

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Devotions



The Historic Tablet Of Perpetual Help

Editor's Note: This is the third of a series of articles by Father Seidel, Redemptorist missionary, on the miraculous Picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. These articles, appearing exclusively in Rochester in the CATHOLIC COURIER, official newspaper of the diocese, are being printed in connection with the special novenas and tridua being conducted in various parts of the diocese and particularly at St. Joseph's Church, Franklin Street, Rochester, where there are now five services every Wednesday after the 8 o'clock Mass, at 12:15 p. m., 3 p. m., 5:30 p. m., and 8 p. m.

By REV. CLARENCE SEIDEL, C.S.S.R.

Until recently, the only source of information we had concerning the early history of the miraculous Picture of Perpetual Help was a sermon, delivered in 1715, by Conceptus Carocci, S.J. Today, however, we are more fortunate, for, as a result of the painstaking efforts of Fr. C. Henze, C.S.S.R., we have at our disposal an authentic copy of the ancient historic tablet on which was written the true story of Perpetual Help. Composed as early as the pontificate of Alexander VI, that is, between the years 1492-1503, it possesses far greater authority and merits a more ready assent than does Carocci's sermon. While Carocci's sermon is, for the most part, in harmony with the story of the tablet, yet here and there it strikes a discordant note. These errors—for such they really are—will be revealed in the account of the tablet itself, and more fully explained in a following chapter.

True, we do not possess the original tablet, a piece of parchment, which was brought to the United States for three centuries—1499-1798—close to our picture, where all could read the story, in old St. Matthew's Church on the Esplanade Hill. It was most likely destroyed, together with the church, in 1798, when Napoleon's legions, like swooping vultures, bore down upon the Eternal City, leaving some thirty churches in utter ruin.

Three Copies Exist
Sad, indeed, would be our lot did we not possess authentic copies of this most treasured tablet. But such, luckily, is not the case. For, three copies, so far as we know, exist, and here we beg indulgence to relate the story of their discovery. In 1903, Rev. Joseph Kaas, C.S.S.R., went to the Vatican Library to look for matter concerning the Picture of Perpetual Help. Little did he suspect the surprise that awaited him. Scarcely had he made his first inquiry when, to his utmost joy, Peter Wenzel, sometime sub-prefect of the Vatican archives, presented him with a copy of the original tablet which he had accidentally found among the pages of an old codex, compiled by a certain Turrius. This discovery encouraged Father Kaas to continue his investigations. He did so, and he was rewarded for his many hours of trying toil by finding a second

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Alhambra Invites Friends to Social Tuesday, Feb. 28

All friends of the Knights of Columbus and Alhambra are invited to attend the card party and dance being conducted Tuesday evening, February 28 in Columbus Civic Center ballroom for the benefit of the Knights of Columbus state convention fund.

The party is in charge of Norman A. O'Brien who is being assisted by a committee of wives and sweethearts of the members of Musa Caravan, Order of the Alhambra. Valuable prizes will be awarded for the card playing and many novelties will be introduced during the social hour.

Grand Knight, Dr. Walter P. O'Neill has sent out notices inviting all Knights of Columbus to attend this Alhambra party. It will be the big social event of the year for the Alhambra as the annual dinner dance has not been scheduled this year.

At the call of the Most Reverend Joseph Schrembs, Chairman of the Department of Lay Organizations of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, two hundred women met in Washington, D. C., March 4, 5, 6, 1930.

This group included representatives sent from the various Dioceses by their Bishops, representatives of national organizations and women prominent in the various fields of social work. At this meeting, organization of the N. C. C. W. was perfected and the first Board of Directors elected.

How Organized:
The National Council of Catholic Women is an affiliation of:
(a) National organizations of Catholic women, enjoying ecclesiastical approval;
(b) Diocesan Councils, organized according to the plan and wish of the Ordinary;
(c) State and Local organizations of Catholic women;
(d) Individual Catholic women interested in work for the general welfare of the Church.

Why Organized:
The N. C. C. W. provides a medium through which the Catholic women of the country may speak and act as a unit when the welfare of the Church or of the country demands such expression.
It affords to its component units increased power by means of this united voice; extended influence through representation in national conferences; greater effectiveness through a uniform program endorsed by authority; the economy of a central clearing bureau of information and contact with the other Departments of the N. C. C. W.; a channel for international relations with the organized groups of Catholic women in other countries; a corps of trained Social Workers who may be engaged to carry on specific work.

How Directed:
The management of the N. C. C. W. is in the hands of fifteen National Directors, one from each diocese, therefore that she was lamenting and weeping because she had been the cause of her husband's death. To this her neighbor replied, saying: "You are mistaken. Why, it is foolish to believe such things. The Virgin Mary is in heaven and does not care what we do with her painted pictures here below. Why, if you were to put it into the fire, the fire would burn it up just like any other piece of wood. And if you are so timid, give it to me. In a similar strain she continued to heap insulting slurs upon the Picture. When this neighbor returned home that evening, she was stricken with a miraculously-sent infection. But on making a solemn promise to the Picture, she was cured.

Second Apparition
"Finally, the Blessed Virgin appeared a second time to the above-mentioned little girl, commanding her to tell her mother to place her Picture between St. Mary Major's and St. John Lateran's in a certain church dedicated to St. Matthew, the Apostle. The mother did as she was told, and sent for the Augustinian Friars who were then in charge of that church. In the presence of the clergy and all the people, they removed the Picture to St. Matthew's church, where, on that same day, this miracle—the first to happen—occurred: A man who was so paralyzed in both his right arm and side that he could scarcely move, by humbly recommending himself to God and the Virgin, and promising a votive offering, was instantly cured.

"In this manner the Picture of the most Blessed Virgin was enshrined in the above-mentioned church of St. Matthew, the Apostle, on the 27th of March, 1499—in the pontificate of our most holy Father and Lord in Christ, of our Lord, Pope Alexander VI, in the seventh year of his pontificate."

Truthfulness Shown
Such is the account of the tablet; and here we may justly ask, does it merit belief? Is it not, perhaps, merely some "pious legend" gotten up to inspire the faithful with devotion towards our Lady? Nothing further from the truth. For this account is solidly founded on historic fact, and, consequently, worthy of the most exacting scientific belief. But this is only a statement. Have we any arguments to prove it? Certainly; and they are numerous. Allow us to present them:

The first question to be settled concerns the time or date of the tablet's composition. If we can prove, as we think we can—that the tablet

Rochester Diocesan Council of the National Council of Catholic Women

Office 1020 Columbus Civic Center

So frequently are we asked, "What is the N. C. C. W.?" we believe the following explanation will be of interest and inspiration to all our readers:

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

What It Is:

The National Council of Catholic Women is an integral part of the National Catholic Welfare Conference—an organization composed of the Archbishops and Bishops of the United States. The National Council of Catholic Women and the National Council of Catholic Men constitute the Lay Department of the Conference and are thus an official part of the program of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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was written, during the pontificate of Alexander VI, who occupied the chair of Peter from 1492 to 1503, then we can see no reason why the account should not be believed. To prove that such is the case, we need but point to the peculiar formulae used at the end of our tablet. Such formulae were commonly employed at that time to designate the reigning pontificate. Let us cite only one example. It is from Rudolf Lanciani's "Storia degli Scavi di Roma."

This notary begins his document thus: "In the year of our Lord 1519, of the pontificate of our most Holy Father and Lord Jesus Christ, Leo X, by Divine Providence Pope, in his eleventh year." How like is this to the last sentence of our tablet!

Another argument for its composition during the pontificate of Alexander VI, is derived from the fact that after his account of the tablet, Turrius gives several other documents, all written by the same hand, which bear some reference to this Pope's pontificate.

Brutus, upon examining the text of the tablet, asserts in his Third Volume (the tablet): "If we judge from its oldness and lettering, recalls that memory" (viz. the age of Alexander VI); and in his Sixteenth Volume, "The aforesaid tablet shows by its antiquity that it is of the aforesaid time."

A contemporary of Brutus, Benedict Mellini, styles the tablet an "old piece of parchment." And Conceptus Carocci, S.J., declared, in 1775, that his sermon on the Madonna of Perpetual Help was based "upon a very old memorial on parchment" which he found "in Beatenche," who wrote "in 1502."

Clearly do these statements show that the tablet was composed during the pontificate of Alexander VI; and, such being the case, we can easily believe that the erection of the tablet was contemporaneous with the exposition of the Picture.

It is quite evident to all, too, that from the antiquity of the tablet we can draw a good intrinsic argument for its truthfulness. "For," as Fr. Henze says, "Imagine the arrival of the merchant from Crete; at the home of his Roman friend; imagine his death; imagine, too, the sudden death of the Roman; imagine the equally sudden infection and the instant cure of the neighbor; imagine, finally, the solemn translation, of that Byzantine Picture, from the dwelling of a private individual to a public church; and the sensation caused by the first miracle wrought on the occasion—imagine all those details to have been falsely asserted, would not the gross error and lying falsehood have been immediately detected?"

This argument is even strengthened when we recall that in 1517, one of the most learned and upright men of the times, the Augustinian Friar, Regidius Casiano a Viterbio, was Titular Cardinal of St. Matthew's Church. When, in 1499, the holy Picture of Perpetual Help was delivered over to his confreres, he was residing at Rome, and was, undoubtedly, a participant in the grand celebration of that memorable day. Now, suppose this tablet were untrue, would not Cardinal Aegidius have thrown it out of his church? Would not he who loved truth so passionately, have destroyed this piece of falsehood? Moreover, the same may be said of the succeeding cardinals.

Reason for Belief
Besides, consider the text itself. Who finds there anything impossible, or even improbable? What is extraordinary in the fact of the Pic-

SODAL TALK

Did you ever stop and think about something which had suddenly presented itself forcibly to you in a new light? Do you realize the tremendous connotation of the word "Sodality" in this country, alone? Unless you are intimately acquainted with it I am afraid you would not know all that it means. Therefore, I shall answer my own question.

From Los Angeles, to New York, from Chicago, to San Francisco, the Sodality is in high schools, colleges, and parishes. Men and boys, girls and young women are united in this splendid cause of personal holiness and active Catholicity together with the rejuvenation of Catholic leaders. A new era of Sodality activity has begun.

The youth of today are the men and women of tomorrow. In this age, when the morals are at the lack of morals of modern youth is being criticized, young men and women are discussing Christ, the Model of Perfect Manhood and are engaged in a Respect for Women crusade. The intelligent young Catholics of today believe in his faith, because he knows from study that it is a reasonable faith. These modern Sodality believe in "doing unto others" as many number of instances will show, for example, their buying milk for school children, giving their old clothes, driving, really work teaching of catechism, Boy and Girl Scout work.

I mentioned the modern youth in connection with this very topic let me suggest that you look up the recent numbers of the "American" and see what Reverend Daniel A. Lord, S.J., has to say on the subject than whom none is more in a position to know and understand modern youth. His view is optimistic which is encouraging.

I told you last week that the Sodality of Holy Ghost Parish was going to be an active one. This week I bring to you the proof of my prophecy. You will find that I shall be hammering away on the theme that Sodality is the right hand of the Pastor. This Sodality is filling that capacity right now. The pastor is encouraging, congratulating, singing and the Sodality is taking it up with will and readiness so that they will soon rival the angelic choirs. You know that if you hear your neighbor singing you rather feel that you can summon up enough courage to add your little tune even though you do not happen to be an opera star.

Inspired by the power of the Holy Ghost, Sodality has started a new project. At the last meeting a Valentine was passed out to each girl. It wasn't an ordinary valentine with red hearts and white lace. These heart-shaped valentines were blue, our Lady's color, and were tied with ribbon. The first heart represented the heart of Our Lady, the second, the Sodality's heart. Little gold hearts were made for each month and every time the Sodality received on general Communion Sunday she pastes one of her little gold hearts on her valentine. "The one who has her valentine completed this time next year receives a Sodality pin as her accolade. The explanation I have given may not be remarkable for its oddity but the idea is a good one, don't you think?"

The Sodality is also establishing an honor roll of outstanding Sodality. A very clever way of managing the special entertainment of this group at meetings has been devised. Two girls are responsible for the entertainment at the meeting after the business has been concluded. They in turn have the right to appoint the two Sodality who will take charge the next month. Thus, the social part of the meetings are never monotonous for each pair have new and fresh ideas for fun.

St. Francis Xavier Sodality had general Communion Sunday last week. An increase in the number

of the Sodality was reported. The Roman's wife? If you object on the score of the miracles related in the account, we simply reply, "Qui bono?" Who could have profited by their narration? Why should we not believe the merchant who, on the approach of death, confessed his sacrilegious theft? Why doubt the Roman who, on several occasions, openly declared that he had often been warned by a heavenly Lady to remove the Picture? Why question the other's statement that she had been forced, so to speak, by a superior power to part with the Picture? Had nothing occurred by accident, would the merchant have so readily avowed, except perhaps by the dim of neighbors? And why doubt him not to believe the neighbor who, by admitting her sudden infection, readily acknowledged her punishment by God? And then surely, no one will contend that a little girl of only six years could have devised, or even imagined, such heavenly messages and visitations "as recorded in our tablet. In fact, the appearance of that little child most strongly convinces us that the story is true, for Mary generally chooses little children to be her messengers. Did not the Blessed Virgin reveal her immaculate Conception to the little Bernadette? Did not our Lady of La Salette appear to the two French herds, Maximin and Jeanne, on the Alps? What wonder, therefore, that Perpetual Help should choose this little child to be her messenger?

It seems quite timely that we should say at this point "Gather ye roses while ye may" for the coming and last is approaching time of sacrifices. As we read: "A sacrifice is worth a life." He died for you, what will you do for Him?

St. Andrew's Sodality had a session—breakfast, last Sunday. Father Peery was the guest speaker. His topic was "The Spirit of Sodality." There were also Sodality who spoke, and a very interesting and instructive session.

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