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THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

IT HAD ITS ORIGIN WITH THE LOWLY ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

This Most Beautiful Devotion Was Inaugurated in Italy by the Apostle of Simplicity in the Year 1223—Its Spread Over the Whole World.

It is fitting that we should owe the most beautiful of Christmas devotions to St. Francis of Assisi, the brown robed mendicant whose passage through the hills and valleys of Umbria has left a golden memory in the heart of the world for 700 years. He was the apostle of simplicity, this gentle saint who could speak so wisely to his little brothers, the birds, who could learn such wonderful lessons from his little friends, the fishes. He found God everywhere and saw His likeness in everything. He sanctified the commonplace, seeing the symbol of the Creator in the least of His works: blessing the beasts, praising God in the flowers, loving every created thing. He loved the lambs because they reminded him of the Lamb without spot, and we read that when he met them being led to the shambles he wept tenderly and would not go until he had redeemed them from death. One day, seeing a poor little sheep walking in the midst of a troop of goats, he said to his brethren, "It was thus that our Saviour walked in the midst of a troop of goats when with the Jews and Pharisees." His friars wished to buy the sheep to save their gentle master from distress, but they had no money. A passing dealer—one of those opportunistic dealers who follow the footsteps of the flock—seeing the embarrassment of the brothers, paid for the sheep.

Is it any wonder that such a man should have been seized at once with the idea of the human beauty of the incarnation? Is it any wonder that he should have seen in the Nativity not the coming of the King, not the unspeakable mystery of the redemption, but the birth of a Babe in Bethlehem? St. Francis may not have originated the devotion of the crib—it is one of those beautiful heart growths by which Christianity has nourished the human soul from the beginning—but he at least popularized it in Italy. Christmas was his spiritual holiday. It was the feast of love, and St. Francis is the world's greatest preacher of the love of God. His brothers asked him one day if it was right to eat meat on Christmas when the feast fell on Friday. "Assuredly," answered Francis, "he of all saints the closest to the Passion, he of the Stigmata—assuredly, I would even wish that princes and great ones of the earth strewed the country and the highroads with meat and cheese in order that the birds and the beasts of the field should have their share in so great a feast."

And he began to consider how he should bring the Christmas feast near to the hearts and vivid to the imagination of the peasant folk of his country. It was only a genius, one whose mind was as quick as his heart in the service of his Master, who could have hit upon an idea so universal, an appeal so inextinguishable as the cradle of infancy. From a purely human point of view the Nativity is one of the great master strokes which make Christianity as a human system so incomparable, so magnificent, so divine. To cloak the most abject helplessness, to weigh down a little outcast Babe with the omnipotence of the Creator of the world—what conception of human genius could be at once so bold and so beautiful, so awful and so winning?

St. Francis saw the possibilities of increased devotion to his dear Master that would follow the emphasizing, the humanizing, of this idea. He determined to have a great Christmas feast, of which the renown should spread through the length and breadth of Italy. He went to Rome—it was already close to the end of the year 1223—and, going to the Holy Father, he laid before the Supreme Pontiff his idea of the Christmas crib and his desire to celebrate the birth of the Saviour with his brethren, to gather together the populace from all the neighboring hill towns and to make the underlying mercy and love of the incarnation so patent to all that no heart in Italy should be able to resist it.

With the Pontiff's blessing and god-speed he started forth, the joy of Christmas already singing in his heart. It was the vigil of the feast before he arrived in Greccio. He had conveyed minute instructions to his good friend Giovanni Velita, and he found everything in readiness in accordance with his pious plans. An altar had been built in the open air. A skillful craftsman among the brown robed brothers had fashioned a crib and grouped around it the ox, the ass, everything as the evangelist had described it and tradition had pictured it in the stable at Bethlehem. The shrine was in the heart of the wood, and at midnight the Friday Minor led thence a strange company of mountaineers and peasants, awed and silent, who craved leave to go to Greccio to celebrate the Christmas festival. They lighted the way through the black aisles of the forest with flickering torches. As they proceeded they broke the mysterious silence with song, re-

peating over and over again the haunting verses of the Umbrian Christmas carols, their liquid Italian religious melody compared to which our harder northern hymns of a colder Christmas sound hard and conventional.

Francis was jubilant. We are told that he could not refrain from shedding tears of joy. One suspects that the good saint, with all his inimitable piety, had a touch of the dramatic instinct, or at least had well developed that sense of the picturesque which is so strong in all true sons of Italy. The Italian immediately groups his ideas into pictures; he at once seizes upon the right artistic moment to perpetuate an emotion. It is for this reason that faith in Italy flowers into so many lovely fancies and that Italy has been the world's inspiration and the world's teacher in art.

At the midnight Mass that followed the procession to the crib St. Francis filled the office of deacon and preached there in the midst of the trees, as he liked best to preach, of the birth of the Babe, of the angels and the shepherds, of the manger and the oxen, of all the dear traditions that had glorified the cave of Bethlehem for twelve hundred years, that are as near and as clear after nineteen hundred. The love of Jesus so welled up in the preacher's heart that every time he came to the sacred name he was obliged to pause for very ecstasy of devotion.

"His voice faltered as if he had tasted a delicious honey," says one who writes of him, "or heard a hidden melody the notes of which he wished to catch. The Cavaliere Giovanni Velita, a trustworthy man who had abandoned the career of arms the better to serve Jesus Christ, affirmed on oath that he saw a child seemingly asleep over whom the saint bent, covering him with kisses and, as it were, awakening from his slumbers."

The straw which the apparition touched is credited with afterward working several miraculous cures. A chapel was built on the site of this first Italian crib after the death of St. Francis.

The devotion was taken up as promptly and as ardently as the saint foresaw. His holy friend St. Clare immediately introduced the custom into all the convents of her order. Like St. Francis himself, she was never so happy as in preparing the crib, in meditating with her sisters on the infinite sweetness of the mystery of Bethlehem. It is related in a quaint and pious chronicle of Bernard of Besse that her devotion to the Christ Child once merited for her a proof of the divine favor of the young devotee.

He relates that the sisters of the Convent of St. Damien were preparing to celebrate the feast of Christmas. Only St. Clare, the victim of a torturing illness, was unable to share in the festivities. When her daughters went down to the chapel at midnight to chant the matins of the Nativity she could not control her disappointment and burst into tears. She upbraided her Heavenly Spouse with the pious familiarity of those who are nearer the things of heaven than of earth, and the Master listened. Bernard records that Clare felt herself suddenly transported, whether in spirit or reality she was never afterward certain, to the Church of the Sacro Convento. She distinctly heard the chanting voices of the Friars Minor; she distinctly saw the crib with its smiling Infant; she distinctly felt that she received the newborn King in the Blessed Eucharist.

Whether or not St. Clare was favored with such a miracle, it is certain that the devotion of the crib spread over Italy and over the world with miraculous enthusiasm. The "Bambino" is almost a national institution in Italy. For years in what had once been the capital of pagan Rome there gathered throngs from all over the country to celebrate the birth of Christianity. Then took place the historic procession of the "Bambino," the jewel set statuette of the Infant Jesus made of olive wood from the garden of Gethsemane and venerated through the year in the Franciscan Convent of the Ara Coeli.

The Christmas of the north is different from the Christmas of the impulse, the imaginative peoples of the south. The traditions and customs are different, but the idea of the crib of Bethlehem is the same all over the world. Its accessories may change with changing climes, but the spirit that builds the crib is as universal as the mission of the Church. The old gospel story is retold every year in every church. It is told in picture letters, that all alike may take it into their hearts, that all alike, as children on the verge of life, may touch the edges of the mystery that encompasses the Christmastide, seeing dimly in human fashion what it was given Mary to see when the angel came to her one March morning in the little house of Nazareth—Teresa Beatrice O'Hare in *Nazareth Magazine*.

Mrs. C. Temple Davies, mother of E. Wyatt Davies, the well-known English Catholic historian, was received into the Church on November 20th by Very Rev. Prior O'Gorman, O. S. A., in the Church of the Virgin Mother of Good Counsel, Hythe, Kent.

THE PAPAL LEGATION

IT IS NOW HOUSED IN ITS NEW HOME IN WASHINGTON.

While Not Designed as Ecclesiastical Lines, the Building is Emphatically Suitable as the Official Residence of the Pope's Representative.

The growing importance of the Catholic Church in this country is emphasized by the splendid new building in Washington that is to serve as a home for the Most Rev. Mgr. Domenico Falconio, papal delegate to the United States, and his official family. The building is eminently suited for the purpose for which it has been erected. The new delegation is located at 1811 Blittmore street, Washington Heights, in a fashionable section of Greater Washington, where around some of the most representative homes and apartments in the Capital City. It is in a section that has been built up within late years, and on all hands are evidences of newness and modernization of residence construction.

When the papal delegation was established in the capital by Cardinal Satolli in 1898 he made his home at the Catholic University of America. The delegate remained there only a few months until a residence at 201 I street northwest was secured. This is one of the famous old mansions of Washington.

At a meeting of the archbishops and bishops of the United States, held in Washington last year, it was decided to put up a building at the national capital for the residence and executive quarters of the papal delegation in this country. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, Archbishop Farley of the New York diocese and Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia served as a building committee.

The finished structure has won high encomiums from Mgr. Falconio and from the other prominent ecclesiastics who have inspected it. They and other competent authorities declare it to be ideal for its proposed uses.

While not designed on ecclesiastical lines, it embodies every essential to the comfort and well being, officially and personally, of the representatives of Pope Pius X. in the United States. It is built of light brick, with trimmings of Indiana limestone, and is three stories in height. The house is designed on the lines of the Italian renaissance, the dominating note of the exterior being Corinthian capped pillars at the main doorway of Indiana limestone, surmounted by a cartouch of the same stone, in which the papal coat of arms is represented. Four other pillars rise to the top of the house, and these also are capped after the Corinthian period. Window trimmings are of stone, and the whole makes an exceedingly happy effect. The building is surmounted by a cornice of good design.

The building contains a chapel which will be a revelation among semiprivate shrines. It extends the breadth of the building, and its roof rises to the third floor, a distance of twenty-five feet. Here the sculptor's art has been freely employed, and with good effect. The high ceiling lends scope for the working out of large designs. Mr. Von Herbold made the design for a beautiful altar of Italian marble, which has been received from Italy and set up in the chapel. Behind it are three stained glass windows of rose pattern, and these, facing the east, shed a beautiful light about the sanctuary of mornings. The chapel is also provided with electric lights in profusion, which are operated by a switchboard from the sacristy adjoining. This room is of necessity small, but at the same time commensurate with the needs of the household.

It is declared that only the best of construction material has been used throughout and the most skilled labor employed. Though its construction was retarded by the many delays incident to a new building, it is the proud boast of the architect and contractors that not all of the appropriation of \$60,000 was used.

Year by year the number of Catholic institutions in the Capital City is being added to. New foundations are being made by the more prominent orders, and Catholics at large have felt that it was only in the nature of things that the representative of Pope Pius X., head of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world, should be installed in the capital of the United States in a home commensurate with the dignity of his office.

Spiritual Perfection.

When shall we bear in mind this plain truth—that the future perfection of the saints is not a translation from one state or disposition of the soul into another diverse from the former, but the carrying out and, as it were, the blossoming and the fruitage of one and the same principle of spiritual life, which, through their whole career on earth, has been growing with an even strength, putting itself forward in the beginnings and promise of perfection, reaching upward with steadfast aspiration after perfect holiness?—Cardinal Manning.

TRIALS OF A CONVERT.

Three Mental Stages After His Reception Into the Church.

There are as a rule three stages in the life of the convert after he has received baptism—namely, his first experience as a full fledged Catholic, then the reaction as the second stage, and finally the third stage, resignation or second conversion.

When the convert has been duly instructed and the sacraments of Baptism and Penance impressed upon his soul he feels that he has indeed entered the new Jerusalem. Heaven opens. A vision of life everlasting peace and happiness dawns before him. He longs to walk over hot gridirons to be a martyr. I am speaking of the convert who has not entered the Church on account of marriage or some other practical object, but solely for the love of truth, which, after long years of doubting and wearisome search, he has at last found. He longs to take up the cross of Christ literally and assume the burden of all His suffering and passion in spite of all obstacles, for there are obstacles, great unforeseen ones. He then wishes to walk in the paths of poverty, to do unheard of penances, such as he has read of the lives of the saints.

He will find to his consternation that very few Catholics ever read or know anything about them, nor are they interested in these servants of Christ to any great extent. The convert finds that his zeal is met with a smile of amusement at this too zealous penitent.

He cannot understand why the Catholic is so little interested in the literature of his own Church while he devours all sensational papers and magazines of other writers. And the convert will try to reform this state of affairs, though he will as often get rebuff, and criticism will follow his actions. One of the strangest things in the world is the suspicion that the convert is regarded with. Why did he become a Catholic? How can the Protestant understand the faith of the old Church? He must give some reason for joining other than a regard for the truth. Why does he go to communion so often? He must have a lot of sins to tell. Well, he does not amount to much anyway, and so the convert gets his eyes open. He loses his hot gridiron notion and as like as not will go to the other extreme—indifference to all that has the name of religion. In fact, unless he has more than the usual amount of courage he will feel a spirit of listlessness arise within him that turns against all that was once good and holy.

But, as a rule, God does not lead a soul thus far without giving him unusual grace to combat these evils, and the third stage of conversion is of a different type than the first fervent period. He learns to see the hand of God in these conflicts and grapples with them with courage, with the firm determination, come what will, of conquering, and finds his reward in the faint glimpses of eternal reward which is given him from time to time.—A Convert in Catholic Cities.

The Church in America.

"The only living church in this country is the Catholic Church. There is no such word as fall in the work of converting this country." This was the watchword which Archbishop Farley gave the Catholic Converts' league of New York at its recent meeting. The archbishop alluded to the bitter complaint of Cardinal Newman when he said: "We are losing more than we gain. In London and Liverpool they are stealing from us the children of the slums."

"That used to be true some years ago," said the archbishop, "but there is less of it going on now. The clergy are bestirring themselves. A child that is dependent, a little idiot child, is as dear to God as any other."

Father McLaughlin, the chaplain of the Newman school, said that from the sea of irreligion and anarchy in Europe the eyes of Pius X. turned in hope to America.

Mutual Confidence.

"Without mutual confidence," says Cardinal Gibbons, "there could be no official or friendly relations among men and the wheels of social intercourse and commercial communication would suddenly stop." Every man of course should strive to improve his condition, but his strife need not be of a sort to make him unhappy. Perseverently, calmly and heroically striving to better one's condition will bring happiness. Patience, contentment, charity for others, interest in the world about us—these are the conditions of happiness. Neither fame nor fortune can bring happiness to a man who is discontented.

The Timid Catholic.

Any one calling himself a Catholic who is afraid to publicly profess his religion is no Catholic. Such a person would do better to openly confess himself outside of the Church, because he lacks the moral courage to live up to the principles he pretends to believe. Outside the arena of religion the standing of Catholics and Protestants is simply as citizens—some good, some bad.

We do job printing.

MISSION STATISTICS.

GOOD WORK OF THOSE ENGAGED IN SPREADING THE FAITH.

Twenty-five Thousand Converts Are Brought Into the Church in This Country Annually—Remarkable Results in the Mobile Diocese.

The Apostolic Mission House has recently collated some extremely valuable statistics of the number of converts received into the Church every year in this country. They are valuable because they furnish ground for some accurate and reliable statements. Heretofore it has been only guesswork. Cardinal Gibbons has ventured some statement based on the converts in the archdiocese of Baltimore, but these figures now given out by the Apostolic Mission House are based on the exact returns from twenty-nine of the dioceses in this country.

It is altogether strange that the conversion to the Church in this country a few years ago was so much of a negligible quantity that in most of the dioceses of the country there was no record kept of them. The number of baptisms was recorded, but no distinct rubric was accorded to the baptisms of the converts. But now in most of the well organized dioceses there are preserved accurate statistics of the converts who have been received, and probably in a few years, when the number of converts increases, there will not be a single diocese where the returns of conversions will not be an important item in reports.

However, according to the recent returns of the Mission House and published in the *Missionary*, twenty-nine dioceses whose aggregate Catholic population amounts to 4,310,180 show up 5,353 converts to the Church. This proportion is 1 in 806. If this same proportion is maintained throughout the 106 dioceses in the country, there would be a total of 25,066 converts received into the Church in this country every year.

It is interesting to study the figures. A few facts seem to be apparent. In the dioceses where a positive organized effort has been made to reach the non-Catholic the number of converts is very large. For example, New York diocese received 1,500 converts each year, and so small a diocese as Mobile, Ala., with only 23,000 Catholics received last year 537 converts. In these two dioceses there have been missionaries to non-Catholics for the last ten years.

New York has had its apostolate band of six missionaries, while Mobile has had two missionaries from the Mission House. They are now reaping their harvest. In dioceses where there has been no organized non-Catholic mission work the number of converts is very scanty. These indisputable facts demonstrate that wherever efforts are made to get converts they are secured, and in large numbers.

The figures from Mobile diocese are very remarkable—537 converts, or one in fifty-five of the Catholic population. If this same proportion were maintained throughout the country, the number of converts would be 20,000, but in its notable proportion Mobile stands out unique.

It would also be interesting to learn how many of these 5,353 were received by the religious orders and how many by the regular, parochial churches. From information derived from other sources it appears the largest proportion of converts are received by the ordinary parochial clergy. Of course their churches are by all odds the more numerous, but it is also true that the diocesan priests as a rule have the parishes on the frontiers, where the best work of conversion is done.

The Bomb in St. Peter's.

At the recent annual meeting of the alumni of St. Mary's seminary in Baltimore the following dispatch was ordered sent to Pope Pius X. through Cardinal Merry del Val, papal secretary of state: Moved with horror at the sacrilegious outrage at St. Peter's tomb and impressed by the diabolical trials that have been witnessed, the alumni of St. Mary's seminary of St. Supple, Baltimore, in anxious meeting wish to emphasize their loving prayerful sympathy and loyal devotion to Pius X., St. Peter's successor, Christ's vicar, and beg his blessing on their work in this fertile field.

The dispatch is signed by Cardinal Gibbons, Bishop Burke of Albany, Bishop Donahue of Wheeling, Bishop Monahan of Wilmington, the Rev. James A. Duffy of Brooklyn, the Rev. Thomas Griffin of Worcester, the Rev. Dennis O'Callahan of Boston, the Rev. Dennis O'Connell of Washington, domestic prelate; Auxiliary Bishop McDonough of Chicago, president of the association; Edward A. Kelly of Chicago, secretary; and Edward D. Winter, president of the seminary.

With God's Help.

Some say that the age of chivalry is past. The age of chivalry is never past so long as there is a man or woman undisciplined on earth or a man or woman left to say, "I will restore that wrong of my life in the attempt." The age of chivalry is never past so long as there is a man or woman left to say, "I will restore that wrong of my life in the attempt."

THE WORD MASS.

What is it which most obviously distinguishes Catholics from all other sects? Surely, it is the gift of Mass. Next to the bodily vision of Christ in heaven it is the greatest gift which God can give to His creatures, for in some respects it may be said to be greater than sanctifying grace, because it is its indispensable foundation.

The Mass of Faith. The word Mass in its various meanings is found in nearly all languages. In every land under the blue canopy of heaven this word is used to denote the great central act of Christian worship known as the sacrifice of the Mass. In Portugal the Mass is called *Missa*. In Spain, Germany and France it is called *Messe*. In Spain, South America and Mexico it is called *Misa*. In every part of the United States and the English empire it is called *Mass*.

The etymology of this word has been a mooted question. Many eminent theologians and philologists, such as St. Thomas Aquinas down have written on the subject, but not one of them as far as the present writer is aware has ever traced the word *Mass* to Hebrew word *Masach*, which signifies the elevation or lifting up of the host while offering sacrifice to God. In the Old Testament the *Masach* is foreshadowed (Gen. xiv, 18) and foretold (Mal. i, 11). In the New Testament we find it promised (St. John vi, 22, vi, 31, 53) and celebrated by the first apostles (Acts xiii, 20). Now, the first apostles were Hebrews, and the Hebrew word for elevation of the consecrated host is the *Masach*. The word *Mass* is found in the second verse of the hundred and fourth Psalm: "Let my prayer be recorded as incense in Thy sight, the elevation of my hands (Masach) as living sacrifice."

The word *Mass*, therefore, was probably first applied to the sacrifice of the New Testament by the Christian Jews of the early ages, who were accustomed to witness the elevation of the priest's consecrated host (Masach) every day, and who, after the consecration, which bread of earth became the body of Christ, from heaven and the blood of Christ became the blood of the new, Jesus Christ—Albert McGowan, S. J., St. Columba, Ont.

The Loss of Faith. The Civita Catholic draws a depressing and melancholy picture of the religious epidemic in Europe. The picture attributes this to the loss of faith. The figures are calculated to show that, in the Protestant countries, the loss of faith is more numerous than in others. While in Spain and France, for example, it is noticed, Denmark, France show an increase. While last thirty years has not been a period of such loss of faith, the loss of faith has been increasing in Europe and in this total European figure with 300,000.

SHORT SERMONS.

Be true to your word, your word is your power. "All the days of my appointed time I will wait till my sentence shall be fulfilled when I awake they'll know me." There is no loss of living if we do not help other lives. They help other lives if it is done in the power of God. Nothing is more delightful than repaying of good will, nothing sweeter than the interchange of personal freedom and good offices. How many a man by throwing a word to the wind in casual conversation and detours (revolves) a thousand men of hope that were ready to be lost and gladden all his pathway.

Practical Charity.

Rev. Timothy Dempsey, pastor of St. Patrick's church, St. Louis, has issued a three story bulletin for the relief of the victims of the recent earthquake in San Francisco, and in that city the purpose of starting an "earthquake fund" as a helping hand for the little ones. The philanthropist has secured the hearty approval of Archbishop Gleason. Together with the boys' home, recently started to make St. Louis Catholicism more of a practical and original of charity.

CHRIST IS BORN.

Awake! The every heart needs to be stirred by the birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is the birth of hope. All who believe in the birth of Christ will have the world's end and peace. This is the birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is the birth of hope. All who believe in the birth of Christ will have the world's end and peace. This is the birth of Christ.

Episcopal Church's Peace.

To break the power of the Peace Union, the Episcopal Church has issued a statement. The statement is a statement of the Episcopal Church's position on the Peace Union. The statement is a statement of the Episcopal Church's position on the Peace Union. The statement is a statement of the Episcopal Church's position on the Peace Union.

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