

# The Close of a Triduum

By MARGARET B. GERALD

The place is the beautiful new church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Elmira, the time is the eve of her Feast Day and the occasion, the closing evening service of the triduum, conducted by the Bishop of our Diocese. The frame is a fitting one, the beautiful simplicity of the walls, whose only decorations are the exquisite portrayals of the road to Calvary, trod by the God Man on the day of His supreme sacrifice. The picture, the focus of all thoughtful eyes, is the perfect replica of the grotto of Lourdes, which forms the background for the main altar.

The statue of our Lady, dazzling white against the dark rocks, seems to smile in lovely benediction on the simple peasant girl, who reached such heights of sanctity that she has been canonized by Holy Mother Church. But the gracious beauty of our Blessed Lady is also reflected in every corner of the Church that is dedicated to her, and the smile is for you and for me, who kneel at her feet and plead for her protection. Many of us will never enjoy the privilege of a visit to the original Shrine of Lourdes, but to us, has not our Lady given a priceless substitute.

### COMPLETES PICTURE

Linger with me, until I complete the picture, framed as our Blessed Lady would have wished it to be, with an absence of grandeur and lavish display. His Excellency, the Most Rev. James E. Kearney, is delivering his closing message to these devoted followers of our Blessed Mother. Quite in keeping with the beautiful simplicity of the scene are the words of the Shepherd to those members of his flock, who were privileged to hear him on that occasion.

His words bring us very close to the reality of Lourdes and remind us that we had just completed the recitation of the fifteen Mysteries of the Holy Rosary, which we could offer to our Lady of Lourdes, asking of her the future welfare of the parish. And our Bishop continues, "I hope that my coming here, for this your first triduum in your new church will mark the inauguration of a strong devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes in this Church and parish."

"May I remind you," Bishop Kearney continues, "that Our Lady very definitely said to little Bernadette, 'I want a church built here . . . And so in Elmira, we have built around her grotto a Church and at her feet we have placed an altar, where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered.' Reviewing the devotion to St. Rita and to the Little Flower, he pointed out that we are so skeptical that the trend of our devotions depends upon the experiences of

others as well as upon the grace of God.

### PERSONAL PLEA

"And so today," he said, "we see a tremendous wave of devotion to our Blessed Lady." Relating a personal experience, he told of a little girl of nine years of age, who was so horribly mangled in an accident, that an amputation was judged the only means of saving her life. Placing his confidence in our Blessed Lady, our Bishop, who was then a young priest in New York City, told the story to the congregation, who came to his church that evening for October devotions.

Aware of the personal qualities of our own petitions, we were startled to hear him repeat the plea which he made that night to his people. The child was not known to most of them; they had their own particular intentions, but filled with a great ardor for the need of this little girl, he begged them to pray that she might be given the chance for a normal girlhood and womanhood.

The answer you must know—the operation was not performed. The little girl recovered because our Blessed Lady answered the challenge of those unselfish petitions. And in closing, our Bishop said, "The only motive that could bring you here is your sincere love for Our Lady of Lourdes. This parish should be characterized by a strong tender love for her—and finally I place in your hands, on this the eve of her feast, the sweetest thing that God has given His creatures, a true love for our Blessed Lady."

And so the triduum, which was solemnly closed the following morning concludes the services on that last evening, with Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Do you notice the added glow of candles, the bright lights giving a new brilliance to the scene, the white vestments with a touch of the blue of our Lady's robe, and the soft notes of the organ, blending with the voices of the choir and the congregation. Until then the picture had been perfect, and how could we add another trace of beauty to it—you may well ask that question.

### FINAL TOUCH ADDED

And my answer is only this as at the Wedding Feast during the days of Our Lord's public ministry, our Blessed Lady seemed, at that moment to turn to her Divine Son, and leave the finishing touch to Him. Into His Sacred Hands, she placed the paint brush, to Him, she entrusted the master stroke that would complete the portrait. And as if to give to her, the best beloved of all His creatures, the choicest of Gifts, on this the eve of the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Son of God and our Bless-

ed Lady adds the final touch of beauty to a perfect panorama.

We bowed our heads, pledging anew our devotion to His Blessed Mother, our Lady of Lourdes, as we gazed in awe, at His answer to her, a shining and monstrance, the "frame" for our Sacramental God.

And so we say a triduum closes, ah no, for who can so state, when the graces granted through her intercession during those three days, will reflect in us and ours, God willing, through many of the years to come. Life may close for some of us before another Feast Day, but in eternity, will we not know why and how we made this first triduum to Our Lady of Lourdes, in her Church in Elmira.

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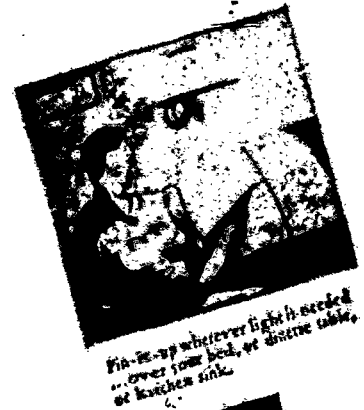
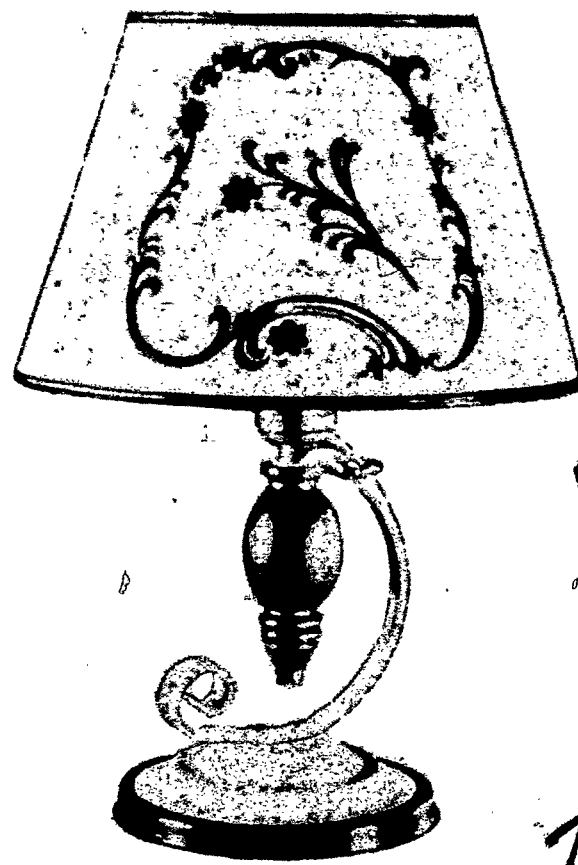
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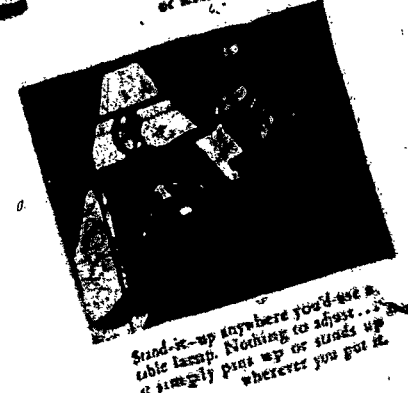
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## Babies Were Crying . . .

I walked up the hard stone steps of a downtown Chicago church. It was Sunday, well past mid-afternoon. The priest stopped out of the arched door of the sanctuary to begin the 10 o'clock Mass. Chicago is considered, as its own Catholics generally consider it, as a 50 per cent Catholic city. There may have been two hundred people at that Mass: I counted twelve persons twenty-five years of age and under.

The next Sunday following, irate winds were blowing dust around my ears as I tramped down the street of one of North Dakota's wind-swept, treeless, agricultural towns. Two blocks from a tapered, wooden, cross-crowned steeple, I found myself the part of a moving crowd that ambled along—talking, laughing and leading itself past two weather-beaten oak doors that had for the present given up the struggle to close themselves. Divide your world into heads twenty-five years under and over and count them in that North Dakota Catholic Church on Sunday and well have you counted if you do not come out even.

And a third Sunday, quite by chance (for I was not out gathering statistics), I found myself scanning the growing green pastures and small crop varied farms of one of Wisconsin's remote agricultural fastnesses. Indeed, this was dairyland. Every half mile on each side of the road was a farmstead. Here neighbors were neighbors—by location as well as by tradition. Here, if anywhere in America, was Catholicism, social and

corporate. Seventy years the "red," aging, red brick church has been standing—and not yet, and I predict never, "a ragged beggar sleeping." Up four, worn, wooden steps, past and beyond a single wooden door. I looked long for a place to kneel and the Lord forgives, as I found so easy to forgive, the distractions—babies were crying in their mothers' arms, and babies out of arms were dropping rosaries and prayer books, and bigger ones were picking them up again . . .

Ask the pastor of a Chicago parish, or a New York parish, or most any big city parish, "How big is your parish?" He will answer, "I don't know exactly . . . six blocks to the north and seven to the east . . ." Then go to the country pastor and ask him, "How big is your parish?" He will answer you in a manner familiar, and his answer will be the best answer yet ever heard, "So many families." And that makes all the difference. —ESG.

### 37 SCHOLARSHIPS

Washington. Thirty-seven graduate scholarships and fellowships in Catholic University of America, valued at more than \$25,000, will be offered for the academic year 1942-43, the Most Rev. Joseph M. Corrigan, Rector of the University, announces.

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

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