take your rest.

"I recommend to you specially the presence of God, the source of all blessing. May God pour forth on you His choicest blessings."

Very soon, under his direction, this docile and generous soul was raised to the highest summit of divine contemplation through the adorable Wounds of the Savior. Calvary was for him, as we have already seen, the rapid way to perfection.

"Make for yourself," he wrote to her, "a little bouquet of the sufferings of Jesus and keep it in the depth of your soul. From time to time choose from it a sorrowful remembrance of them and make intimate colloquies with your Redeemer, 'O Jesus, my dearly Beloved, I see you face, living, swollen and covered with spittle. ...My sweet Love, I see your sacred Wounds. ...Oh, my dear Wounds, I wish to keep you always in my heart.'"

In teaching her how the Christian should renounce self in order to follow Jesus Christ faithfully, the Saint added, "Happy is the soul which detaches itself from its own will, from its own desires; what a profound lesson there is in this truth. God will make you understand it, if you seek your joy in the Cross of Jesus Christ and regard as dead all that is not God." He taught her to love enemies in Jesus Christ. After recommending her to show nothing but the sweetest charity towards them, he added, "Make at the same time an interior act of charity but do it gently; for example, 'O dear souls of Jesus, I love you in the Heart of Jesus, which is on fire with love for you. O blessed souls. Love Jesus, the Eternal Love for me.'"

During Holy Week he wrote to her, "My very dear daughter in Jesus Crucified, I invite you to Calvary to assist at the obsequies of Jesus, our Eternal Love. Ah, let us remain there forever, blessed by divine charity, until we should die of love and sorrow for the Passion and Death of our true God. I shall celebrate the divine mysteries during these holy days, and each time I shall put the heart of this daughter, whom God has given me into the all-pure and agonizing hearts of Jesus and Mary. Do the same for the poor father whom Divine Province has given you. Good-bye, my daughter, and may Jesus bless you and embrace you with His holy love."

The pious virgin of Jesus Christ, faithful until death, was one of the precious fruits of this first mission of Paul at Telamone.

His apostolate in the diocese of Soana had caused such a sensation that Bishop Crescenzi heard of it in Rome. We have already said that at their departure from Saint Gallican, the two brothers, not having an ecclesiastical title, had received by a Brief permission to celebrate holy Mass but only for a year. According to a letter from Bishop Crescenzi, we saw that Cardinal Corradini wished to give them a benefice. He could do

it quite easily since under Benedict XIII he was the Prefect of the Apostolic Datary. But Paul desired no other benefice than that of solitude and souls. By an amiable condescension, Bishop Crescenzi had the Indult prolonged each year. When he learnt the extraordinary results of the apostolate of the two religious, he knew what was the true title that God wished for his servants. He begged the Bishop of Soana to send a report on their apostolic works to Cardinal Corradini, and the latter obtained for them from Clement XII the title of "Missionary" by a Rescript of the twenty-third of February, 1731. On the eighteenth of July, of the same year, again through the intercession of the well-wishing Crescenzi, the Sovereign Pontiff willingly addressed a Brief to Bishop Pakmieri, in which he bestowed the apostolic blessing upon Paul and John Baptist, now Missionaries. His Holiness also granted a plenary indulgence and remission of all sins to those who attended their missions.

These apostolic favors were a new stimulus to the zeal of the two brothers, who, like Moses, lifted up suppliant hands to heaven on the mountain, and, like Josue, descended onto the plain to fight the battles of the Lord.

Often, the fragrance of their sanctity attracted souls towards their solitude. The pious virgin, that pure conquest of grace during the mission at Telamone, after her return to her family at Orbetello, like the woman of Samaria finding Jesus, was not able to restrain her joy and gladness of heart. She contributed not a little to make the name of her father in the Lord more venerated in this city, where the people were already speaking of the lives of the hermits of Monte Argentario as a spectacle of sanctity, the like of which had never been seen in these places before,

From Orbetello many pilgrims wended their way up the mountain. The pious sought encouragement, the tempted sought the grace of victory and the sorrowing sought consolation from the Saint. Among them was a Curzio Petri, whose wife had been given up by the doctors and was in imminent danger of death. He found the servants of God praying in the little chapel. At the end of their prayers, he came to them and with tears in his eyes told them about his wife. In faltering words he earnestly begged them to obtain her cure from the Lord. Touched with compassion, the brothers knelt to pray. A few moments later Paul rose and assured the anxious husband, "God, God, gives me confidence that the sickness will be cured." At these words Petri himself was filled with confidence and set out for home with a joyous heart. As he passed by the lake, a messenger met him and told him that "his wife took an unexpected change for the better and was now out of danger." Shortly afterwards, she was completely cured. This miracle aroused in the hearts of the townspeople of Orbetello a greater devotion to the Saint.

Such enthusiasm could be turned to the advantage of souls. The Vicar General, Bausani, reported to the most Eminent Abbot, Cardinal Lorenz Altieri, who immediately gave the two apostles of Jesus Crucified faculties in his diocese. (The Abby of Orbetello had as titular Abbot, a Cardinal who resided in Rome.) A new field for apostolic labors awaited them. That it might be fruitful, neither labors, nor sweat, nor tears, not even blood, would be spared. Even heaven would be pleased to rain upon it showers of grace, as we shall see in the following.

The first fruits of his ministry at Orbetello were quite ordinary. Paul humbly entered the city, heard confessions, visited the sick and assisted the dying. Seeing him so often among them, always solicitous for their welfare, the townsfolk, who had admired his eminent virtue from a distance, were drawn to him by singular affection and they now called him their holy father. Divine Providence was preparing the way for the first foundation of the new Institute within the township. Ever in Paul's mind was this constant desire, no matter whether he was engaged in the labor of the priesthood or at prayer in his solitude. After the disappointment caused by the loss of his first companions, he was confident that others would come, guided by the Spirit of the Lord. He, therefore, always thought of building on his dear mountain a large retreat and church where he would celebrate with fitting solemnity the sacred liturgy and feasts of the Church.

Walking one day with Father John Baptist, they arrived at a spot called the "St. Anthony property" where on the side of the mountain was site of land, level, expansive and verdant. From it could be enjoyed the magnificent view of the lake and of Orbetello, which seemed to float upon the waters of the lake. They knelt down, as was their custom, to adore the Blessed Sacrament in all the churches of the city, when they perceived a sanctuary in the distance. After they had recited the Litany of Our Lady, Paul was rapt in ecstasy. The Queen of Heaven appeared to him and told him the first retreat had to be built on this very spot and the name of it was to be the Presentation; such was the will of God. On coming out of the ecstasy, he related everything to Father John Baptist and together they thanked God.

In all his undertaking, the Saint ever had in mind the will of God. He knew how to await the manifestation of the Divine Will with patience that nothing could disturb, neither time nor trial. But when the hour had come, then he set himself to the work without further delay. He first spoke of his project to Captain Mark Anthony Grazi, father of Agnes, and to her brother, Dom Giaconda, a priest of holy life. Since the remarkable change in this young woman, the family became one of his most devoted benefactors. Then he made a humble petition to the authorities of Orbetello. The magistrates convoked the council. With complete unanimity, they voted the expenses necessary for the foundation. For the acquisition of the St. Anthony property, they voted a perpetual levy on municipal funds equal in value to the priory benefice of the Collegiate body to which the said Property belonged. This session took place on 15th July, 1731. They wrote to the Cardinal Abbot, Lorenzo Altieri, begging him to give his consent to their deliberations. At the same time they addressed a memorandum to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to obtain from the Holy See permission to reconstitute this ecclesiastical foundation.

But, here, this work of God meets its first obstacle. The Cardinal, without however showing any sign of opposition, prolonged the affair. For what reason, no one knew. He still held the missionaries of Monte Argentario in the highest esteem and never ceased to use them for the spiritual good of his flock. Providence, no doubt, wished to add a brighter luster to the fidelity of its servants and to sanctify them through the virtue of patience. Time rolled on and the matter reached no conclusion, to the great displeasure of the people of Orbetello.

In the following year, 1732, the site, on which the Saint wished to build the first retreat, was examined more closely. It was discovered that it was outside the limits of the aforementioned St. Anthony property and on land owned by the royalty. Then the royal ministers and especially General d' Espejo, who was greatly in favor of the work, obtained the permission of the Viceroy of Naples. Without further delay, although it was winter, and while Paul was preaching in the diocese of Soana, the townspeople themselves arranged to carry up the mountain, close to the St. Anthony Property, the greater part of the materials required for building the retreat.

It certainly seemed that at long last the holy edifice would rise. But further unexpected events occurred. With their coming, all hope of success seemed to vanish forever.

A powerful fleet set out from Spain. It was feared, and, not without reason, that it would attack the possessions of the Emperor of Austria in Italy. Reinforcements and supplies were rushed to the garrisons and defenses were strengthened. Everything presaged war and the evils and privations which accompany it.

Besides, at the beginning of summer, a fearful epidemic ravaged Orbetello. The foreign troops in overcrowded barracks were the cause of it. The death toll was so great that the inhabitants of Orbetello were terror stricken.

Paul was in his solitude, regaining his strength, when he learned of the calamity afflicting his people. He immediately hurried to their assistance. Day and night, in homes and in barracks, in prisons and wherever the epidemic was raging, there he lavished the treasures of his charity, the succor of religion. He heard the confessions of the dying and performed for them the lowliest of tasks. His charitable services were bestowed upon all, but especially upon the poorest and the most neglected. The Saint was so attentive to the needs of others that he neglected his own health and almost fell a victim to the scourge, a martyr of his own devotedness to the sick. He fell ill and scarcely had the strength to drag himself to the hermitage, where continual attacks of the fever so weakened him that the only food he could eat was bread and water with a little oil.

He remained in this weakened state until November, when his strength returned sufficiently for him to undertake a series of missions in the diocese of Soana. His pale and emaciated face aroused pity in the hearts of all who saw him.

Thus, the Saint passed two years in periods of suffering, of solitude and of apostolic works. But whether as a missionary or a religious, he is always obtaining some singular grace for his neighbor.

At Portercole, a man of fortune named John Fontana had been suffering from a disease of the skin. His whole body was affected. His hands, especially his face, were so disfigured that none could look at him without experiencing a sense of repulsion. People fled from meeting him as though he were a leper. The doctors had failed to cure him, so he turned to the Saint of Monte Argentario. He came and threw himself at his feet, begging and pleading with tears to be delivered from this hideous affliction. Seeing to what infirmity sin had reduced human nature and, touched with compassion for this

cruel suffering of the unfortunate man, Paul encouraged him, blessed him and recommended him to God. Filled with a secret joy, the like of which he had never experienced, Fontana returned home in the evening. Very soon afterwards he went to bed and slept peacefully throughout the night. On waking in the morning, he felt that he had been completely cured. But fearing himself to be deceived, he called his servants to open the windows and saw with his own eyes, with a joy that is easy to understand, that he was freed from the disease that had afflicted him. He called all his servants, and altogether they knelt down to thank God who worked such miracles through the intercession of His servant.

About this time, Paul had preached several missions in the diocese of Soana, at Port San Stefano, at Piombino and at Monte Oriniali. At the latter place, all the people came to the missionary. At the sight of him in his strange garb and bare-footed, they received him with jeers, whistles and other insults. The apostle, disregarding their affronts, began to preach. When he began to speak, at the sound of his commanding and solemn voice, the crowd ceased to mock and listened with rapt attention. The fruits of this mission were very great in spite of the efforts to thwart its success.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIRST MISSION AT ORBETELLO - THE BUILDING OF MONTE ARGENTARIO CONTINUES - HOLY WEEK AT PIOMBINO - OTHER MISSIONS - THE WORK ON THE RETREAT STOPS - PILGRIMAGE TO LORETTO - MIRACLES

February - October 1733

The tireless apostle, though weakened in body, set himself to labor with all the fire of his zeal for the conquest of souls. His apostolate, always singular because of its extraordinary happenings, attracted attention from far and near. His name was on the lips of all, and the Bishops summoned the missionary from Monte Argentario to preach to their flocks. Cardinal Lorenzo Altieri was one of the first to give him an unusual mission at Orbetello, where fear of war had proved groundless. It was learned that the Spanish fleet had sailed to Africa to attack the infidels instead.

The Servant of God willingly accepted the mission, for he loved the good people of Orbetello. And the townspeople were themselves anxious to hear him whom they loved for his charity towards the sick and the dying. The soil was, therefore, perfectly prepared to receive the seed of the word of God. Paul, with Father John Baptist, began the mission in February 1733. A large congregation of rich and poor, officers and soldiers from the garrison - all listened to him eagerly and attentively, which clearly showed their tender affection.

The women of the town had adopted a style of dressing that offended against Christian modesty. The apostle vehemently condemned this practice, and from that time the norms of modesty in dress were respected. But there was one - a French woman - who defied the denunciation of the preacher and sat shamelessly in front of him during the sermon, as though to flaunt her defiant attitude. The Saint, ever patient, hoped that the divine light would open the eyes of this soul to her unsightliness. One day he looked at her, a look that reflected the indignation of divine justice, and this brazen woman saw her flesh go instantly black. She was horrified at the sight and in vain sought to flee, but the denseness of the crowds around her prevented it, so she covered herself as well as she could. At the same time the grace of God was working in her soul, and her heart was changed. After the sermon, humble and repentant, she cast herself at the feet of the missionary and promised to cease giving scandal. Reconciled with God, she begged the Saint to free her from this chastisement that her conduct had so justly deserved. Paul, more ready to pity than to punish, delivered her by making the sign of the Cross over her. This miracle caused a great stir in the city. Henceforth, the women of Orbetello were models of modesty. More than forty young people of noble families devoted themselves to works of piety with such fervor that they became examples to all. They became apostles, whose word as well as example, led others to despise the vanities of the world and seek Jesus Crucified and His love alone.

Misery of body often begets misery of soul. Among the poorer class whole families were living in dark and disgusting hovels; fathers, mothers and children were forced to sleep on the same pallet. The Saint could not see so pathetic a sight without desiring a remedy. He pleaded the cause of the poor so eloquently that the hearts of the rich were

moved to a generous charity towards the needy. Thus, he raised many families from a state of degradation by restoring to the soul its dignity and affording innocence protection.

The mission was coming to a close. Nothing depicts the idea of heaven like the close of a mission. There was the joy of souls reconciled to God, peace of heart and mind, harmony among families, holy canticles of triumph and love, a universal gladness throughout the whole of the city and a festive air radiating on every side. Such was the scene in Orbetello.

The holy Missioner was about to leave them. In his last exhortation he mentioned the great work at Monte Argentario, adding with humility that the building of the monastery had been suspended due, no doubt, to his sins; that he adored the judgments of God and bowed before the dispositions of Divine Providence. Paul blessed the crowd, moved even to tears, and came down from the platform. They thronged around him, each wishing to kiss his hand or his mantle. It was only with difficulty that he passed through them to return to his solitude in the wilderness. But at the gate of the town, near the shore of the lake, the royal ministers, officers and distinguished personages were waiting for him. They approached him, calling him their father, making the most lively protestations of affection, of devotedness, and promising him to build the retreat as soon as possible. The Saint expressed his gratitude and entered the boat which carried him across the lake while the whole population watched him go.

Faithful to their word, the townsfolk subscribed to a fund for the laying of the foundations, promising to bear all expense as the work advanced. They immediately put their hands to work. Paul drew the plan. The building was to be one in which comfort and convenience harmonized with religious poverty. On the fourth of March 1733, in the presence of an enthusiastic assembly, the first stone was solemnly laid. But the Founder, leaving Father John Baptist to supervise the work, had already left to preach a Lenten course at Piombino.

At this time, because of the unfortunate influence of the eighteenth century in which everything had degenerated, the Lenten sermons were only a display of pomp and vanity, delivered with a superficial and pretentious eloquence. This appearance of eloquence could flatter the ear but left the hearts of the hearers as they were, cold in heart and unconvinced in mind and lethargic in will. But Paul, a real apostle in souls, was horrified at this style, opposed to the simplicity of the Gospel and to the genuine eloquence of the early Fathers. In his Rules he prescribes a law of apostolic eloquence for his missionaries, wishing them "to preach Jesus Crucified in villages as well as in cities, not in the persuasive words of human wisdom but in showing of the Spirit and powers.

The holy Missioner possessed this divine eloquence in the highest degree. The people of Piombino, who had been thrilled by his preaching during one mission, begged to hear him again. To satisfy their wishes, Bishop Ciani, Bishop of Massa and Populonia, invited Paul to preach the Lenten course. Paul accepted, but he would remain the true apostle, whose only wish was to draw his eloquence from the Wounds of the Savior. Mounting the pulpit, quite inflamed with divine love, he communicated this love to the crowded

church. The Lenten sermon itself failed to satisfy his zeal; he taught Christian doctrine to the children and prepared several of them for First Holy Communion. He also gave spiritual conferences to Religious, many of whom made such progress in perfection from that time that they died in the odor of sanctity. One of them, Sister Maria Cherubina Bresciani, excelled all the others by the loftiness of her virtue, which she practiced under the guidance of the Servant of God, who directed her by letter for more than twenty-five years.

While Paul was engaged in beautifying the temple of souls, the building of the Retreat on Monte Argentario was rising. But the water was a problem. There was a supply on the property, but it had to be carried from a distance, which caused a great deal of unnecessary expense and delay. Father John Baptist had recourse to the Lord, who is able to “open to them the treasures, a fountain of living water” (I Num. 20:6). One day, animated by a lively faith and thus confident of a miracle, he took the cross and went in procession to the forest with his companions and some workmen. Suddenly, he stopped near the building, knelt down, begged a little time to pray and, rising, told the men to dig.

They had scarcely begun digging when a limpid and abundant stream began to flow, a singular blessing for which they praised the Lord by a canticle of thanksgiving. This water, flowing along a channel, was used for the work of construction. Since that time two tanks furnish fresh water, one inside the monastery and the other in the church yard for the convenience of travelers.

After this token of divine favor, the work was continued with greater enthusiasm. The walls were high above the ground when the Founder returned from Piombino. At the sight of the growing monastery, the heart of Paul overflowed with joy. After enjoying for several days the sweetness of solitude, he returned again to the harvest of souls, and once again his apostolate was marked by marvelous conversions and stamped with the seal of miracles.

At Saturnia, an ancient village in the diocese of Soana, the return of souls to God afforded him a deep consolation. But in spite of this, his soul was troubled because of a notorious public sinner, hardened in heart. He was a brigand chief, the terror of the district on account of his ferocity, his plunders, his murders and a scandal to souls because of his sinful and criminal associations. What remedy could be applied to one so wicked, who well might be called hopeless, hardened as he was in soul by an evil life?

True, he would not come to the church to hear a condemnation of sin. But how could one speak to him, a murderer, without the risk of bodily harm, and even of death? Paul first knelt in prayer. Then, inspired by God, he set out, in spite of the entreaties of those who feared for his life, to the house of the brigand. Armed to the teeth, the criminal met him and said to him in a brutal and savage manner, “Well, what do you want?” The Saint, taking the Crucifix from his breast, said, “I want you to send that immoral woman away.”

“But, Father, there is no harm in that.”

“Send her away, I tell you.” The commanding words of the Saint were like a thunderbolt shattering the boldness of the criminal.

“When must I send her away?”

“This very instant,” said the Apostle. The grace of God had touched the soul of this poor sinner.

“Yes, Father, I will do as you say,” he said. “But, then, you will hear my confession?”

“Yes, my child,” replied the loving and gentle Father, holding him in his arms. And with tears in his eyes, he said, “Yes, I will hear your confession, and I will bring consolation into your heart, and you will know the joy of real peace.” Paul arranged with the parish priest for the woman to be received in a place of refuge. And to the great astonishment of the whole district, the wolf became a lamb, the scandalous sinner a humble penitent.

This amazing conversion spread throughout the country. Though it produced a universal joy, yet it was a joy mingled with fear. For would not the bandits, whose leader had been converted, be so enraged at the conversion of their chief that they would seek revenge upon the missionary responsible? Would they not openly attack Father Paul? But Paul feared no human creature; his trust was in Almighty God.

When this mission was finished, Paul went to Manciano to open another. He was passing through desolate fields when, all of a sudden, he heard the savage barking of dogs. Raising frightened eyes, he saw ahead of him a band of armed bandits whose very appearance foreboded evil. Surrounded by a number of vicious dogs, whom they had trained to assist them in their nefarious work, Paul, believing that his last hour had come, offered his life to God. These were the followers of the leader whom Paul had converted. They had learnt of their chief’s change of heart and had come to this place for the express purpose of awaiting the arrival of the priest responsible. Coming towards him, they greeted him in tones of deepest respect. They, who knew so well the perversity of their leader, marveled more than others at his return to God and, attributing it only to the persuasive power of the Saint, had come to meet him that they might see for themselves the great Apostle and might venerate him for his holiness of life.

Paul, emboldened at this unexpected welcome, began to speak to them of the things of God and of the soul. His words gradually penetrated their hearts, which were so accustomed to crime and brutality. They even wished to go with him and accompanied him almost to Manciano, where they said farewell.

This meeting was far from fruitless. The kindly words of Paul planted seeds in their souls which, watered by the prayers of the Saint, would soon be ready for the harvest. When he returned from his mission, they again met him and begged him to hear their confessions and to reconcile them to God. To ensure their perseverance, Paul obtained their pardon, not only from the victims they had harmed, but also from human justice, which was ever awaiting them. At that time it was not difficult to obtain mercy for these human beings, whom the severity of justice had failed to subdue, but whom the gentleness of religion had transformed and rehabilitated by sincere repentance. Happy

at the thought of these conquests, the Apostle sought to regain new strength at the foot of the Crucifix.

Climbing the slopes to Monte Argentario, his eyes longed for the sight of the rising walls of the new building. But even a casual glance revealed the disappointing fact that work had been abandoned. He learned that the work had ceased by order of the King's ministers. Afflicted in soul by this untoward happening, he spent the whole night in prayer. On the next day, he went down to Orbetello to seek the reason. He was told that as the former Viceroy had been transferred to Naples, the construction could not be continued without the approval of his successor.

To avoid unnecessary and lengthy delay, which formalities demands, the Founder resolved to plead his own cause at Naples. In spite of the burning heat of summer, he undertook the long journey on foot.

His request was not granted, and he returned to Monte Argentario, disappointed, where further trials awaited him. Other incidents occurred, which not only extinguished the feeble gleam of hope of finishing the work which had already been accomplished, but which filled him with fear that what had been erected would soon be torn down.

This was a poignant sorrow for the Founder, especially as the darkened horizon presaged for the people disastrous consequences. He undertook himself to allay their severity by the devotedness of his charity.

Troubled in soul, Paul turned to his heavenly Mother Mary and made a pilgrimage to Loretto to visit the poor, humble cottage where the Eternal Son of God became incarnate in the immaculate womb of the purest of virgins. He desired to kiss these hallowed and holy walls, for he used to say that he would willingly have crawled there on hands and knees. Two remarkable happenings occurred on this journey.

At Pitigliano, Doctor Gherardini, a devoted man of God, gave him a letter for a relative of his, a priest of Perousa, Dom Peter Bianchi. The doctor asked the priest to send one of his servants to guide Paul through the lonely and wild country as far as Cetona. At a place called the Cross of Saint Cassian, they saw that the sky threatened rain. Paul knelt down and made a short prayer.

A wonderful thing happened. The rain fell heavily all around them but not a drop on the path they were following. His astonished guide took Paul to be a magician. He was more convinced of this when, on his return, he noticed that near Cetona, at the Cross of Saint Cassian, the road alone was dry while on each side of the path and the whole countryside had been soaked by a heavy rain. On his return the guide related all to his master, who told him that Paul was not a magician but a great saint.

At Perousa, Dom Peter Bianchi, seeing Paul bare-footed and so poorly clad, suspected that he might be a scoundrel and was not at all happy about receiving him into his house. However, he did receive him but sent him to the servants' table and intended to provide a bed for him in the servants' quarters. His sister pointed out that this would be failing in respect to the wishes of their relative. The priest then decided to give Paul a

room to himself. To assure himself of protection from this stranger, he locked the door upon Paul, drew the heavy bolt and took the key with him. The stranger was secured, locked in for the window was guarded by a strong iron grill. Paul made no complaint at these precautions; neither did he show that he had been in the least offended by their suspicion attitude. He merely asked that the door be unlocked for him early in the morning so that he could continue his long journey. The priest thought no more about Paul's humble request and slept peacefully during the night, quite confident that the bedraggled stranger could not escape without his help. His sister reproached him for keeping a guest prisoner. He replied, "You do not know what could happen unless you take these precautions." In the morning he gave her the key. She went to unlock the door, but to her great surprise ... Paul was no longer there...

"Without doubt," writes Saint Vincent Strambi in his Life of Saint Paul of the Cross, "he had been delivered by the hand of the Lord, who knows how to work miracles when it pleases Him."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WAR IN ITALY - A SERIES OF MISSIONS - SIEGE OF MONTE FILIPO - HEROIC CHARITY ON THE ISLE OF ELBA - NEW COMPANIONS

1733 - 1736

In 1733, Spain, France and Sardinia formed a league to seize from the Emperor of Austria his possessions in Italy. In October, whilst the French and Sardinian armies were invading Lombardy, the Spaniards disembarked at Spezia and marched into Tuscany. The Duke of Montemar, the commander of the forces, established his headquarters at Sienna. The siege of Orbetello and other fortresses from the coast was greatly feared. An incursion by the troops had already carried off all the cattle from the surrounding districts and destroyed the crops.

Don Carlos, appointed commander-in-chief, led his army upon Naples, which was unprotected by the Austrian troops due to lack of foresight on the part of the Emperor. The assault was victorious. Don Carlo entered the city and soon became the master of the kingdom and was crowned at Palermo, becoming Charles III.

During the vicissitudes of this war, the Austrian viceroy, Visconti, had ordered all subjects of the enemies' dominions to leave within a month the territory of the Imperial States. This came as a thunderbolt to the Saint and his companions, who as subjects of the King of Sardinia, had at once to say farewell to their beloved solitude. But their departure was also to overwhelm the people of Orbetello with grief; Paul, their father and their pillar of strength in all their misfortunes, Paul, who had so generously devoted himself to them during the time of the plague, would no longer be with them when they especially needed his help and consolation, faced as they were with the horrors of war. Even the soldiers were not insensible to their loss. The Austrian General, who had as much affection as esteem for him, could not bear to see him go. He found a reason for exempting the servants of God from this rigorous decree and granted them permission to come and go freely and unmolested, even to leave the fortress whenever they pleased.

While ambitious conquerors were seeking territory by the sword which destroys, Paul, with the cross that saves, was engaged in the battle for souls. In spite of the scourge of war, he continued his missions, now in the dioceses of Acquapendente and Civita del Pieve, now in that of Soana and the Abbey of the Three Fountains. Of the conversions and the miracles that he brought about, we shall relate two which reveals in a special way his burning zeal and ardent charity.

At Scanzano, in the diocese of Soana, a Canon, threatened with death by one of his relatives, locked himself indoors and lived in daily fear and terror. Paul set out to find the culprit who, at the sight of the Saint coming after him, fled in haste. The Saint pursued him across fields, calling upon him to stop. Not being able to catch him, Paul took from his breast his crucifix and, calling the fugitive by name, cried out, "If you do not obey the voice of this Christ who wishes you to make peace with your relative, at the first ditch which you attempt to cross, you will drop dead." Frightened by these terrifying words,

the fugitive stopped in his tracks, and then began to walk slowly away, still fleeing from him who wished to save him. But when he reached the first ditch, the threatening words of Paul burned themselves on his mind, and he stopped, reflected for a moment and turned to walk back to the man of God. He found him praying at the foot of a tree. He begged forgiveness from the Servant of God and listened to his consoling words. The Saint related all this to the Canon and, then, the two relatives, who had been bitter enemies, embraced each other and reunited in the bonds of peace and friendship, living together in harmony.

A certain Francis Vivarelli of Magliano, in the diocese of Soana, had borrowed a hundred crowns from his friend, a priest. When he paid his debt, not having the bill with him, he promised to destroy it as soon as he returned home. But he thought no more about it. After his death, several days later, the heirs, finding the bill, claimed the hundred crowns. Vivarelli, at the sight of the bill, was quite distressed; he declared that it had been paid and related the circumstances; he called on God to witness that he spoke the truth. But as no record of payment could be produced, he was brought to court. Just at this time Paul came to give a mission. Vivarelli had recourse to him, hoping that he would save him from an unjust conviction. After the Saint had listened to the sad story, he replied that he would consult the Lord on the matter. As he was about to say Mass, he went to the altar. Afterwards, he told Vivarelli to follow him to his lodgings, where after praying, summoned the heirs of the deceased priest. An animated discussion between the interested parties came to nothing. Then, Paul, drawing a receipt from his sleeve, said to those seeking payment, "My children, is this the receipt from your uncle? Examine it closely and see if you recognize his writing?"

"Yes," they replied in surprise after examining it attentively. "Yes, it is indeed his writing. Had we been shown this earlier, there would not have been any trouble."

With these words they destroyed the bill. Paul took the receipt and put it in his pocket; it was never seen again.

While the holy missionary was watering, with the sweat of his brow, the vineyards of the Lord, the Spaniards were marching on Monte Argentario. After the conquest of Naples and Sicily, the Duke of Montemar began, in February of 1735, to concentrate all his forces, both of land and sea, on Tuscany. The assault was expected. The Austrian General, d'Espejo Vera, realizing that his troops were not strong enough to halt the advance of the enemy, planned a strong and determined defense from the walls of the fortress.

Fear and terror reigned in Orbetello and the neighboring districts. The peril of the people was also the peril of the Apostle. Paul never rested; he was everywhere, comforting the afflicted, strengthening the faint hearts and raising the hearts of all towards heaven. Within the fortresses he instructed the soldiers and heard their confessions, inspiring in them the unflinching courage of Christian heroes who have no fear of death because they have no fear of eternity.

A holy work called the Apostle to the village of Saint Flors in Sanese. The journey was a dangerous one, but Paul never hesitated when it was a question of the glory of God.

Returning, he was arrested as an Imperialist spy by a patrol of Spanish soldiers, who lead him to their General, Marquis de Las Minas, who was a good Catholic as well as a valiant leader. When he saw the Religious and listened to his words, he was soon convinced that he was not a spy but a holy priest of God. He received him affectionately and desired him to eat at his table. Paul then took leave of the General as the soldiers, too, were now showing signs of respect and veneration. He returned in peace to his solitude.

God had permitted this incident so that the Apostle, during the bloody struggles of war, might be free to carry to all, Spaniards and Imperialists, the consolations and the succor of religion which in his charity he bestowed on all, irrespective of political loyalties.

In April, the banners of the enemy appeared. Montemar, after having blockaded Orbetello, left General de Las Minas in command with instructions to seize the prominences overlooking Orbetello from which they could shell Monte Filipo. The General, without any resistance from the Imperialists, took up his assigned position and made it the base from which to begin the siege. Not far distant was the hermitage of Saint Anthony. The General, wishing to see the holy man of God, called on him and pledged to him a lasting friendship. He invited the Saint often to his headquarters to dine with him where Paul's modesty and mortification edified him greatly. As it was Paschal time, he asked the priest to hear his confession.

On 16th April, the Saturday after Easter, the attack on the fortress began. During the time of the shelling, the extent of the Saint's charity was revealed to all. At the first burst of the firing, Paul took his crucifix and appeared on the scene of destruction as an angel of peace. From the enemy fortress, bullets and grapeshot rained. The Apostle heeded it not, but sought only the souls waiting to be saved. He considered not the danger to his own life. On the wounded and dying he lavished spiritual consolations and purified their souls in the Blood of Jesus Christ. A shell burst so near him that he was showered with earth. At his side men fell to the ground, wounded or killed. His charity increased and was further manifested as the dangers increased. He is everywhere, wherever he is needed. He even went, with the courage of a hero, to hear a dying soldier's confession, under heavy fire to the very place where the shells were causing the greatest devastation. The General, a witness to the holy fearlessness of his venerable friend, and, being unable to restrain the zeal of his charity, sent soldiers to accompany him, who, at the first burst of shelling, warned Paul to drop to the ground. If Paul was not a causality on the field of battle, it must be attributed to the manifest protection of God, who is pleased to protect his servants who face death willingly in their search for souls.

But all this was not sufficient to satisfy the generous heart of the Apostle. Although weary and exhausted, he went down under a barrage of shell fire to the other garrison, which was blockading Orbetello. Here, a mortal fear was decimating the ranks. Thanks to his zeal, all died in the peace of Jesus Christ. His manner was so gracious that the soldiers were strongly attracted to him and came in crowds to avail themselves of his priestly ministrations. During the first few days, the work was extremely fatiguing, for many of them did not understand Italian while he knew no Spanish. But he soon sufficiently learnt their language to make himself understood.

This is indeed a strange thing and can be only explained by the increase of his holiness. At this time the two opposing armies afforded him opportunities to practice charity. From the attackers he passed over to the attacked. The latter, at his approach, would hold the artillery fire, open the gates of the fort and welcome him as a friend and father. Never, on one side or the other, did he cause to arise the slightest shadow of suspicion, such was the prudence of his conduct and such was the great veneration he inspired in all.

The siege of Monte Filippo lasted for twenty-nine days. After a direct hit on the powder magazine, the garrison surrendered, and Portocolle was soon in the hands of the Spaniards. For a complete victory only the city of Orbetello was wanting. But as it was well protected from assault by the lake almost surrounding it, the efforts of the enemy to capture it had been in vain. The Spaniards were persuaded by false reports that townspeople were loyal supporters of the Imperialists. For this reason General de Las Minas ordered the vineyards and crops to be destroyed and the city to be shelled. This order was about to be carried out. The platforms had been built and the artillery dragged into position when Paul, learning the reason for the General's anger, begged him to spare these poor people, whose noble qualities he knew so well. He added that the town would surrender within a few days, and that the General's mercy would win for the new Prince the affection and the loyalty of all citizens. The General was determined that his order be carried out to the letter, but eventually the humble, tearful pleadings of the Saint won him over, and he yielded,

"It is only because of you, Father Paul," he said, "that I agree to this." He revoked the order. The surrender of the city, as the Saint had foretold, soon took place. Within a few days the garrison surrendered. General de Las Minas and his troops made a triumphal entry into the city, and he had only the highest praise for the reception given them by the inhabitants. The first occasion on which he saw his friend again, he said, "You were quite right, Father Paul, for I am very pleased with Orbetello, and I am thankful to you for persuading me to follow your recommendation."

From the theatre of war, the soldier of Jesus Christ often had his apostolate in more peaceful fields, first on the Isle of Elba and then on the Isle of Capri. The Bishop, who had invited him, announced his arrival by letter to both clergy and people. The Bishop paid a high tribute to the missionary Paul Danei; he said that he regarded him as a gift to earth by the mercy of the Lord and recommended the priests to make the spiritual exercises under his direction. The Saint, for three consecutive months, labored unceasingly for souls. He was rewarded by the abundant spiritual fruits of his labor and by the extraordinary events that showed that the blessing of God was upon him and the people.

In the district of Rio was a woman who had for a long time been ill-treated by her husband. It was caused by the deadly hatred of one of the neighbors who continually calumniated her to her husband. The innocent wife came in tears to Paul and unburdened her heart to him. The Saint, then, summoned the woman responsible for the lies and pleaded with her so eloquently that she seemed disposed to retract her calumnies. Taking advantage of her good disposition, Paul immediately called the husband and, in the presence of all, said to the guilty woman, "Now is the time to make reparation for you injuries to the good name of this innocent woman. Are not all your

accusation untrue?" The guilty woman experienced how difficult it is for the proud to retract their lying statements and admit themselves guilty. She would not admit defeat and confirmed her heart in evil.

"It is true, every word of it is true," she replied obstinately.

Then the defender of the innocent, acting under an inspiration from the Holy Spirit, said to her, "Well, then, if you maintain it is true, come with me to the Church and there in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament testify again to its truth." All went to the Church and there before the tabernacle, with another priest as witness, in the presence of the innocent woman and her husband, she did not hesitate to add perjury to her sin by persisting in her calumny.

In punishment for this added wickedness, she was suddenly possessed by the devil, who raised her high into the air and from her frothing mouth protruded a hideous tongue. The witness of this frightful scene was seized with terror; but Paul, kneeling in prayer, began the exorcism. After a time the evil spirit allowed the wretched creature to drop to the floor, as one dead. Then the Saint, taking the ciborium from the tabernacle, stood at the head of the prostrate women. The power of the Blessed Sacrament caused her to regain consciousness and then, heart-broken with repentance, she retracted her calumnies.

In the same district, while the missionary was preaching, his voice suddenly took, I do not know what solemn and terrible tone, as though he were delivering the sermon to an obstinate sinner. Taking the crucifix in his hand and turning towards the door of the Church, he cried out, "I will go, I will go with my Jesus to convert him." As he uttered these words, he was seen to be in ecstasy, lifted up from the pulpit and carried above the heads of the people to the door and then to return to the pulpit again.

When Paul arrived in the Isle of Elba at the beginning of June, he found the land drought-stricken. Harvest time came and a single drop of rain had not fallen. The earth was scorched, the wheat crops were withered and the poor people did not think it worthwhile even to gather a few wisps of straw. But the Saint, who had implored the blessings of the heavenly Father, said to them, "Have confidence in God. Reap your harvest, my dear brothers, and you will see how good God is." They listened to his voice, for all regarded him as a great worker of miracles, and the harvest that they reaped was so bounteous that they always referred to it as "the year and the harvest of Father Paul."

After some days of rest at Monte Argentario, he again set out for a series of missions that occupied two months.

Orbetello and Portofino again wished to hear him. After the horror of war, peace and tranquility was restored on the Island, and all were free to pursue the things of the soul. During these two missions, the Spanish soldiers were models of fidelity to the practice of their religion. Although most of them only understood a little Italian, yet the words of the missionary penetrated their hearts and caused them to burst into tears. General de Las Minas, accompanied by his officers, was always present for the sermons. Under the

direction of the Apostle, he made great progress along the path of Christian perfection. He was instructed by Paul how to meditate on the truths of faith and on the Passion of Jesus Christ. He spent two hours each morning at this holy exercise, frequently received the Sacraments and often had spiritual conferences with his holy director, whose advice he followed with the simplicity of a child.

It was at this time that the man of God undertook a heroic means in order to convert a great sinner, for he was ever ready to sacrifice all, even his very life, for the salvation of souls. One winter evening, a bandit, armed as bandits usually are, came to the hermitage of Saint Antony. Paul received him with amiability and kindness and during the course of his conversation learnt that he had not been to confession for thirty years. In his efforts to lead him back to God, Paul used every means, but his effort was in vain. However, the bandit accepted the hospitality that Paul offered him for the night, but early the following morning, not daring to face the Saint again, he left the hermitage. Whilst walking down the path that led from the mountain, he passed a lake of freezing water. To his utter amazement, he saw the man of God, Paul, standing in the frozen pond with his arms outstretched. "What are you doing there, Father Paul," he exclaimed. "I am here," replied the Saint, in a voice filled with sadness. "I am here because I am doing penance for your sins."

These words at least softened a hitherto unyielding heart and could not restrain his tears. Offering his hand to Father Paul, he helped him from the frozen water and said that he wished to accompany him to the hermitage. His conversion was complete. An eight days' retreat, under the direction of the Saint, initiated him into a life of penance and prayer and the practice of the Christian virtues.

The thought of the innumerable conversions that God worked through him made the Saint forget his own bodily fatigue. As a reward for his zeal, Jesus Christ increased his little band of followers, whom the Saint instructed in the school of the Cross, that they may be equipped to fight the battle of the Lord.

His brother Anthony was ordained priest on the Saturday of Quarter Tense in Advent, 1735, and celebrated his first Mass in the little chapel of the hermitage, assisted by Paul and John Baptist, who wept with joy on this memorable occasion.

A few days later, a young priest arrived who wished to consecrate himself to Jesus Christ and to be clothed in the black livery of the passion. He was from Pereta in the diocese of Soana. His name was Fulgentius Pastorelli. While a student for the Priesthood, he had first conceived the idea of following Paul's way of life when the Saint came to give a mission. He would have joined the ranks of the followers of the Crucified then, had not the Saint advised him to wait until after he had been ordained to the Priesthood. He followed the Saint's advice but often came to visit him. On one occasion, as a newly-ordained priest, he acted as a catechist for the Saint. He loved to visit Monte Argentario and would spend days with the religious.

During this visit an interesting incident occurred, which showed that those servants of Jesus Christ lived on earth as though in heaven, forgetting the world around them and even the needs of the body. The first time that Dom Fulgentius came to the hermitage,

the Saint and his companions wished to prepare something special for their guest. They lit the fire and put on some beans to cook. While waiting they began to speak of the attributes of God and the beauty of His celestial kingdom. Absorbed in these holy and sublime thoughts, they forgot about the fire, the beans and the soup, filled as they were with spiritual food. Next day they found the pot on the hearth, cold and blackened, and the beans burnt to a cinder.

After the arrival of Dom Fulgentius, the other postulants came. Soon the holy Founder had the consolation of seeing the number of his sons increase to nine. Not being able to accommodate all in the small hermitage, they build a hut of foliage and thatch, where four of them would sleep at night. They were poor, but their poverty, far from diminishing their happiness of heart, intensified it. They always led that life of penance which we have already described.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AT NAPLES AND AT LEGHORN - PERSECUTIONS AND SUFFERING - SAINT MICHAEL - SOLEMN BLESSING OF MONTE ARGENTARIO - NOVENA OF THE PRESENTATION - SIGNAL FAVOR FROM HEAVEN

1736 - 1738

It was a severe trial for Paul, first at not being able to comfortably shelter his well-beloved family, and then to see the construction of the new monastery delayed by the war. However, he had charged Brother Mark to spend some time on the building daily so that the partly built walls may not fall into ruin. Paul himself, during the intervals between missions, delighted in helping him. One day a priest, seeing him working there, asked him how he proposed to complete the monastery. "I find that I have only three pils (about 30 pence) but if God provides the means, as I trust he will, then I shall finish it before long."

The high cost of materials and the expense of transport had absorbed the money given by the people of Orbetello. Paul's delicacy prevented him from appealing again to their generosity because the war had impoverished their meager resources. General Las Minas, who had already obtained for him permission from the new King to continue with the work of erection, advised him to apply to the monarch himself, Charles III, whose generosity, he said, equaled his kindness.

After the feast of St. Anthony, Paul, entrusting his little community to the care of Father Fulgentius, and, in spite of the excessive rigors of that winter (1736), left for Naples, accompanied by John Baptist. When they arrived at the palace, the king was at dinner. However, he summoned the brothers to him at once and asked them with genuine interest what was the reason of their call upon him. Paul outlined briefly the purpose of the Institute, recalled the beginnings of the new monastery, thanked his Majesty for his kindly approbation of the work, and concluded by saying that to complete the building his only hope now was his confidence in the generosity their Sovereign. The King was fascinated by this holy work and gave orders at once for a hundred gold pistoles to be given to the brothers.

Delighted at the assistance they had received, the servants of God returned to Monte Argentario, and soon the walls of the building were rising though by invisible means. In order that no time should be wasted, or opportunities neglected, the brothers themselves assisted the workmen. Each morning, after meditation and holy Mass, they left the hermitage and set themselves to the work. Paul also contributed his share and encouraged all by example as well as by his word. But, in constructing this material temple, he worked with equal diligence at the spiritual formation of souls by speaking to the men of spiritual things. He taught the head mason and his laborers about hatred of sin, love of Jesus Crucified and devotion to the Blessed Mother.

What could express the joy of heart of the Founder? "My God," he exclaimed, "there is the abode of your love being prepared for you by one who loves You." But the devils, regarding this building a formidable bulwark against their power, commenced their diabolic machinations to dash it to the ground. They destroyed by night the work done

by day. The construction did not advance by one brick. Very soon, however, a superior power paralyzed their efforts. Defeated by the prayers of the Saint, they revenged themselves upon him in person. They assailed him in an atrocious way. But Paul's patience ever tranquil became more manifest, and the devils retreated in confusion.

During this time, the main body of the Spanish army, after its return from the Lombardy expedition, was quartered in the towns of Leghorn and Pisa. General de Las Minas was again in command. No doubt he spoke to the Duke of Montemar, the Commander-in-Chief, of the influence that Paul had been over the soldiers. The Duke, impressed by the heroic virtue of the Saint, invited him to preach a mission to his troops, and sent a royal felucca (small sailboat) to bring Paul to Port San Stefano. The felucca was sailing with the fleet, and, when almost at the end of the voyage, near Leghorn, it was caught in a violent storm. The other ships of the fleet became helpless in the throes of the gale and, after being tossed about by the heavy seas, overturned and sank. A similar fate threatened the felucca, for the decks were awash by the continual breaking of the heavy seas. The sailors furled the sails and seized the oars, but, as one of them was smashed, they had no chance of surviving. The sailors were as pale as death, for they feared that each moment was their last and they would be cast into the depths of the seas. The venerable Father invoked the help of Mary, the Star of the Sea, by reciting the litany and at the same time abandoned himself to Divine Providence. His words inspired the sailors with confidence that, by a supreme effort, brought the ship safely to port. All marveled that they had escaped from such imminent peril.

After giving thanks to the Mother of God for her timely intercession, the Saint agreed with the Duke that the mission should be held during Easter week in Pisa; then he returned to Monte Argentario with the generous alms which he had no doubt received from the Commander-in-Chief and other Spanish officers.

Towards the end of Lent, Paul set out for Pisa, accompanied by John Baptist, but they learned that the mission had to be cancelled because orders had come from Madrid that the army was to be evacuated in small detachments to Tuscany. However, the two apostles accepted the invitation of the Vicar Capitular of Chiusi to preach in his diocese.

On their return to the hermitage, instead of the rest that they desired, they found awaiting them only persecution and mental anguish. The trials that afflicted Paul during the following years were so great that had it not been for a special grace from God, he could not have borne them. Men and demons had each conspired the ruin of the new Institute, and God seemed to have abandoned him into their hands. Let us listen to Paul as he confides to a friend in one of his letters:

“Oh, God, so fierce is the rage of the devils. How fearful an uproar they make. I do not know where to turn, and God alone knows what a state I am in. Storms beat on every side and contrary winds blow. The demons attack us because they hate us. And men persecute us with good intentions. May God be blessed.”

In another letter he says, “New assaults are being prepared for us. Who knows how I shall endure them. One storm follows another, darkness descends and engulfs me while I fear and tremble. The demons launch their attack and men lash us with their

biting tongues. From without, fierce assaults; from within, fear, darkness, indecision, weariness, desolation.”

One of the reasons for the beginnings of this new era of assault was the jealousy in Portercole. The people regarded the choice of Orbetello for the site of the new foundation as an insult. They gave vent to their injured feelings by mocking and insulting the Saint and his companions. But even more bitter to the heart of Paul was the fact that the people of Orbetello joined in the persecution. In that city, certain men regarded the man of God with an evil eye. They were powerful and influential enough to sway others. The reason may well be that they were offended by his outspoken manner of preaching; perhaps they had reasons they were ashamed to admit. However, they did not dare to attack him in the open because the people and the higher authorities still revered him as a saint and would protect him at any cost.

But when General de Las Minas left Orbetello, their treachery knew no bounds. Goaded by the devils, they mocked him publicly and devised ways and means to force him to leave the monastery, never to return again. They spread the blackest calumnies and planned their attack with such astute cunning that even the Most Eminent Abbot was influenced by them, especially as he had been led to believe their lying reports. The fact that the Abbot was on the side of the persecutors increased the intensity of Paul's anguish. The plotters made use of the Abbot's favor and used his name to support the lie that whoever would support the missionaries of Monte Argentario would incur his grave displeasure. The efforts of their enemies achieved the desired result for the devotion of the people cooled towards the hermits, some through fear and others by believing the calumnies. But the result was that all ceased to send offerings, which formerly had been so generous. The poor servants of God, whose resources had been spent on the work of building the retreat, were now reduced to such poverty that for food they had only the wild herbs and fruits they picked in the wilderness, and for drink the water they drew from the fountain.

Tormented in mind, deprived of all heavenly consolation, abandoned by God and cruelly assaulted by the devils, the Saint cried out:

“Poor Paul, the waters of tribulation encompass him. Ah, the hand of God strikes me heavily, and I fear the blows may increase. Beg the Lord to chastise me with mercy and to save my soul, which he redeemed at such a price. May God be blessed forever and ever.”

To these fearful trials were added others; the absence of that consoling joy which usually results from the conquest of souls for God. Preaching with Father John Baptist at Pitigliano, he was grieved to see almost all the people, due to the deceit of men, obstinately resist the word of God. The two apostles, sorrowful at heart, left this unresponsive town and, fulfilling the counsel of the Gospel, shook the dust of that city from their feet. But there was a further trial; this whole community fell ill and Paul with them. Weakened in body by sickness, their extreme poverty prevented them from obtaining even the barest of necessities. This was a crushing blow for the Founder, but, drawing for himself strength and courage from Jesus Crucified, he encouraged the

others to bear their sufferings with resignation, and, arising with difficulty from his sick bed, attended to their needs with the greatest charity.

God had tested the fidelity of His servants; now, He will reward them by a manifestation of His fatherly love. A priest named Peter Cavalier came from Porto Longone on the Isle of Elba and asked to be admitted into the new Institute. He was not discouraged by the sight of the poverty and distress of the servants of God. As though sent by God to help them in their hour of need, he ministered to them with a tender charity. When they were all fully recovered from their sickness, he left to set the affairs of his family in order. Then he returned to Monte Argentario to receive from the hands of the Founder the habit of the Passion.

The divine goodness was again manifested when sentiments of generosity and charity were reawakened in the hearts of the people towards the wants of the servants of God. One pious person in the diocese of Acquapendente sent them a generous supply of vegetables and the Religious of Piombino took up a collection for them.

This timely alleviation of the distress of his religious afforded Paul great consolation and relieved his anxiety of mind. In gratitude he offered to God fervent thanks,

But the fires of hatred continued to flame. It raged against him with an ever increasing fury. His enemies were determined to force him and his religious to flee from Monte Argentario. Their calumnies had proven ineffective and now they resorted to violence. They themselves would attempt what the devils had already tried in vain to accomplish, the wrecking of the almost completed building. Under cover of darkness, when the mountain was wrapped in silence, and Paul and his companions were sleeping peacefully, the enemies, goaded by blind passion, crept noiselessly to the monastery. They were at the site about to blow up the walls when the same mysterious power, which had protected the building from the devils, struck fear and terror into the hearts of the fanatics. They fled, some in one direction, some in another, heedless of the direction, across rocks and down valleys. What had they seen? Standing on a fiery globe and holding in his hand a flaming sword, the Archangel Saint Michael. He was the protector of the holy edifice. A holy soul had also seen him. When the Founder had learnt of the peril that had threatened and of the timely deliverance by Saint Michael, he dedicated an altar to him in the new Church and always venerated him as a defender of the infant Congregation.

This singular sign of heavenly protection persuaded Paul that it was his duty to refute the calumnies spread about him and to defend himself and his religious in the presence of the Most Eminent Abbot. He made two journeys to Rome, wrote many letters and, after innumerable difficulties, at last succeeded in exposing the malice of his calumniators. But the Cardinal, learning that these poor and persecuted religious had not the means to furnish the new church, would not give them permission to say Mass in it. They could live in the Retreat, but they could not use the church. This prohibition was the hardest blow of all; yet, Paul waited patiently for God to change the heart of the Cardinal. The heat of the summer of 1737 was so excessive that the religious could not remain within the restricted confines of the small hermitage without endangering their health, so the Saint and his companions moved into the new Retreat. But the priests,

although still weak as a result of their sickness, had to walk a mile and a half each morning to the chapel of the hermitage of Saint Anthony in order to say Mass, while the magnificent Church that had been built at the cost of untold sacrifices, remained empty and unused.

Paul could not bear to see his religious walking each morning the stony path back to the hermitage, so he wrote to the Cardinal again. He stated that he would be quite happy if his Eminence would approve the new church as a private oratory, where the priests could at least offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass. "Thus," he added, "we will be able to spend longer hours at the foot of the Crucifix, since we are not permitted to work for the good of souls by administering the Sacraments, as we have previously done. We hope that God will have pity on us who desire to serve Him with all our hearts, all the days of our lives. ...In His infinite goodness we place all our hopes; we give thanks to our Crucified Lord for having closed to us the ways of men; all our trust and confidence we place in our heavenly Father."

This confidence of the patient servant of Jesus Christ was not in vain. Soon, in an unexpected way, he saw his long endured sorrows vanish. Paul's letter had not yet reached Rome, when by order of Pope Clement XII, a Brief was drawn up on 31st August, 1737, in which the Cardinal was given faculty to delegate the solemn blessing, as a public oratory, of the new Church built by the Danei priests of Monte Argentario, in which without prejudice to parochial rights, the Sacraments could be administered and all other ecclesiastical functions celebrated.

We will relate how the favor came to be granted. On the day of the Assumption, a feast which the Saint celebrated all his life with special devotion, he had written to Bishop Crescenzi and spoken to him as friend speaks to a friend. Paul told him all his worries and anxieties. Then this prelate, together with Cardinal Corradini, petitioned this signal favor from the Holy See.

As soon as he learned of the Brief, the Most Eminent Abbot, who sought only the glory of God, regarding it as a manifest sign of the divine will, yielded wholeheartedly and at once gave the faculty to his Vicar General, Moretti, to bless the new Church. The Cardinal always held the missionaries of Monte Argentario in the highest esteem and from that time was more ready to give them sincere signs of his solicitude. This was his way of making reparation to them for the harm he had involuntarily caused them by being swayed by the lies spread about them by their enemies.

Soon, at Orbetello and in other places, too, things changed for the better. The new Commander of the garrison, General Charles Blom, was a fervent Catholic and showed himself a zealous defender of the persecuted Founder. The adversaries were intimidated and no longer put the same zest in their attacks, while the people, again showing their affection and devotion to Paul and his companions, ardently desired to see the solemn blessing of the new Church, which, rising majestically on the side of the mountain and surrounded by lofty oaks, seemed to be always calling them to prayer and union with God.

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14th September, 1737, was the day destined by Divine Providence for the solemn celebration. From early morning in bright sunlight, a procession of barges crossed and recrossed the lake, bringing the inhabitants of Orbetello to the opposite bank. Then, in the colorful array of their festive clothes, they walked in happy groups up the shady paths of the mountain. There they joined with those who had come from other neighboring places and waited for the ceremony to begin. This was the day of days; everybody seemed to be present; the magistrates, the Spanish officers and soldiers with General Blom at their head. The mountain resounded with the vibrant music of the military band, a joyous song of praise to the Lord of Hosts. The Vicar General arrived with the clergy and went into the Church to put on the sacred vestments. The Founder, with a rope around his neck and holding high the glorious standard of the Cross, came in procession from the Retreat with his companions – four priests and four lay-brothers. All were barefooted, solemn and recollected with downcast eyes. On their faces could be seen the stamp of austerity, yet also could be noticed the heavenly serenity of the servants of God. They sang with joyful voices the praises of the Lord. The clergy received them at the door of the Church and led them in where the Church was solemnly blessed under the title of the Presentation. Mass was celebrated with all the splendor of the Roman liturgy during which the Founder delivered a moving sermon worthy of this memorable occasion.

This ceremony aroused deep emotion in the hearts of all, but for the Founder it was an occasion that would ever live in his memory and the thought of which would fill his soul with a joy and gladness more of heaven than of earth - a day never to be forgotten.

But God had other consolations for him. The reader will recall that a petition was sent to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for permission to change the title of the ecclesiastical property attached to the Retreat; nor will he have forgotten the silence of his Eminence, the Abbot, on this matter. But today, having become a generous benefactor of the Religious of the Passion, he is the first to furnish the necessary documents. He speaks highly of them and refers to them as “zealous and indefatigable priests, full of zeal, who have for several years labored in the service of God and for the good of souls.” In his desire to accede to their request, he wished to be present at the signing of the agreement between them and the community of Orbetello. The King’s treasurer also wished to be present and read a royal decree, which he had personally obtained and which gave to Paul and John Baptist the right to cut and carry wood in all the forests on the mountain that belonged to the King,

Some months previously, General Blom had granted them an acre of land. This, together with the land of the Saint Anthony property, formed on the slope of the mountain an enclosure surrounded by a wood and a garden which were watered by a freely flowing stream.

Yet, in spite of all these privileges, there was something lacking: permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the new Church. Let us listen to Paul as he speaks of his yearning for the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. In a letter to one of his penitents who later joined the Congregation and who died a Passionist in the odor of sanctity, he writes, “My dear friend, the Retreat is completed, the cells are furnished and now it only remains for us to adorn the Church a little that the Blessed Sacrament may remain there

as in a fitting temple. O true God, an hour seems as a thousand years until I see my Eucharistic Love in our Church. When shall I be able, during the hours of profound solitude, to remain at the foot of the altar? Who will give me the wings of a dove that I may soar to the Sacred Heart of my Jesus?"

Several years are yet to be spent in longing and waiting for this supreme hour, yet Paul never ceased to hope that one day he would possess under the roof of the monastery the God of the tabernacle. Inspired by this hope, he was ever at work adorning the Church. Because of the poverty of the new Congregation, he could not provide the rich and beautiful vestments and vessels he desired for the holy Sacrifice. The Cardinal Abbot came to his aid by making a gift of a large and magnificent painting from the School of Conca of the Blessed Virgin being consecrated to God in the Temple.

This thoughtful consideration pleased Paul greatly, and the gift itself touched the sensitive fibers of his heart. Words cannot express how dear to him was the remembrance of Mary fleeing from the world that she might consecrate herself completely to the service of God. He celebrated solemnly in the new Church the feast of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple for which he prepared by a novena. During those blessed days, he experienced an increase of fervor and, prostrate before the altar, he intoned in a loud voice a hymn of David, the royal psalmist, in which his children joined, sharing as they did his devotion to this glorious feast. The psalm harmonizes so perfectly with his struggles and with his triumphs, that we quote some verses from it. "Shout with joy to God, all the earth, sing ye a psalm to his name; give glory to his praise. ...Let all the earth adore thee and sing to thee; let it sing a psalm to thy name" (Psalm 66).

To the Saint, the ways along which God, in His mercy, had led him, seem to have been aptly expressed in the words of the psalm, "Who hath set my soul to live and hath not suffered my feet to be moved. For You, O God, have proved us; You have tried us by fire, as silver is tried. ...We have passed through fire and water, and thou hast brought us out into refreshment."

But the overflowing of his soul knew no bounds when he came to these words of the Royal Prophet, "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows which my lips have uttered. And my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

The Saint always celebrated this feast with a special devotion, even to the end of his life. No matter how wearied he was from his exhausting apostolate, nor weakened by bodily infirmity, nor the distance separating him from the Retreat, he would return to Monte Argentario to take part in the novena in preparation for the feast.

"The feast of the Presentation," he used to say, "I consider to be one of the most solemn and sacred." The remembrance of Mary's consecration in the Temple was not the only reason for his devotion to it. What memories did it not recall to his mind? Was it not on that day in 1720 that he said farewell to the world to receive on the following day, a Friday, the black habit of the Passion from Bishop de Gattinara, and from that day to consecrate himself entirely to Jesus Crucified? But there was another, a secret reason,

for his predilection for this feast. He alludes to it vaguely when speaking to his religious during the novena. In a voice choked with emotion, he said, "I know, I know, I..." He did, however, confide this secret to one who has revealed it to us. On the feast of the Presentation, we do not know in what year, the servant of Jesus Christ received from his Divine Master a supreme pledge of love.

To express the union that exists between a faithful soul and Himself, God often applies to Himself in Holy Scripture the name of Spouse. "And I will espouse thee to me forever...in faith," He said (Osee 11:19). The Eternal Son of God fulfilled this promise when He espoused Himself to humanity at the Incarnation. It is for that reason that in Holy Scripture Jesus Christ is called 'Spouse,' and the Church, 'Spouse.'

"He espoused human nature which was foreign to Him," exclaimed Bossuet. "He made it one with Himself. In it He has espoused His Holy Church, the immortal Spouse which has neither spot nor wrinkle. In it He has espoused holy souls whom He calls not only to share His Kingdom, but also His royal couch, lavishing upon them priceless gifts and spotless pleasures, rejoicing with them, giving Himself to them, not only all that He is but all that He has, His Body, His Soul, His Divinity, and preparing for them an incomparable greater union in the unending joys of His eternal Kingdom. Jesus Christ, then, becomes the Spouse of all just souls through the faith and love that the Holy Spirit enkindles in their hearts."

But there is another union, more intimate and more exalted, that God for chosen souls of spotless purity that have consecrated themselves entirely to Him, and on whom He was pleased to lavish all the treasures of His divine love. The Eternal Word, by the infusion of His eternal Light, raises the soul to the highest contemplation and fills it with the Holy Spirit. In the present life this is one of the highest degrees of loving union with God. The soul, when it is united with the heavenly Spouse, is transformed into Him, and now living only in union with Him, exclaims, "And I live, now not I, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Having returned from this ecstatic state of mystical marriage, the soul retains a vivid recollection of the profound knowledge that it has received and of the pure joys which have inebriated it; but it finds neither word nor expression to relate its experiences. The soul has seen and heard, it can say with the great Apostle, Saint Paul, "Secret words which it is not granted to man to utter" (II Cor. 12).

God, in order to accommodate Himself to the condition of human nature, which is raised to the spiritual through the sensible and the intelligible, sometimes gives to a chosen soul a symbolic sign of its mystical nuptials. That sign was given to Paul of the Cross on the feast of the Presentation.

He was at prayer, deeply recollected in God, when he was blinded by a brilliant light. Surrounded by the splendor of radiant glory, the Queen of Heaven appeared to him with the Infant Jesus in her arms, accompanied by a glorious retinue of resplendent Angels and Saints. With sentiments of profound reverence, Paul prostrated himself upon the ground. A voice of ineffable sweetness invited him to celebrate his mystic union with the Divine Word. But the humble Servant of God could not find words to accept this sublime invitation, for realizing his own nothingness and unworthiness, he considered himself undeserving of so signal a favor. Then some of the Saints approached, and raising him

to his feet, presented him to the august Queen of Heaven, who looked at him with eyes of maternal love and gave him a precious ring on which was engrave the instruments of the Passion. The Blessed Virgin told him that these divine nuptials were to be a constant reminder of the Sufferings and Death of her Divine Son and of His infinite love for his soul. The Divine Child confirmed the words of His Blessed Mother and placed the mystic ring on Paul's finger.

The vision ended, but it left so deep and lasting an imprint on the Saint's soul that even when relating it during the last years of his life, his words were interspersed with sobs and ejaculations of love.

Who can measure the treasures of grace that this mystical union with the Son of God conferred upon his soul? It was the presage of other extraordinary favors which "this tender, loving, enraptured Spouse, whose love is manifested by unheard of effects," (Bossuet) gave to him, and which we shall relate during the course of this Life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE RULES ARE PRESENTED TO POPE CLEMENT XII - THE BROTHERS RECEIVE THE TITLE 'APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES' - OBJECTIONS TO THE RULES - GOD REVEALS THAT THE TIME OF APPROBATION HAS NOT YET ARRIVED - MISSIONS IN CIVITA DEL PIEVE - MIRACLES - TRIALS

1738 - 1740

The first Passionist Retreat had been founded and the consolation that this brought to the Saint was further increased as he saw his little religious family grow from day to day. He believed that the time was opportune for him to seek the approbation of the Holy See upon his Congregation.

Early in the year 1738, he set out for Rome and through the mediation of Bishop Crescenzi presented the Rules to Pope Clement XII for approbation. The Sovereign Pontiff received the petition with kindness and entrusted the examination to a commission of Cardinals.

Bishop Crescenzi desired the Saint to give in the following spring a mission in Civita del Pieve and in other towns of that diocese; he obtained for Paul and John Baptist the title of Apostolic Missionaries by a Rescript of 22nd January. The Holy Father, in addition to the title, granted them the faculty of imparting at the end of each mission the Papal Blessing and a Plenary Indulgence to all those who had attended the mission.

In the examination of the Rules, the Cardinals judged that they were too austere, and for that reason difficulties arose. But Paul, hoping that the matter could be attended to without him, left the matter in the hands of Bishop Crescenzi and returned to Monte Argentario. At home in his Retreat, Paul spent the time in prayer and awaited the news of the approbation. There came to him a letter from Bishop Crescenzi asking him to come to Rome as further difficulties had arisen since his departure. Towards the end of February, Paul set out once again for Rome. These long and wearying journeys, undertaken in the middle of winter, caused him untold hardship; his feet were cracked and bleeding and each step left a blood-stained print on the road; the biting cold cruelly tortured his famished body, poorly protected as it was by his coarse habit. Indeed, one day in a lonely spot, he fain would have succumbed to the intense cold had not God sustained him.

Alas, such intense suffering along the way and only bitter disappointment awaiting him at Rome. He found the Cardinals, appointed to examine the Rules, opposed to him. Then, placing all his trust in God, he prayed fervently for guidance. Whilst in the Church of Saint Charles of Corso, he heard the divine voice clearly saying to him that the hour for the approbation of the Rule had not yet come; it would come at another time. In spite of the earnest entreaties of Bishop Crescenzi, the judges rejected the petition. With profound humility Paul bowed in submission to the will of God.

Returning to Monte Argentario, Paul spent some days in prayer and solitude and then began a series of missions. He preached seven altogether in the diocese of Civita del

Pieve, one following upon another. He preached the first in the Cathedral. Though he was fatigued by the continual preaching, his apostolic labors were accompanied by miracles. We will relate only one of those that Paul worked, the most sensational that took place in the Church before the whole congregation.

At Piagoro, the Missioner was sorrowful of heart because some of the people resisted the graces of the mission; they even objected to the mission altogether. Paul entreated the Lord to conquer their hardened hearts. To console him, Our Lord revealed the designs of His mercy upon these obstinate souls. Several times, but especially at the end of the mission, the Apostle of the Passion uttered these surprising words, "Some among you earnestly desire my departure and the close of the mission, and it seems to you that it has lasted for a thousand years. But I will leave behind me One to continue the mission more eloquently than I" as he pointed with his hand to a Crucifix which was venerated on an altar of the Church "When I have gone," he continued, "this Figure will preach."

He gave the Papal Blessing, descended from the pulpit and, followed by a great crowd, set out for Monteleone. There were still people in the Church when the Saint left. As they were kneeling there, they saw this Figure, carved from wood, begin to sweat profusely, especially on the hands and the wound in the Side. Astonished and terrified, they all cried out at the sight of this miracle. Those outside rushed into the Church and all crowded around the miraculous Figure and gazed in amazement at the phenomenon. Then Antony Felix rushed up to the altar and overcome with emotion cried out, "These are my sins...these are my sins." He reverently wiped the miraculous sweat with a white cloth. Others ran after the Saint and told him of the miracle. "I know it. I know it," he replied. "What is the color of the sweat?" "Blue," they answered. "A good sign," he replied and continued on his way.

A good sign indeed, a sign of the Divine Mercy, for not one sinner resisted the grace of God. The miracle triumphed over those very ones who were unresponsive to the words of the Apostle. From that time the Crucifix was an object of special veneration. A chapel was built for it and the following inscriptions were carved at each end of the altar.

On the Gospel side:

To the All-Good and All-Powerful God.
This image of Jesus Crucified,
After a holy mission by Father Paul of the Cross of Monte Argentario,
In the sight of the people of Piagoro, lamenting and weeping, gave forth a blue
colored sweat.
11th May, 1738

On the Epistle side:

The Magistrates of the town of Piagoro
Have erected this monument by the aid of subscriptions,
In memory of the miraculous sweat;
And Antony Pazzaglia, citizen of Calles, priest and Rector of this Church,
Has devoted his time, his industry and his wealth to the adorning of this chapel.
In 1738.

Other reports had no doubt been given on this miracle by the Servant of God, said Saint Vincent Strambi, for this is what he wrote in one of his letters, "When the news reached Civitavecchia, I already knew it," To what did this refer. We do not know, but it was certainly something miraculous. "There occurred," continued Father Paul, "something no less extraordinary during one of our missions in Umbria. A carved statue began to sweat. A written report has been compiled and forwarded to Rome. This Figure of Our Lord is greatly venerated because of the miracles that God has worked by means of it. I have all this from a letter from Saint Angelo, dated 28th June, 1749, and addressed to Doctor Dominic Anthony Ercolani of Castellana."

"Such are the words of the Servant of God," adds Saint Vincent Strambi. "The people of Piagoro continue to honor this Crucifix with special devotion. Besides, the very sight of this Figure arouses sentiments of compunction and recalls the miracle itself. It still bears traces of the miraculous sweat, for it is discolored from the head to the feet. I am convinced of this fact, for I saw it myself with my own yes during the mission that we gave there in 1771."

To avoid repeating ourselves, we shall merely state that until the Spring of 1740 the intrepid Apostle preached many missions throughout several dioceses and especially in that of Todi in Umbria. At one time, in towns, at another, in the country, but wherever he was he sought the hopeless sinner and won them back to God. He preached Christ and Him Crucified to the shepherds herding their flocks, to the farmer tilling their fields, and in convents of nuns he preached the word of God and inspired them to be loving and faithful Spouses of Jesus Christ.

What recompense was due to him for his unceasing labors? The most fitting reward was the Cross! Always the Cross, for without the Cross, how could the Apostle of the Cross be associated with Christ in the redemption of souls. But, this time, the Cross was a heavy one and the chalice, the most bitter, for the Saint was plunged into an ocean of interior and exterior tribulations. We can embrace, in a glance, the course of the admirable Life, and, at the end of the sorrowful way, by which God was leading His servant, we can see the pure joys of charity radiant with a heavenly splendor shine forth in the works of Paul of the Cross. But at this moment, Paul could not find a single ray of light to dispel the gloomy blackness of the sufferings that engulfed him.

His efforts to obtain approbation of the Rules from Clement XII had been brought to naught. It is certainly true that the Church compares the foundation of a new Institute to a miracle. What trials and tribulations from man, from the devils, and even from God. What unshaken constancy does it not demand. It can be said in all truth, if the work does not come from God, it will soon crumble and fall. But, if such strength is needed for the cornerstone, it is equally necessary that the foundation stones, that must support the whole edifice rising to the height of the heavens, should possess an invincible stability. God does not rush His works for He has all eternity in which to work. But men, unless their confidence is boundless, their courage of a rare quality, are very soon discouraged at the thought of the sacrifice demanded of them and abandon the struggle. The Founder must have, therefore, as the first stones of his great work, heroes

of faith and love. "Expect, expect again, expect again" (Isaiah 28:10). This profound utterance of the Prophet gives us the understanding of the unsearchable ways of God.

This long delay in the approbation of the Rules discouraged two of Paul's companions, both priests, of whom the holy Founder expected great things, and who had already made great progress along the way of perfection. But he, who knows not how to die, knows not how to live. In sacrifice, first there is death and then the resurrection. And so his companions returned to the world. Their departure was the beginning of a new storm against the Congregation. His enemies, who were eagerly awaiting the slightest pretext for attacking him, seized this opportunity to belittle his Congregation, and in exaggerated language, inspired by blind passion, said, "The Rule is only an absurd collection of impossible austerities; that is why Rome will not approve it. The Retreat will very soon be abandoned." Quite naturally, the object of all their assaults was the holy Founder himself.

A cunning plot was hatched to destroy the humble Congregation. A young Florentine, of a noble and influential family, came to Monte Argentario and asked to be received amongst them as a follower of Christ Crucified. His semblance of piety impressed the venerable Founder, so he clothed him with the holy habit. But the novice was a traitor in disguise, sent by men as wicked and as depraved as himself, for the express purpose of sowing the seeds of dissention among the disciples of the Crucified. The penetrating eye of the Saint soon discovered an evil heart concealed beneath a veil of hypocrisy. Free from all human respect, Paul drove the wolf from the sheepfold. Because of this action, the Founder was the target of the blackest of calumnies, which spread abroad by the friends of the dismissed novice through the whole of Tuscany and destroyed the good name of Paul and his companions.

The enemies of Paul at Orbetello, on hearing the reports circulating about him, joined in the attack. Things reached such a state that the Servant of God, humble though he was, judged it necessary, that he might not be the occasion of sin to them, to avoid appearing in the town by day. When duty called him, he would go forth secretly and silently, as though he justly deserved the assaults of the people.

This was a strange persecution of hate. It must have astonished those who have not fathomed the deep recesses of the human heart. But it is, indeed, difficult to reconcile it with the lofty virtues of the Saint so often proved amongst them, and the miracles that were associated with his works amongst them. To understand perfectly this first religious of the Passion, it is necessary that we pause for a moment and see Jesus Christ in him; for in Paul of the Cross the great Victim of Calvary lived. Did not the savior restore sight to the blind? Did He not bring back the dead from the grave? And the people, the very ones who were the eye-witnesses of His miracles, did they not cry out to Pilate, "He is worthy of death!" And just as this King of Sorrows passed from shame to glory, so, His faithful Servant will soon see Orbetello, the scene of his humiliation, shine with the greatest glory that can crown the brow of an Apostle. But now, he must drink the chalice of suffering to its bitter dregs.

Our God is a jealous God; He is extremely jealous of His works. He allows it first of all to fall into ruin, then He restores it, so that it may be seen that it is His work, and His work

alone, achieved through the instrumentality of human weakness. He directs all in this way so that the work is accomplished for His greater glory and not for the gratification of self-love. The nobler the work God wishes to build by the hands of men, the more conscious must the medium of His choices be of its own utter powerlessness and worthlessness. Then, and then only, will the work be manifest, from the tower to the foundation, as the work of the All-powerful God.

As a boatman, whose frail craft is battered by the storm, no longer expects help from the seas around him, but turns his face to heaven and receives no other response than the vivid flash of lightning, so Paul saw his lowly Congregation battered by a hurricane of hate. Betrayed by men, he turns his mind to God, but God seems to have abandoned him and to want neither him nor his works.

In the chapel of the Holy Trinity at Gaeta, an angel appeared to Paul with a cross of gold, and the Lord said to him, "I will make of you another Job." And, the present state of the Saint and the heart-rending cries of his soul recall to us the Patriarch of Idumea.

"My sins have cast me into the most pitiable of miseries the earth has seen; the persecutions, the murmurings, the calumnies of men, which I willingly embrace to humble my pride, the dreadful onslaughts of the devil, and, what is the worst of all, the fearful scourge of an angry God which chastises me - it is hell that I suffer. I can only hope for a happy death through the merits of the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ."

Let us dwell on these words. There, in the darkness, is a faint glimmer of hope; everything at once is enveloped in darkness. "Yes, I am persuaded, I am convinced that the Divine Majesty no longer wants the work which I thought should be accomplished, for the signs that He gives me are too clear. I foresee that very soon the Retreat will fall into ruin, and the scourge shall strike with such violence that it will be the cause of my death. God gives me evident marks of His wrath, and makes me understand that He no longer wishes to use this miserable creature, but I hope for my eternal salvation through the infinite merits of the Sacred Passion"

O Paul! What has become of the promises made by the Lord and His Blessed Mother. Have you forgotten those heavenly apparitions that filled your heart with sublime joy and your soul with confidence? Paul had not forgotten them; he only believed that by his sins he had become unworthy of them and saw the sensible proof of it in his horrible abandonment by God, deprived of love and delivered instead to the wrath of God. It is not confidence that is wanting, it is his profound humility that is being revealed.

When God lets "the smoke from the pit of the abyss," that is to say from the lower powers of fallen nature, mount up to the superior part of the soul, even in the greatest of the saints, all is obscured by the smoke. It sees and feels only the effects of the fall of our First Parents. Though the soul is as pure as the day, it believes itself defiled by the stain of every sin. It is the old Adam stirring; he never completely dies, even in the soul of the greatest saint. The difference between a saint and a sinner is that in the latter the original seed of death grows, while in the saint the growth is combated by grace and the offshoots of sin destroyed. Without this knowledge of human nature, we cannot hope to understand either the language of the saints or the little value they have of themselves,

when we hear them, for example, in spite of the sanctity of their lives, call themselves and believe themselves to be great sinners. However, in the midst of these apparent crises of despair, there is, in the depths of their souls, I do not know in what secret sanctuary and unknown to themselves, boundless confidence. Thus, Paul, when everything seems to be lost, is still sustained by the virtue of hope, for he concludes this pathetic outburst with these assuring words, "But Jesus Christ will, I hope, save me by the infinite merits of his Most Holy Passion."

The cruel agonies of his soul were his own secret. He kept them to himself and carefully concealed them from his children, whose courage on the contrary he sustained by saying to them, "Beloved brothers, let us do what is right; then we can abandon ourselves into the arms of Divine Providence; God is our Father."

A further grief was added to Paul's already crushing burden. His most influential friend in Rome, the devoted and affectionate Bishop Crescenzi was retiring from office, True, Paul still had Cardinal Corradini as a friend and support, but his Eminence was also being deprived in Bishop Crescenzi of one whom he had often used on behalf of Paul. Bishop Crescenzi was retiring on account of his advanced age.

On 6th February, 1740, Pope Clement XII died and the chair of Peter was vacant for seven months. The delay in electing a successor prolonged the holy Founder's trials. To fill the chalice of suffering to the brim, soon Paul's health, affected by these interior and exterior trials and weakened by the excessive fatigue of the apostolate, failed day by day; frequent attacks of a slow fever was bringing him to the grave. On the ruined mound of human hopes, God alone now stands.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

POPE BENEDICT XIV - CARDINAL REZZONICO - THE SAINT BEFORE THE POPE - THE APPROBATION OF THE RULES - RELIGIOUS PROFESSION - "SIGN" OF THE PASSIONIST

1740 - 1741

On 17th August, 1740, Cardinal Prosper Lambertini was elected Pope, who was to become one of the most illustrious of the Popes, the light and the glory of his age, as Benedict XIV. With great joy Paul welcomed the appearance of this noble figure on the Chair of Peter, because he foresaw in him the powerful pillar of the faith, which at that time had been shaken by sacrilegious violence of unbelievers. We find a presentiment of his expectations of a glorious pontificate expressed in one of his letters, "Speaking to you in all confidence, I can assure your Most Illustrious Lordship that when I learnt the happy news that Cardinal Lambertini had been raised to the Papacy, although I did not know him as a Cardinal, yet his election affected me in an extraordinary way, the like of which I have never experienced. I was filled with a most lively hope that this holy and zealous pontiff will restore the prestige of piety that has fallen so low among Christians. My heart is overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to the Most High for the great mercy that He has shown His poor people."

An interior voice also said to Fr. Paul, "There is the Vicar of Jesus Christ who will establish in the Church by his apostolic authority the Congregation of the Passion." This encouraging thought had arisen in the heart of the holy Founder, but he dared not place complete reliance on the hope, for he always had before his eyes "the picture of his horrible nothingness," as he used to say, "and of his enormous ingratitude, which were the greatest obstacle to the work of God."

A secret hope, coming from on high, directed Paul to present the Rules of the Congregation to the Holy Father. But he realized that in order to do that, he needed an influential supporter. Whom could he find? Crescenzi was no longer in Rome, for in the preceding year, Clement XII had appointed him Archbishop of Nanziano and sent him as Nuncio to Paris. This Prelate, before his departure from Rome, had spoken to another Cardinal and inspired him with an affectionate interest in Paul. This was Cardinal Rezzonico, whose piety was the ornament of the Sacred College and who would be Paul's powerful protector in Rome. He had met the holy Founder at the Hospital of Saint Gallican, where he had been impressed by the charity of the Saint towards the sick, and received from Crescenzi as a pious legacy, the title of protector of the Saint and never ceased to show him a devoted attention.

Paul, on his side, placed all his confidence in his newly-found protector. He wrote to him and begged him to speak to the Pope about the nascent Congregation and received in reply this message:

"Yesterday, I saw the Holy Father and spoke to His Holiness about your Congregation. I explained the purpose for which it was founded and told him of the great good for souls that results from it, the expansion which should be desired and which would most

certainly follow if the Rules were approved by the Holy See. The Holy Father listened to me with intense interest. His Holiness wishes you to send some of your Religious to Rome with the Rules, and it is his hope that he will be able to give you the consolation of knowing that they have been approved by the Holy See.

Joyful tidings that calmed the troubled sea of Paul's soul; the fever abated and his health immediately improved. His generous heart, which knew how to keep its sorrows to itself, hastened to share its happiness with his children, exhorting them to redouble their prayers that the Lord might favor the success of so important a matter. Paul also recommended it to the prayers of those souls whom he was directing, and whose intercession he knew to be powerful with God.

"The affairs of our Congregation," he wrote to Mother Mary Cherubina Bresciani of the Convent of Piombino, "have never appeared so favorable... Now, my daughter, is the time to make lively entreaties, to address fervent supplications to the Most High for this holy work, which I fear is being hindered by myself. Offer to the Eternal Father the Most Precious Blood of Jesus that he may no longer be offended by my ingratitude, and that He may grant me the grace to fulfill His holy will; if this work is not for His glory, then may He destroy it and grant me the time and refuge in which to do penance for my sins and to weep over my many iniquities."

Seeking only the glory of God in all his works, Paul set out for Rome with Father John Baptist after the feast of All Saints.

More than once Cardinal Rezzonico had offered hospitality to Paul, and that the Religious may not fear to lodge in a palace, he wrote with amiable simplicity, "You will find there a poor and modest lodging, very much to your liking and similar to your monastery, where you will be at full liberty to attend to your affairs and to devote yourselves to your religious exercises. In the palace nobody will disturb you..." The Cardinal, faithful to his promise, received Paul and John Baptist with marks of deep affection and desired that they would seek at Rome no other lodging than the palace.

Without delay Rezzonico arranged with Cardinal Corradini that they would together present the Rules to the Sovereign Pontiff and seek approbation for them. Benedict XIV received their petition with kindness, and as this new Congregation had pleased him greatly, he deigned to read the Rules himself. His penetrating mind soon perceived in them the finger of God. Already disposed to approve them, he entrusted the operation to the same two Cardinals who had presented them, knowing quite well that they, too, were disposed to pass a favorable judgment. In his prudence, the Pontiff appointed a third, whose judgment on these matters he valued, the Count Abbot Garagni, who would examine the Rules with a strict but fair judgment.

An incident occurred that brought out into the open what the Vicar of Christ had perceived at first sight. The Rules of the new Congregation are truly the work of the Holy Spirit. The Abbot Garagni began to read them with a too meticulous care, which often has the effect of prejudicing the judgment of one examining the works of God only in the light of human prudence. The result was that they appeared to him as a collection of impracticable observances. This was his impression when he met the venerable

Founder. Seeing Paul so emaciated, so pale and trembling with the cold, the Abbot was more firmly convinced of his judgment. He told Paul in a curt and cold tone of voice that he would never co-operate in the approbation of such Rules, and then dismissed him abruptly, as though he could no longer stand the sight of him in his presence.

This totally unexpected reception by the Abbot Garagni convinced the Servant of God that he had weathered the storm at sea only to run aground in the harbor. He knew that the Abbot, by his prudence and learning, had great influence over Pope Benedict XIV, and that he was in a position to express his opinion freely and without human respect to the Holy Father. Therefore, the obstacle was almost invincible. No longer daring to hope for the favor from men, which had at first seemed certain, Paul turned to God; his petition was worthy to be heard.

The following evening, Abbot Garagni was suddenly overcome by a lively sorrow, accompanied by a fearful anxiety. He understood his state of mind to be a blow from the hand of God, yet could not discover for what reason it had come. He summoned his servants and implored them to pray that he might be enlightened by God on the matter. While reciting the Litany of Our Blessed Lady, a picture of Paul, poor Paul, humble Paul, came into his mind, not as an unlearned and ignorant priest of little account in the Church of God, but as a saint of the highest virtue. He could not doubt that it was his unkindly and rude treatment of him that was the real cause of his troubled state of mind. After a sleepless and restless night, he sent his servant at break of day to find the poor religious and to bring him back as soon as possible.

When Paul entered his room, the Abbot apologized for his attitude, treated him with the greatest respect, and said that he had altered his opinion; he was now willing to support him by every means in his power. As he was speaking, his anxieties disappeared and the cruel torments that had plagued him throughout the night gave way now to a state of tranquility and profound peace. From that time onward the most friendly relations existed between the Abbot and the holy Founder. The most active promoter of the approbation of the Rules and the most zealous propagator of the Congregation of the Passion was the Abbot Garagni. (The Count Abbot Garagni later became a Cardinal.)

This happy transformation filled Paul with joy and, persuaded that he was no longer necessary at Rome, since he was leaving behind him a powerful advocate, he returned to Monte Argentario. But before setting out on his journey, he received another favor: an audience with the Holy Father. The Pope, on seeing the two servants of God, so humble and so poor, encouraged them in a kindly and fatherly manner, and added that he would willingly approve of their Institute, but after a few modifications had been introduced, such as, the use of a hat, a mantle, sandals and a less coarse habit. These changes were necessary, the Holy Father said, for unless they were made, those who would join them in the future would not be able to live a life of such austerity and hardship. Always prompt to the call of obedience, Paul replied that the voice of his Holiness was for him the voice of God. The Holy Father gave them the Apostolic Blessing, and the two Apostles, elated as though they had been in the presence of Jesus Christ Himself, returned to the solitude of Monte Argentario.

The Saint maintained a continuous correspondence with Abbot Garagni. He earnestly besought him to preserve the Rules in their original, as the Divine Majesty had inspired them, without making any other modification than those indicated by the Holy Father. He next expressed his ardent desire to be permitted to wear on his breast the "Sign" which had been revealed to him. "If it is not too bold a request," he wrote to Abbot Garagni, "I recommend to your fervent piety this sacred Sign of salvation so that we may have the happiness to wear it on the habit and still more in the heart, for the confusion of the powers of hell."

Paul, with gentle familiarity, was arousing the zeal of his new friend by showing him the mission and the beauty of the work in which he was cooperating. The Apostle had probed the deep wounds of his age - pride, sensuousness, the spirit of unbelief, the teaching of false doctrines. He had heard the rumbling and menacing murmurs of the volcano which was about to erupt and which would cause devastating ruin. Oh, how he wished to restrain the arm of God, ready to strike the earth. "But I fear, I tremble," he said to the Abbot, "the world is perhaps so perverted and wicked that there is no longer any other remedy for it than the terrible chastisement of the rod of the Lord. I really feel that this is what will happen..." Paul found that the cause of the wickedness of the world was forgetfulness of the sufferings of Christ. Preachers were therefore necessary. The Passion preached in every town and village, the Passion preached in season and out; for the Passion will be the powerful lever that will prize away the heavy burden of human iniquity. Sophism has so perverted the spirit that, henceforth, the appeal must be made, not to the mind but to the heart of man.

That the Congregation of the Passion was founded at an opportune time, Paul explained in the following manner:

"A great number of Christians have forgotten all that the Divine Redeemer has done and suffered for them; that is why their lives are spent in the horrible mire of iniquity. To arouse them from their fatal lethargy, it is essential that apostles, burning with zeal, be sent to preach the word of God and the Passion of Christ that the poor sinners walking 'in darkness and in the shadow of death' be delivered from danger and imminent peril. Oh! God will be glorified by the conversion of many souls, and by so many who will devote their lives to holy prayer which is the sure path leading to sanctity of life. May your zeal be animated, O Most Illustrious Lord; and may it inflame with enthusiasm the hearts of the Cardinals who, with burning charity, desire to be protectors of this holy work; may they be solicitous for its success with the Holy Father..."

The examination of the Rules lasted a few months. The commissioners applied to their task the diligence and prudence that a matter of such importance demanded. On the 30th April, 1741, they voted in its favor, declaring that the Rule of the Discalced Clerics of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ, with the minor modifications directed by the Holy Father, could be approved by an Apostolic Rescript, but only on the condition that the aforesaid Clerics should become more numerous. That very evening the Abbot Garagni related the result of their deliberations to the Pope, who desired more time before taking a definitive judgment. This great Pontiff foresaw that the Institute would be advantageous to souls, and would also promote the glory of the Divine Redeemer, because its special object was to recall to the minds of the faithful a

grateful remembrance of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. He even went so far as to say, "This Congregation of the Passion is the last to come into the Church; whereas it seems that it should have been the first." To implore enlightenment from heaven and the protection of the Blessed Virgin, he asked the people of Rome to visit the four principal Churches dedicated to Our Blessed Lady and to pray for this intentions. The Holy Father himself, on 14th May, visited the Church of Our Lady in Trastevere, where he prayed for a long time. On his return to the Vatican, he had his secretary, Bishop Millo, write the Rescript wherein he approved the Rules of the Congregation of the Passion. On the following day, the Rescript was published, in which His Holiness "approves, confirms and praises the Congregation of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ."

Heaven had triumphed; hell had been conquered. Now had been inscribed on the roll of the militant forces of the Church of Christ, legions of apostles, full of vitality and youth, with a future assured. The sons of Paul of the Cross can now take their stand in the bosom the Church, beside the sons of Dominic, of Francis of Assisi and of Ignatius Loyola.

Abbot Garagni immediately announced this joyful news to the holy Founder. Paul could not restrain his joy, and from his heart he burst forth a hymn of praise to God.

"Let every spirit praise the Lord. May all creatures glorify the infinite mercy of the Omnipotent God who, without allowing Himself to be restrained by the sins of my own heart, had deigned to crown this work as entirely His own. He has directed all things by a secret and gentle disposition of His Providence... Oh! how sweet is our adorable Savior. Oh! how sweet is His Divine Spirit. Oh! how lovable is His Divine Goodness. After the storm there comes the calm, after the struggle, peace. May His holy Name to blessed forever. To Him alone the honor and power unto ages and ages. Amen."

The hour for blessings had sounded; God was pleased to bestow them now in abundance on His faithful servant, who had manifested such courage and fidelity in the face of the fiercest trials.

There was at Rome at that time Angelo di Stefano, Canon of Gaeta, who was, as the reader will recall, one of the first to be clothed in the holy habit of the Passion, and who, to the great disappointment of Paul, could not endure the austerities of the life of the new Congregation. But when he learnt that Benedict XIV had introduced certain modifications, he desired to be re-admitted into the Institute. He made known his desire to the Sovereign Pontiff, who encouraged him and expressed his satisfaction at his intention. On his departure for Monte Argentario, Abbot Garagni entrusted him to deliver to the Saint the approved Rules and Constitutions, as well as the Rescript which he had obtained from Cardinal Altieri. His Eminence had at last granted the favor that Paul had so ardently desired and the deprivation of which was to his loving soul a true martyrdom: permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of Monte Argentario.

The Saint received the Canon, Angelo di Stefano, with tender charity, who sought to rejoin them, and who brought with him from Rome so many graces which Paul called

“blows” of the Infinite and Divine Goodness. Paul and his companions immediately began the spiritual exercises in preparation for their religious profession according to the prescription of the Rules. During the Retreat the Saint wished that the day on which the God of the tabernacle should make His permanent dwelling among them might be a day of the greatest solemnity, or rather the day that heaven had chosen, as Cardinal Rezzonico said. “It is not without a particular design of Providence,” he wrote to Paul, “that you should have waited so long for this blessing. I wished you to enjoy for the first time the Real Presence of Jesus Christ on that very day on which the Holy Church celebrates the feast of God’s gift of Himself to the whole of mankind. I experience an extreme joy myself, for I hope that you will make reparation in some way for the many irreverences which are committed day by day in the world against the Blessed Sacrament.”

On the feast of Corpus Christi, 1st June, 1741, in the beautiful Church of the Presentation, the Religious sung a solemn Mass and, after the hymn of thanksgiving, the “Te Deum,” the Eucharistic Lord was placed in the Tabernacle. Truly, this was an august moment and all were overcome with joy, especially the Saint, who seemed transported into another world. He was astonished that he did not die of joy and, in his humility, attributed it to his little love of God. “Ah,” he exclaimed, “how great is my wickedness. There is not in my heart a tiny spark of true love for God. If there were, I should not withstand the happiness that is flooding my soul; I would swoon away, die and be reduced to ashes at the remembrance of so many graces and mercies which the Divine Majesty showers upon this horrible mass of nothingness, this detestable monster of ingratitude” (Letter to Abbot Garagni written on that very day).

Three days later, Sunday, 4th June, the Religious of the Passion go with their Divine Master to bind themselves also to the Tabernacle with the lasting bond of the religious vows.

Attention! We are about to witness a scene worthy of Angels and of God. Heaven is awaiting this solemn ceremony; the Church is once again bringing forth a new family for her Divine Spouse. The Angels of Calvary are rejoicing as they welcome men who will henceforth remain with them at the foot of the Cross to receive in the chalice of their souls the Blood of the Redemption and to pour it forth in streams upon a stricken world.

The priests celebrated Holy Mass and the lay-brothers received Holy Communion. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar. Then all the Religious, with a cross on their shoulder, a crown of thorns on their head, stood before the altar. And, as men who wish to die to themselves and to the world, they prostrated upon the floor. The Passion according to Saint John is read over them. At the words, “*Tradidit spiritum*” (He gave up the spirit), the venerable Founder rises to his feet and with his eyes brimming with tears, makes his profession of the three vows of religion - poverty, chastity and obedience - and a fourth, special to his Congregation, of spreading in the hearts of the faithful devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ. Then he received the vows of his children. Thus entirely consecrated to Jesus Crucified, and that they shall always remember their dedication, and to show that, they are no longer of this world, they abandon their family name, and after the example of their holy Founder already called Paul of the Cross, they take another name which recalls the spirit of the Congregation. Father John Baptist

of Saint Michael, Father Anthony of the Passion, Father Fulgentius of Jesus, Father Charles of the Mother of God. There is no mention made of the names of the Lay Brothers. We know only one, Brother Joseph of the Blessed Virgin, who made his profession a few days later. After he had received the vows of his sons, the holy Founder placed on his own breast and on that of his companions, the sacred 'Sign' showing the word 'Passion' in a heart surmounted by a cross and embroidered in white.

(We have already described the 'Sign' which the Blessed Virgin wore on her breast when she appeared to the holy Founder. The Ceremony of a Passionist profession is most impressive.)

The black habit and the white Sign are the externals that distinguish the members of this new Congregation from all others. And from that day the Missionaries of Monte Argentario were called "Passionists."

We confess in all simplicity that it has been impossible for us not to be emotionally stirred at the description of this scene, since it recalls to our minds the humble beginnings of our religious family. When one is looking for the source of a river, and after tracing the stream for a long time, one at last reaches the mountain summit from which flows that tiny stream of water which becomes a strong flowing river in the valleys beneath. At the original source one blesses God, the Supreme and Universal Source of every good.

O little Congregation of Jesus Crucified, henceforth, you will take your place under the sun. That Omnipotent Voice, which created the universe and said to it, "Revolve!" and the universe began to move without hitch or halt, has also said to you, "Onward," and you march to the north and to the south, to the east and to the west, beyond the seas, sowing in every field the harvest of the Lord and watering these fields with your sweat and even with your blood.

O Monte Argentario! O solitude fragrant with the virtues of our holy Founder; O privileged confidant of his soul, the sharer of his sorrows, the partaker of his joys. O humble nursery of the Religious of the Passion, how dear you are to the hearts of all of us. Alas, you have been stolen from us. But let us adore the unsearchable ways of Divine Providence. This is the hour of trial, the hour of retribution will sound, and the poor dwelling of our first Fathers will be restored to our treasured possession.

CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK AND FURTHER BREAKDOWN

Dedication to Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux

Letter of his Eminence

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

BIRTH – DEVOTION TO THE PASSION – FIRST STUDIES

1694

January 3 Birth of Paul of the Cross, Birthplace, Parents
Prodigies, Early Training, Mother's Vigilance
Devotion to the Passion and to Blessed Virgin
Progress in Virtue
Extraordinary favors, Vision of Child Jesus
Blessed Virgin Delivers Brothers from Death
Gift of Tears; the Gift of Prayer
Revelation of the Sufferings of Christ
Effects of this Revelation - Mortification
Speaks of the Passion to his Brothers and Sisters
First Holy Communion
Studies at Cremolino, Progress

CHAPTER TWO

CASTELLAZZO - YOUTH - EXTRAORDINARY GRACE - FERVOR

1709

Paul returns to Castellazzo
Precautions against the Dangers of the World

1714

Interior Conversion
Austerities; Meditation on the Passion
The Brothers' Fervor
Drinks Vinegar and Gall; Teresa Danei
Heavenly Consolations
Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament
Vow of Obedience; Recollection in the Church
Insensible to Pain before the Blessed Sacrament

CHAPTER THREE

SEVERE TRIALS - A SOLDIER RENOUNCES MARRIAGE - REFUSES INHERITANCE

1715

Temptations against Faith; Divine Revelations
Desire to be Sacrificed

Enlists as a Soldier, Discharge
Refuses a Rich Inheritance
His Spiritual Director, Trials
Intervention of Heaven during Triads
Renounces an Honorable Marriage
Refuses a Rich Inheritance
Zeal for the Salvation of Souls
Apostolate among the Young
Works of Charity
Reads Conscience
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Two Young Libertines
Charity towards Two Heretics, One Is Converted

CHAPTER FOUR

NEW SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR - GOD~ PREPARES HIM TO BE A FOUNDER - TRIAL

1719

Father Jerome, Capuchin, and Father Columban
First Revelation about the Congregation of the Passion
Paul's Description of the Revelation
Signs are More Frequent and Clearer; Interior Locutions
Victim of Love and of Hell
New Director, Canon Cerruti; Trials
Obedience to His Director
Serious Illness
Revelations Concerning the Foundation
Vision of Heaven

CHAPTER FIVE

BISHOP DE GATTINARA - THE BLESSED VIRGIN APPEARS CLOTHED IN THE HABIT OF THE NEW ORDER - PAUL RECEIVES THE HABIT

1720

Canon Cerruti regards Paul as a Saint
Bishop de Gattinara Becomes Spiritual Director
The Bishop Himself
Relates the Visions Concerning the Congregation
Blessed Virgin Offers Paul the Habit
Paul Is Clothed in the Habit of the Passion
Nature and Effect of These Visions
Blessed Virgin Appears in the Habit, Wearing the "Sign"
All Uncertainties Vanish
Consults Father Columban at Portedecimo
Father Columban's Letter to the Bishop
Prepares to Receive the Habit
Description of Interior Struggles

November 21 Feast of the Presentation; Final Preparation
 Bids Farewell to His Family
 November 22 Receives the Habit of the Passion

CHAPTER SIX

RETREAT OF FORTY DAYS - THE RULES OF THE INSTITUTE - APPROBATION OF THE RULES BY THE BISHOP

1720

Nov/Dec Retreat of Forty Days
 The Sacristy of Saint Charles
 Daily Observances; Temptations; The Devil
 Holy Communion
 Distractions; Darkness of the Soul; Aridity
 Diabolic Suggestions
 Joy in Suffering
 Our Lord Teaches Paul Humility
 Jesus Crucified, Centre of Thoughts & Affection
 Jesus Crucified, Raises Paul to Union with God
 Revelation of the Happiness of Heaven
 Torment Consequent to this Revelation
 The New Congregation, a Means of Saving Souls
 Visions of Heaven, of Blessed Virgin, of Angels
 Vision of Saints, Especially Founders
 December 2 Writing Rules
 December 7 Rules Completed in Five Days
 Reflections on the Passion
 Rules Inspired by God
 Begins to Pray for the Conversion of England

1721

January 1 Last Day of the Retreat, a Foretaste of Heaven
 Transforming Effect of the Retreat
 Rules Examined by Father Columban of Genoa
 Rescued by Policemen
 Mockeries and Insults on the Journey
 Welcomed by Father Columban at Genoa
 Bishop of Alessandria Approves the Rules

CHAPTER SEVEN

HERMITAGE OF THE TRINITY - HERMITAGE OF SAINT STEPHEN - FIRST COMPANIONS - BEGINNINGS OF THE APOSTOLATE

1721

 Fifteen Days at the Hermitage of the Trinity
 Devils Appear under Visible Forms
 January 25 Bishop Sends Paul to the Hermitage of St. Charles
 Letter of Thanks to the Bishop
 John Baptist and Paul Sardi Join Him

Life at the Hermitage
 Luca Danei, the Father, Visits the Hermitage
 Paul Teaches Catechism to the Children
 Bishop Sends Paul to Preach
 A Possessed Person Interrupts the Sermon
 Bishop Directs Paul to Preach during Lent
 Fruits of his Preaching, Reconciliation of Enemies
 Stops a Violent Quarrel
 Holy Thursday
 Marchioness de Pozzo
 Saves People in Danger of Drowning
 Profession of Penance
 Visitation of the Sick
 Heals the Sick
 Miracle of the Cloth
 At the Hermitage Gives Advice to Those Seeking It
 The Table of Holy Poverty
 Paul Sardi Leaves the Hermitage

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOURNEY TO ROME - MARY'S MYSTERIOUS APPEAL - MONTE ARGENTARIO – RETURN

1721

Jerusalem, Rome
 Mount Varallo
 Departure for Rome
 John Baptist Joins Paul at Genoa
 Paul Sends Him Home
 Sails from Genoa
 September 8 Ship mysteriously stops off Monte Argentario
 Mysterious appeal of Mary
 Civitavecchia; Quarantine
 Enters Rome; Sentiments of Heart
 Hospice of the Holy Trinity
 A Cardinal Washes Paul's Feet
 Refused Entrance into the Vatican
 Shares his Bread with the Poor
 St. Mary Major's, Makes a Vow to Spread Devotion to the Passion
 Another Call to Monte Argentario
 Voyage to Monte Argentario, The Mountain
 '*Mons Sanctificationis*'
 Ancient Solitaries of Monte Argentario
 Fabiola
 Hermitage of the Annunciation
 The Prophecy of John Baptist
 Seeks Permission to Occupy the Hermitage
 Orbetello, A Religious Minim

Pitigliano
Guardian Angel Directs Paul
Monciano, The Pastor
Pienza, Bishop Salvi grants Permission
Pisa; Leghorn; Virtue of Patience
“Oratory of the Dead”
A Genoese Benefactor
Genoa

CHAPTER NINE

BISHOP DE GATTINARA CLOTHES JOHN BAPTIST IN THE HABIT - AND GIVES PERMISSION FOR THE BROTHERS TO LIVE ON MONTE ARGENTARIO

1721

November 8 Alessandria, Asks the Bishop to Clothe John Baptist
 Seeks Permission to live on Monte Argentario
 Hermitage of Saint Stephen
 Preparations to Depart, Sorrow of Castellazzo
 Advice to his Brothers and Sisters
 Spiritual Maxims

1722

First Sunday of Lent- Departure of the Brothers; Embark at Genoa
Holy Week, Civitavecchia
Holy Thursday, Portercole; Paschal Communion
Pastor Provides Accommodations
Orbetello, Seeks Permission from Military Governor
Pitigliano, Obtain Blessing of Bishop
Life of Brothers on the Mountain
The Apostolate: Paul at Portercole
 John Baptist at Port San Stefano

CHAPTER TEN

GAETA - OUR LADY OF THE CHAIN - CASTELLAZZO - NAPLES - TROJA - NAPLES - MONTE GARGANO - SAINT MICHAEL - HOLY YEAR

1723

 Renown of the Two Solitaries
 Bishop Pignatelli, Gaeta, Invites Them to Preach
 Bishop Salvi, Letter of Recommendation
June Leave for Gaeta
 Cardinal Cienfugos, Friend and Benefactor
 Win the Hearts of All at Gaeta
 Hermitage of Our Lady of the Chain
 Bishop Visits them; Appoints Ricinelli to attend them
 Life of Solitude, Prayer and Penance
 The Bishop’s Delicacy
 Paul’s Secret Grotto
 Bishop Sends Them to Preach

October	Charity towards the Poor, the Sick and the Dying
	Gives a Retreat to Seminarians
	Castellazzo, Mission of Charity
	The Brothers Become Ill
1724 March	Letter from Cardinal Cienfugos
	Return to Gaeta; Prophecy of the Saints
	Preaches Lenten Course at the Cathedral
	Pilgrimage to St. Januarius
August	Veneration by the Inhabitants of Naples
	Return to Gaeta
	Bishop Cavalieri Invites Them to his Diocese
	Portrait of a Noble Bishop
	Revelation to the Bishop Concerning the Foundation
	Letter from Cardinal Cienfugos
	Depart for Gaeta
	Pilgrimage to Monte Gargano
	Revelation of Future Trials
	Saint Michael, Protector of the Congregation
1725	Apostolic Works at Troia
	Bishop Cavalieri, Regard for the Congregation
	Bishop Cavalieri, Presses Brothers to Receive Holy Orders
	Holy Year, Brothers in Rome

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AUDIENCE WITH BENEDICT XIII - GAETA - "OUR LADY OF THE CITY" - DEATH OF BISHOP CAVALIERI - ROME - HOSPICE OF ST. GALLICAN

1725	Rome, The Tomb of the Prince of Apostles
	Bishop Crescenzi, Friend and Benefactor
	Audience with the Holy Father
	Apostolic Approval for the Institute of the Passion
	Return to Gaeta
	Bishop Cavalieri Desires to Found First Retreat
	Our Lady of the Chain
	Monasteries to be Called "Retreat"
	Reading Secrets, Gift of Prophecy
	A Visionary Is Exposed
	Safe Return of the Sailors
	Sanctuary of Our Lady of the City
	Dom Erasmus Tuccinardi, Spiritual Director
	Crowds Attracted to the Sanctuary
1726 August 11	Death of Bishop Cavalieri
	Vision of a Soul praying for the Congregation
September 14	Sets out for Rome
	Hospice of Saint Galilean

Charity; Zeal; Penance

CHAPTER TWELVE

BROTHERS ORDAINED TO THE PRIESTHOOD - MASS OF THE SAINT - DEATH OF THEIR FATHER - CASTELLAZZO - ROME - LEAVE ST. GALLICAN

1727

February 6	Cardinal Corradini tells them to prepare for Holy Orders
February 23	Receive Tonsure
April 12	Minor Orders
May 1	Subdiaconate
June 7	Diaconate
	Ordained to the Priesthood by Benedict XIII
	First Mass, Revelation,
	Vision of Heaven and the Throne Prepared for him
	Fervor during Mass, Tears
	Advice to Priests, Devotion to the Passion
	At Saint Lucy's in Corneto, Raised from the Ground
	Saint Gallican, Works of Charity
	Delivers his Brother Joseph of a Fever
	Death of Luca Danei
	Letter to their Mother; They Go to Her
	Last Journey to Castellazzo
	Spiritual Counsels to His Brothers and Sisters
	Teresa Daneo Regarded as a Saint
	Return to Rome
	Divine Providence Directs Them to Their Vocation
	Saint Gallican, The Hidden Ways of Providence

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MONTE ARGENTARIO - THE HERMITAGE OF SAINT ANTHONY - APOSTOLIC LABORS AT PORTERCOLE - PRODIGIES - NEW COMPANIONS - LIFE OF THE FIRST PASSIONISTS - THE SAINT IS ABANDONED BY HIS COMPANIONS

1728

Monte Argentario, Hermitage is Occupied
Set out for Castellazzo, Divinely Hindered
Hermitage of Saint Anthony
A Young Piedmontese, Novice Lay Brother

1729

Apostolic Works
Calms a Storm
Miraculous Draught of Fish

1730

Visit from Anthony their Brother
Letter from Marchioness de Pozzo, Reply
Anthony Danei becomes a Cleric Novice
Other Companions, Angelo di Stefano, a Cleric

Life of the First Passionists
 Penances of the Saint
 Abandoned by His Followers
 Bishop Crescenzi Encourages Him
 Confidence of the Saint

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TELAMONE - TITLE OF "MISSIONARY" - ORBETELLO - THE BLESSED VIRGIN REVEALS THE SITE FOR THE FIRST RETREAT

1730

Splendor of the Apostolate
 Bishop Palmieri (Soana) calls for the Apostles
 Mission at Telamone
 Agnes Grazi, Rule of life; Letters

1731

February 23

Clement XII Confers the Title of "Missionary"
 First Pilgrimage to Monte Argentario
 Curing the Sick
 Apostolic Works in Orbetello
 Blessed Virgin Reveals Site of the First Retreat
 Inhabitants of Orbetello Commence the Building

1732

January

Building Begins
 War Suspends Building Operations
 Heroic Charity

November

Missions in Soana
 Extraordinary Cure
 Missions at Port San Stefano

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIRST MISSION AT ORBETELLO - BUILDING BEGINS - HOLY WEEK - BUILDING STOPS - LORETTO - MIRACLES - BISHOPS CALL FOR THE SAINT

1733

February

Cardinal Altieri Invitation to Preach at Orbetello
 The Guilty is Punished
 Assistance for the Needy
 Close of the Mission

March

Building of the Retreat
 Laying of the First Stone
 Sister Maria Cherubina Bresciani, Letters
 John Baptist Finds Water for the Building
 Other Missions
 Saturnia, Conversion of a Sinner
 Work of Construction Ceases
 Naples, Seeking Permission to Continue the Building
 Pilgrimage to Loretto

The Saint and the Magician
Escapes from a Locked Room

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WAR IN ITALY - MISSIONS - SIEGE OF MONTE FILIPO - HEROIC CHARITY - NEW COMPANIONS

1733
October War
Don Carlos Invades Naples
Religious Allowed to Remain at Monte Argentario
Missions
Saves an Ecclesiastic Threatened with Death
The Mysterious Receipt
Conquests by the Spanish Army
Paul arrested as a Spy, General de las Minas

1734
April 16 Siege of Monte Filipo
Heroic Charity
Saves Orbetello from being Shelled
Missions
Calumniator, the Devil and the Saint
Ecstasy

June "The Year and the Harvest of Father Paul"
Missions, Orbetello and Portercole
General de las Minas and Meditation on the Passion

1735
June Heroic Means of Converting a Sinner
Advent Anthony Danei Is Ordained Priest
Fulgentius Pastorelli
New Companions

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

NAPLES - LEGHORN - PERSECUTIONS AND SUFFERING - SAINT MICHAEL - BLESSING OF MONTE ARGENTARIO - NOVENA OF THE PRESENTATION - FAVOR

1736
January 17 Work on the Building, Brother Mark
Audience with Charles III, King of Naples
The Religious Help with the Construction
Diabolic Destruction
Duke of Montemar Invites Paul to Preach
The Voyage to San Stefano; Protection of Our Lady
Mission Cancelled
Return to Monte Argentario
Missions in Chiusi
Persecution and Suffering

Pitigliano, Resistance to the Word of God
 Sickness in the Community
 Providential Aid
 Fanatical Attempt at Destruction
 Saint Michael, Defender and Protector
 In Rome to Expose Calumnies
 New Church not to be used for Mass
 Brief of Clement XII

1737

September 14 Solemn Blessing of the Church
 Cardinal Altieri, General Blom
 Permission to Reserve Blessed Sacrament Refused
 November Novena in Honor of the Presentation
 Mystical Marriage

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RULES PRESENTED TO CLEMENT XII - "APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES" - OBJECTIONS TO THE RULE - REVELATION CONCERNING THE RULE – MIRACLES

1738

January Rules Presented to Clement XII, The Commission
 January 22 Title of "Apostolic Missionaries"
 Objections to the Rule
 February Crescenzi Calls Paul to Rome
 Revelation Concerning the Rule
 Missions
 May 11 The Miraculous Crucifix
 1739 Recompense, The Cross
 Persecution
 The Young Florentine
 Ruin of the Congregation imminent

1740

February 6 Death of Clement XII
 All Human Help Vanishes

CHAPTER NINETEEN

BENEDICT XIV - CARDINAL REZZONICO - AUDIENCE WITH THE HOLY FATHER - APPROBATION OF THE RULE - RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONS - THE 'SIGN'

1740

August 7 Election of Benedict XIV
 Cardinal Crescenzi, Nuncio to Paris
 Cardinal Rezzonico, New Protector; Letter
 The Brothers Leave for Rome
 Cardinal Rezzonico Affords Them Hospitality
 Benedict XIV reads the Rules; The Commission
 Abbot Garagni, Opposition

	Abbot Garagni, New Protector
	Audience with the Holy Father
	Return to Monte Argentario
	Letters of Abbot Garagni and the Founder
1741	
April 30	Favorable Vote of the Commission
	Prudence of Benedict XIV; Modifications to Rule
May 14	Rescript of Approbation
May 15	Rescript Published
	Garagni Announces the News
	Angelo di Stefano
	Permission to Reserve the Blessed Sacrament
	Retreat before Religious Profession
June 1	Feast of Corpus Christi- Blessed Sacrament Reserved
June 4	Religious Profession
	The "Sign"
	The Missionaries Became Known as "Passionists"
	Sentiments of the Founder