

THE CONGREGATION OF ADORATION REPARATRICE

BY

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CENTENARY of a special work of reparation falls in this year, 1948. It is carried on by contemplative nuns who seek by adoration to make reparation for blasphemy and for the neglect of God. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed day and night in their chapels. All the round of the clock the Sisters come in turn, two at least at a time, to pray in silence for an hour. They seek union with the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, offering through it, and with it, praise and love, and supplication for sinners.

It was a marked privilege for the Congregation of Adoration Reparatrice to be allowed to have Perpetual Exposition. Theirs was a pioneer work. In 1848 the practice was a novelty in the Church, and because a novelty, inevitably regarded with suspicion. Even now there are Catholics who do not seem to appreciate the value of Exposition. They do not perceive the tremendous graces that radiate from the Monstrance, or realise how near it brings our Lord to those who kneel before him. Up to 1848 Exposition, apart from the Forty Hours, was not greatly known. It was only something extraordinary, some dire calamity, some urgent need for imploring the mercy of God, that would prompt men to bring the Host from the Tabernacle and set it before the eyes of the faithful. We have come to a time in the history of the world which is itself extraordinary. The Church is faced by a determined enemy—atheistic Communism. The people are becoming more and more material in outlook. Our Lord is either unknown, forgotten or ignored. Family life is perverted. People work only for money, and when they get it, waste it on luxuries and frivolities. To counteract this the Church has set up the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance that God may receive incessant adoration and that souls may be recalled to a simple, humble, wholesome way of life.

The Foundress of the Congregation of Adoration Reparatrice was a remarkable woman. Her parents had both drifted away from the Faith, yet Theodolinda Dubouche grew up with a sharp longing after God. One day in each year of her childhood was specially memorable—the Feast of Corpus Christi. Madame Dubouche used to allow one of the altars for the *Fête Dieu* Procession to be set up in the garden of their house and Theodolinda was given flowers to strew before

the Host. She looked at the Host and was enthralled. She knew that here was Jesus. She desired him.

Theodolinda grew up beautiful and fascinating: she knew how to play her part in society; but she had an extremely determined and independent nature that made it possible for her to resist the evil influences of her own home. She was brought up in a worldly and atheistic atmosphere. To escape from the frivolity which wearied and distressed her she gave herself to study and painting, for she was an artist of some accomplishments. These things were of intense interest to her, and for a time they seemed sufficient. It seemed as if the world would claim her, even if innocently; yet she could not remain satisfied with external things. Music delighted her, and could so enchant her that she would be drawn to the thought of heaven, and forget all else but that.

By one way and another she was called to look after the sick. The easy, pleasant ways of life were not to be hers. She saw suffering, she saw sorrow. She went with understanding into the homes of the poor, and saw what they endured. God was not only Beauty in himself; he had come into this world to know sorrow and death. She was slowly being shown the way she should go. Her mother fell ill, and had to be nursed. This Theodolinda did faithfully and lovingly. Madame Dubouche came back to the practice of the Faith after a lapse of fifty years. When she died M. Dubouche asked his daughter to remain with him always. This promise she made, but even while she gave to him, in his old age, all the care that she could, she became increasingly aware of a desire for solitude. Prayer: silence: God alone—this must be her way of life. What should she seek on her father's death but the life of Carmel?

M. Dubouche, who also by now had come back to the practice of the Faith, had agreed that they should make their home in a house belonging to the Carmelite convent in the rue d'Enfer in Paris. Theodolinda constantly sought counsel of the Prioress, and was guided by her in the paths of the spiritual life. But she was not called herself to be a Carmelite. She was to do something more. What that was she began to understand through a dream that was sent to her in 1847. She saw a plaster image of the thorn-crowned head of Christ which, as she gazed on it, became alive and was transfigured by a divine glory. It bent to kiss her, and two drops of blood fell upon her mouth. She heard clearly the words: 'Thou art my well-beloved. I have chosen thee. These two drops of blood from my mouth I give thee for sinners'. At first Theodolinda accounted this only a dream. But twice more the vision was sent to her, once at Communion and once when she was making the Way

of the Cross and praying that Jesus would imprint his likeness on her heart as he had done on the veil of Veronica.

She who had painted pictures of the saints from models now made a painting of this vision. The crown of thorns is covered with a long white veil which she regarded as a symbol of the hidden life of the Eucharist.

1848 was the year of riots in Paris. In February Theodolinda, grieved by the outrages of the Revolution, sought for a means to make reparation. She gained permission for her picture of the Holy Face to be set over the altar of the Carmelite chapel for forty days. A Mass of Reparation was daily offered before it, and in response to her pleading a number of people came there faithfully, day after day, to pray before the picture and the Blessed Sacrament. They felt strongly that this should not be a matter of days or weeks: it should be permanent. They asked her to form an Association of Reparation. Very shyly she went to Mgr Affre, the Archbishop of Paris, with this suggestion. She found him very ready to agree to it, granting that she could get a sufficient number of adorers, for his one aim in life was the glory of God. By June she had gathered two thousand Associates. It was in this same month that Mgr Affre stood on the barricades of St Antoine and cried to the revolutionary mob as they shot him down, 'I offer my life for the salvation of Paris!' Whilst he lay in state Theodolinda came and kissed his feet, beseeching him to bless and further her work.

During the Octave of Corpus Christi, when the Revolution was at its worst, the Associates came to pray before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the Carmelite chapel. They might see death as they passed along the streets; they might court death; they came not only by day, but by night also. At the end they pleaded for one night longer.

During this extra night, the Vigil of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Theodolinda received a further vision in which our Lord commissioned her to found a Religious Congregation. 'I must have souls always before me', he said, 'to receive my life. They in their turn will communicate this life to souls who are living in the world.'

Theodolinda had already been training some young girls in the spiritual life, and these became the first novices of the new Congregation. As she had originally desired to be a Carmelite, and as she was indebted to the inspiration of Carmel, the habit of Adoration Reparatrice nuns was adapted from that of Carmel. She desired only simplicity—the quiet brown habit with the black veil of the great saint of Avila, after whom she called herself Mary Teresa of the Heart of Jesus. The distinguishing mark of the Congregation

was the bronze cross hanging from a red ribbon, bearing on one side a monstrance, and on the other a representation of the Holy Face.

Mother Mary Teresa had a deep spiritual wisdom which enabled her to mould the character of a community to take on this pioneer work in the Church in order to honour the Blessed Sacrament. Her daughters were to be simple in every way—simple and gentle in demeanour, simple in speech, simple in their mode of penance. There were to be no lay Sisters. All were to take a share in the housework. That was safe and wholesome. It made them like our Lady at Nazareth, who spent so much time in household tasks. They were to seek to be little, humble and hidden. Quietly and simply they were to learn detachment, not as a negative thing but as a means to love. To be withdrawn from the world, from the desire for possessions, from selfishness, in order to centre love on him who emptied himself to become obedient to the death, even the death of the cross: that was to be their aim. Love was to be their motive, love their goal, and withal they were to be tranquil, contented, cheerful. She set St Joseph as the great exemplar of the hidden life. Nothing hid a soul so much, she said, as the exterior of an ordinary life. Even as St Joseph's wonderful sanctity was hidden by an ordinary life of labour, so were their lives to be hidden under ordinary work and speech. They had before them as their supreme model, Jesus, silent, unknown to the world, patient obedient. He must live in their hearts. It must be Jesus who prayed in them, Jesus who suffered in them.

Mother Mary Teresa founded houses not only at Paris but at Lyons and Chalons. At Paris, on November 8, 1855, the chapel caught fire. The woodwork had been newly varnished, and soon it was all ablaze. Mother Mary Teresa strove heroically to rescue the monstrance from the midst of the flames, but she was beaten back. Escape seemed impossible. She knelt down, expecting to die in the smoke and fire. A fireman discovered her, half suffocated and unconscious.

As she lay on her bed she murmured with distress that she had not taken sufficient care of the Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps the privilege of perpetual Exposition would be withdrawn. But that was not to be so. She had struggled to save the Host. Her lips had been blistered and her eyelids burnt away by the fire about the altar. Never again could she close her eyes: never know proper rest. She lived for another eight years with her sight impaired, suffering always from the burns on her face and hands. She was misunderstood, misjudged, and her work was attacked; but in the end she

died in peace, the work firmly established and blessed.

The Congregation of Adoration Reparatrice is a comparatively small one. There are nine Houses in France and England. The communities of these Houses, who live for God alone, must bring down countless blessings on London, Liverpool and the other cities in which they carry on their devoted life of prayer which atones for the irreligion of the world. By silence they make amends for unkind talk and all the sins of the tongue; by sacrifice for all the indulgence of the present day. Outside the world is feverishly restless: people rush after pleasure, money, excitement; they want they know not what. The nuns keep still before the monstrosity. They draw their life from the Eucharistic sun. They find Jesus in the stillness of their own hearts. They seek to forget self. Their horizon is the wide one of the glory of God, and the salvation of souls.

Nor is the work confined to the nuns alone. Mother Mary Teresa desired from the outset that it should be carried out into the world. She wished to link up souls living in the world with her nuns. Up to the age of forty she had herself lived in the world: she had been a contemplative in the world. She knew how to guide other souls to be likewise, to live the life of recollection and prayer, even though they had a family to care for, or a job at an office. In so far as possible they should live the life of silence: their life should centre round adoration; they should share the nun's life of simplicity, humility and little hidden sacrifices. Abandonment to the will of God, the acceptance of the trials of life, small self-denials made for the salvation of souls, the way of love which humble souls so readily understand: these she set before layfolk also. She impressed on those whom she thus trained as *Reparatrices* that they should be very glad of the small humiliations that may be the lot of anyone, of contempt and of failure. Of these things were formed the veil of Veronica, and they should rejoice when it fell upon them. Not self, but Jesus: he should be ever before the eyes of their mind, in the beauty of his divinity, in the beauty of his passion, the one thing to be desired, the one person to be loved.

Everything in this life of contemplation should bear the seal of reparation. The adoration of the nuns and of the layfolk associated with them should atone for those souls who refuse to adore God; their gratitude for all who are ungrateful; their acknowledgment of dependence for those who think they have no need of God; their love for those who treat him with coldness and indifference.