

Triumph of the Heart

LET EVERYTHING THAT BREATHES
PRAISE THE LORD!

Family of Mary

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Daily Audience

Gretchen, a beautiful white canary, was always a relaxing diversion which Pope Pius XII permitted in his highly disciplined daily schedule. The little bird flew out of her cage as soon as she heard the whir of the electric razor at 6:15 in the morning. Even though the Holy Father was also concentrating on the English or French radio broadcasts to keep his linguistic skills polished, his beloved pet could sit on the hand guiding his razor.

The little bird recognized the sound of the Pope's footsteps and flew over to meet him whenever he came for breakfast or lunch. If a platter was brought in from the kitchen, Gretchen flew over to check it out and to see if something on it might taste good to her. Sometimes she plucked Pius XII's hair or ear if the Pope was deep in thought and did not notice her. The little bird loved to sit on his hand and sing as beautifully as she could.

From the memoirs of Sr. Pascalina Lehnert, a housekeeper of Pope Pius XII for many years.

The Saints and the Animals

Even with such a title, we have no intention of presenting in this issue of Triumph of the Heart fables or fairy tales, which are well suited for children but have little to do with reality. Far more importantly, in the 21 we should feel personally spoken to by holy men and women who had a paradise-like relationship with God's creation and to whom animals were obedient and very trusting.

Just as correspondence with God's grace on the part of man can bring rich blessings in the animal world and all creation, so also our sins have an effect on the animals. Yes, animals have also suffered consequences from our original sin. By turning away from God, man became godless and therefore loveless, irreverent, and unkind toward God's creatures, and thereby lost his dominion over them.

Because man was disobedient to God, creation is no longer obedient to man and as such, it poses a threat to him even to this day!

A poisonous bite or sting from a tiny animal can be enough to kill us. Does our God of love want it this way? No, that was never his design. We see how God has remained faithful to his plan to sanctify his creation and the animal world through mankind in the men and women united with him. With their seraphic love of God, they also love their neighbor and creation.

We even know from St. Francis that he had such a trusting, peaceful, compassionate and tender relationship to all creatures, that he called them his "brothers" and "sisters" and spoke with them.

However, not only singular saints like Francis should, through their unity with God, have this relationship as it was in the beginning with nature and animals. We are all called, as collaborators with God in the family of creation, to praise our Creator in harmony, so that famous prophecy of Isaiah may be realized and not simply sound like utopia:

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, shall lie down and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, shall lead them. The cow feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den." (Is 11:6-8)

St. Francis and the Animals

St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) lived 800 years ago and yet people of every age up to this day, have been fascinated by him. Children, young people, and adults, regardless of nationality, culture or religion, feel innerly drawn to him. He has been called “*prayer personified*”, and already during his lifetime, the citizens of Umbria went out to meet him like a second Christ with bells tolling and branches in their hands. What was his secret?

God pointed out the way to 25-year-old Francis, “*after a wasted youth*” as he expressed it, to become a stigmatized renewer of the Church and a saint of seraphic love. After his radical conversion, the ‘poor one’ from Assisi asked only one thing of his beloved Lord: “*I want as much as conceivably possible to bear the suffering and the love of Jesus.*”

With this love for his Creator, Francis, during the 20 years of his work, looked up to creation, to the animals and plants which for him were a wonderfully unique reflection of the goodness, care and diversity of God.

By order of Pope Gregory IX, a fellow Franciscan brother, Blessed Thomas of Celano, wrote down many events in the first biography of the saint as an eyewitness. He wrote, “*In every artwork of nature, he praised the Artist. What he found in the created world led him back to the Creator. Through this, what his eyes offered him in loveliness, he saw through to the life-giving cause of all that is. In the beautiful, he recognized the most beautiful himself. Everything good cried out to him: He who created us is the best!*” (2 Cel 165)

The Wolf of Agobio

The following episode from Chapter XXI of “*The Little Flowers of St. Francis*” is very famous and has been depicted often by artists. It took place as Francis was staying in the city of Agobio: In that time, a wild wolf appeared who attacked and killed not only other animals but people as well. The town’s citizens were gripped with fear because he often came very close to where they lived. They were always armed if they had to leave Agobio. It even went so far that, for sheer fear of the wolf, nobody had the courage to leave the town anymore. Francis had such compassion with the inhabitants that he wanted to go out and find the wolf, even though the townsfolk tried to dissuade him. Francis, however, put all his trust in God, made the sign of the cross, and headed his companions. When his brothers

had misgivings, Francis continued on his own. Many of the citizens of Agobio watched from a distance, and they saw the following miracle take place.

With jaws wide open, the wolf charged toward St. Francis. When the wolf was very close to him, he made the sign of the cross over it and called out, “*Come, Brother Wolf! I command you in the name of Christ not to harm me or anybody else!*” As soon as he had made the sign of the cross, the wolf closed his mouth and stopped in his tracks. Through this command, the wolf became very calm and laid down like a little lamb at the feet of St. Francis who said, “*Brother Wolf, you are causing a lot of problems*

in this area. I want to make peace between you and the people. Do not cause them any more trouble, and they will forgive everything that you have done. Neither the townsfolk nor the dogs will threaten you from now on."

Through his body movements, the wolf showed that he agreed to what St. Francis had expected of him. Francis continued, "*Brother Wolf, since you want to make peace, I promise you that, as long as you live, the people around here will feed you. You have to promise, however, not to harm in any way the people or the other animals. Do you promise me? I want a sign of your agreement so that I can rely on you.*"

Francis stretched out his hand to accept the wolf's promise, and the wolf lifted up his right paw and placed it in Francis's hand. At the saint's command, they went together into town where all the people had gathered in the square. Francis began to preach, and everyone was so amazed about him and the peaceful wolf that they began to thank and praise God aloud.

The wolf lived another two years in Agobio. He went from house to house; everyone was friendly and fed him. When the wolf finally died of old age, the citizens were sad because, as he wandered so mildly through the town, they were vividly reminded of the virtue and sanctity of St. Francis.

A Homily for the Birds

*O*f all the creatures, St. Francis especially loved the birds which flew about so freely because they live in the sky—in heaven so to say—so close to the angels. Thomas of Celano wrote about how Francis, on the way from Assisi to Montefalco, suddenly saw a huge flock of birds on a tree; there were pigeons, doves and crows. Francis was curious and said to one of his brothers, "*Wait here, I want to go and preach to our brothers, the birds.*"

All the birds flew over from the tree, sat on the ground and did not move even though Francis paced back and forth through them, grazing their heads with his habit.

He spoke, "*My brother birds! You must praise your Creator very much and love him always because... you do not sow and you do not reap, but God nourishes you and gives you streams and springs from which to drink, the mountains and hills, rocks and cliffs where you can hide yourselves, and high trees in which to build your nests. ...Therefore, do not be ungrateful, but praise your God zealously!*"

All the birds began vivaciously to open their beaks, spread out and flap their wings, stretch their necks, bow their heads to the ground and chirp joyfully.

The Cricket

*A*nyone who has made a pilgrimage to Assisi knows the Portiuncula church. In the days of St. Francis, naturally, there was only the little chapel, which today is surrounded by a huge basilica. St. Francis stayed there one sum-

mer, and he lived in the last cell close to the garden fence. He discovered a cricket there on the branch of a fig tree. Every time he passed by the tree, he called out, "*Come and sing sister cricket!*"

The cricket would crawl very tamely onto his outstretched hand and begin to chirp. He would hold it for an hour, pet it, and set it back down on the branch. This went on for a week; whenever Francis came out of his cell, he found it in the same place. “Sing, sing! Even your chirping is nothing other than a song of praise to our Creator,” he invited her each day.

On the eighth day, however, he turned to the brothers and said, “*This little animal has brought us more than enough joy. We do not want to keep it for ourselves but give it freedom.*” Turning to the cricket he said, “*Thank you little creature for your obedience, but go now wherever you want. We will never forget you!*”

Preaching to the Fish

In Italy, Doctor of the Church St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231) is the quintessential saint; he is simply called, “the saint”. The countless healings of the sick, answers to prayers, and miracles at the tomb of the 36-year old resulted in him being named ‘Doctor Evangelicus’ only 11 months after his death, in the shortest canonization process in the history of the saints. St. Anthony had a charismatic gift to speak and had such an extraordinary knowledge of

Sacred Scripture that they gave him the nickname “Shrine of the Holy Scripture”. As a poor but well-educated preacher, he traveled around Italy where he came to be known everywhere as a convincing proclaimer of the gospel. Wherever he went, the inhabitants of whole cities were spiritually renewed and, above all, those who had fallen into error were led back with patience and love.

*“Listen, you fish of the sea,
“because the people refuse!”*

*A*nthony was chosen by his superior to try to win back the heretics in northern Italy. In his zeal for souls, Anthony even dared to go to the city of Rimini, the stronghold of heresy, where he won many of the dissidents back to the Catholic Faith, including Bonillo, who had been the leader of a sect there for 30 years.

*N*evertheless, this great pastoral success took place before he preached his famous “*Fish Homily*”. “*The Little Flowers of St. Anthony*” tells the story: Because the heretics had been insubordinate for days and would not even listen to Antho-

ny, he was divinely inspired to go to the beach one morning where the Marecchia River flows into the sea. He began to speak to the fish. Immediately, a countless number of big and little fish, like nobody had ever seen in the river or in the sea, swam up close to the shore. They all stuck their heads out of the water and inclined them attentively toward Anthony. The little fish came in the closest, then the medium size fish, the bigger fish, and then finally the largest fish where the water was a little bit deeper. St. Anthony preached with a solemn voice, “*You fish, my sisters, thank God with all your strength! Thank him that he has given you such a glorious element in which to live, fresh or salt*

water according to your tastes. God, your good and loving Creator, gave you the instruction to grow and multiply. When the Great Flood covered the earth and all the animals drowned, only you were spared from harm. God intended that you to save the prophet Jonah and deliver him safely to land on the third day. You had the privilege to be food for Jesus, both before and after the Resurrection. For all these reasons, you should praise God because he has shone you more favor than all the other creatures.”

The fish began to open their mouths and bow their heads, using these and similar gestures to honor and praise God. When the saint saw this, he rejoiced and said with a loud voice, “Praised be the Eternal God, who the fish in the water honor more than the heretics, who’s Word

the irrational animals accept more than the unbelieving people!”

The more he preached, the more the number of fish increased, and they did not budge. Now the people streamed out from the city, among them the heretics as well. When they saw this miracle, they were taken with repentance and listened attentively to the words of Anthony. He began to speak so effectively about the Catholic faith that the heretics under stood and converted. At this point, St. Anthony dismissed the fish with God’s blessing, and they all swam back into the sea.

Also the people went away strengthened and consoled. St. Anthony remained in Rimini to preach and to fortify the souls in the faith.

Jordan of Saxon

In lower Saxony near Dassel, Blessed Jordan of Saxon was born around 1200. He met St. Dominic while he was studying in Paris, and then joined his young order at the age of 20. When St. Dominic died two years later, amazing as it may sound, the 22-year-old German succeeded him as the second General of the order. Only 15 years remained for Jordan to lead the tremendous task of building up the Dominicans because he drowned in 1237, at the age of 37, when his ship sank in a storm off the coast of Syria while returning from a visit to a convent in Palestine.

Contemporary accounts of Jordan of Saxon describe him as a gifted organizer, a man of overabundant liveliness, and an outspoken, charming person, meek and full of goodness towards everyone, especially the sick, weak, and difficult. In spite of his position, he proved himself a simple, helpful brother, and so everyone felt irresistibly attracted to him. He knew people so well and therefore it was especially easy for him to be with the youth.

When he pursued his favorite mission, speaking enthusiastically at the different universities around Europe as a traveling preacher, he had immense success and popularity.

Jordan of Saxon won over to the young Dominican order more than one thousand students, but also many famous professors and celebrities. Not a single one of them gave up on their vocation. Twenty students, for example, immediately applied to the Dominicans after one of his homilies at the university in Padua, among them German Albert of Lauingen, later known in Church history as St. Albert the Great, “*doctor universalis*”.

St. Albert, in turn, was the teacher of the great theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. The order spread so quickly and vastly that 250 convents were founded in Jordan’s time. With his great missionary spirit, he sent his preaching brothers to Africa, Palestine, Russia, even to the Tartars. Dynamic and active by nature, he still always found time for prayer on his extensive visitation journeys.

Therefore, also his spiritual friendship and unity with Diana d'Andalo and her sisters in the St. Agnes Convent in Bologna was so pre-

cious to him. In many letters, he entrusted all of his undertakings to her prayer and sacrifice.

“Come out pretty little animal”

*D*uring one of his long trips from convent to convent in the West, the following episode took place. It was early in 1232, Jordan of Saxon had set out for Paris in Lausanne where the General Chapter was because he wanted to visit his friend Bishop Boniface, a learned Cistercian theologian. Since Boniface did not live in town, Jordan made an excursion to him out in the country. His faithful traveling companion Br. Gerhard of Frachet recorded what took place.

“One day, Master Jordan left Lausanne to visit the bishop with whom he shared a deep friendship. Several brothers set out ahead and Jordan followed them with the treasurer of the cathedral, and they conversed about Jesus. Suddenly, an ermine ran across the path in front of the brothers. They called out for this animal, but it turned around immediately and ducked

back into its hole. They were still standing by the hole in the ground when Jordan caught up and asked, ‘Why are you standing here?’ ‘They answered, ‘A magnificent, totally white animal disappeared into this hole. Oh Master, if only you could have seen it!’ “

Jordan stooped down to the hole and called, ‘Come out, pretty little animal so that we can see you too!’ Right away, the ermine appeared at the entrance of his hole and looked at the Master. Jordan worked one hand under the front paws of this shy little animal and petted his head and back with the other; the ermine was calm. Finally, he let the animal go and said, ‘Go back into your hole, and may God who created you be praised.’ The ermine disappeared again at once into his hole and all Jordan’s companions were amazed at the power of the Master over this shy, furry little animal and its extraordinary trust.”

Blessed Sebastian of Aparicio (1502-1600)

*O*nly 40 years after the discovery of America, Sebastian of Aparicio emigrated to Mexico at the age of 31. He settled in Puebla de los Angeles and started working on a farm. Soon thereafter, he started a delivery company with teams of oxen, and then developed trade routes.

Sebastian became a well-respected, rich man, but he selflessly used everything he owned to support the poor, to ransom the indebted from

prison, to finance the dowry of poor girls, and to lend money to farmers without ever making them return it. In spite of his prosperity, he lived like an ascetic and slept on a simple mat. In 1552, at the age of 50, he gave up his flourishing business and bought a farm near the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which had been built only 21 years earlier.

Out of his deep compassion, he made an unusual step when he was 60 years old. He mar-

ried a poor young woman to help her in her need, yet lived together with her as brother and sister. She died after one year, and he remarried another poor young woman whom he helped to survive. As with the first, they lived in abstinence.

After the death of his second wife, Sebastian bequeathed all of his possessions to the Poor Clares. At the age of 72, he became a lay brother of the Franciscans where he served as a beggar for the brothers until his death, more than 25 years later.

“They will not trample or eat anything.”

During Br. Sebastian’s 25 years with the Franciscans, he became well known throughout the area because he was responsible for gathering provisions for the one hundred of them who were studying in the large convent at Puebla de los Angeles.

One day in 1596, at the age of 94, he arrived with his cart and five oxen at the hacienda of Don Juan de Garcias, close to Cholula, Mexico. Don Juan was not home at that moment, but his wife Doña Francisca Mendez saw the begging brother arrive and unhitch his oxen, which headed right for the cornfield that was almost ready for harvest. The woman welcomed her guest, invited him into the house, and offered him a glass of milk. At the same time, however, she expressed her concern for the fields, “Br. Sebastian, your oxen are running through the cornfield.”

He answered calmly, “Don’t worry, they won’t bend a single stalk nor eat a single cob. I warned them sternly not to damage the property of other people.”

Doña Francisca thought he was just kidding and renewed her plea, “Please, Br. Sebastian, stop your oxen. Not only will they cause a lot of damage, but they will overeat and be bloated!”

On his extensive begging journeys, many people, who testified later for his beatification process, witnessed his extraordinary power in relation to the animals. Unruly, wild animals which nobody else could handle showed not even the least opposition to him and became very tame. Especially his oxen teams obeyed his every word, as if they were intelligent beings. At the slightest movement of his lips, the oxen would lay down, stand up, or come over to him. Even if they had been allowed to roam freely about the field through the night, they were always ready to depart first thing in the morning.

The old brother finished his milk and realized Doña Francisca was not convinced. “*You don’t believe me,*” he said. “*Come, let us go over there and you will see that I am not kidding.*”

They both stood out on the veranda and saw that the oxen were quite a distance from the house. Without raising his voice, Br. Sebastian ordered very calmly, “*Capitán, come over here and bring the others with you.*” *Cápitan* was leader of the ox team. “*But they are too far away to hear you,*” Doña Francisca objected. To her great surprise, she saw one ox turn around and begin to trot in their direction. Then the other oxen followed his example and came back to the hacienda. “*Capitán,*” the brother asked, “*did you or any of the others eat the corn or even bend any of the stalks?*”

The ox shook his head just as a person would if he wanted to express “no” without using any words. Pleased, the begging brother smiled, “*I knew, Capitán, that you would not be disobedient. You are a good ox!*” He held out his arm, and the ox kissed the sleeve of his habit. Then he called each of the other oxen by name, and they came over one after the other and likewise kissed the sleeve of his frock. Afterwards, they all turned around together and began to graze in the nearby field.

The woman was speechless and ordered one of her servants through a silent gesture to load a great measure of corn onto the cart of Br. Sebastian. She explained to her husband when he returned what had taken place. He inspected his fields the next morning and, in fact, he found the tracks of the oxen, but not the slightest sign that even a stalk had been bent.

Doña Francisca testified about this event under oath for the record while an investigation into the life of Br. Sebastian was being conducted for his beatification process. In addition to hers, 300 other wonderful events from the long life of this blessed were attested.

Br. Sebastian of Aparicio died on February, 25, 1600, at the age of 98.

Madre Laura (1874-1949)

Laura Montaya Upegui, from Colombia, felt unloved and lonely as child. From her childhood on, therefore, she loved to observe nature. *"It was my only friend,"* she said. This girl received her first great grace at age 7 when, at the sight of the colorful movement of an anthill, she joyfully experienced God's all-encompassing presence and love.

When Laura headed off with her young companions to win over the despised Indians of South America for God, she asked the accompanying priest to pray an exorcism over the jungle and its inhabitants. As he prayed, a tornado formed in the sky, trees were uprooted and they heard loud screeching, snapping and other noises. Laura described it in her 1200 page autobiography, "Anyone who does not believe in the prayer of the Church should have been there to witness the fury of the devil. The priest had hardly finished saying the

words of the blessing when complete silence fell over the jungle." She encouraged her companions with her broad-minded thoughts to seek and find God in nature. *"The wild jungle will be your cell, and the Andes, the forests and streams, the prolific and varied vegetation will be the tabernacle where you will find God!"*

In prayer, she made a pact with her Creator and the dangerous, wild animals of the jungle, *"Lord, grant that we may live together with your animals without them harming us and we will not do anything to them."* To this day, in fact, not even one of her sisters, who work in 19 different countries in the Americas, Africa, and Europe, has ever been attacked or bitten by a wild animal.

"We want to see how you chase away the locusts!"

It was May 1914. Mother Laura had accepted an assignment with her first missionaries in Dabeiba, Colombia. In her autobiography, written in obedience to her bishop, it is apparent how God helped her missionaries in this difficult beginning especially through miracles of nature which they promised and

worked in his name in order to win the hearts of the Indians.

She wrote, *"It did take a few weeks to make our first friend among the Indians, Juan de Jesús he would be called as a Christian. There was not much more we could do as, despite all*

our efforts to speak to him about God, he energetically protested and emphasized again and again, *‘Indians cannot learn because they do not have a soul.’* One day he came and asked, *‘Mother, are you a good friend of God?’* *‘Yes,’* confirmed Mother Laura. *‘And your God, why did he create us? To let us starve? We are dying of hunger because the locusts have eaten everything.’* He continued, *‘If you are friends with God and if you love us, then why don’t you tell your God to send away the locusts?’*

At that time, in fact, the whole area was infested with a massive swarm of locusts. For seven years already, yards, fields, and forests had been covered by this living plague. They had eaten everything bare, sparing not even the weeds. There were always swarms of them in the air too, making it impossible even to see short distances. All the people in the region were in great need because of the locusts, and hunger prevailed. Mother Laura replied to the Indian Juan de Jesús, *‘God does not send the locusts away from here because you do not want to learn his law.’* Untouched, the Indian answered, *‘Where did you speak with God that you can say something like that?’*

‘In Medellín,’ she said with a confident voice. *‘How did he tell it to you?’* *‘He said that he sent me, Mother Laura, and my sisters to teach the Indians his law. The Indians, however, say they cannot accept God’s law. Therefore, it is better that the locusts stay where they are.’*

Then the Indian moaned and begged, *‘Oh no, tell your God that he should send away the locusts. He made them. When the locusts hear his command, they will certainly obey his word.’*

The clever missionary responded, *‘If you promise to gather here all the Indians from the Pital area, then I will tell him to send away the locusts.’* *‘The Indian promises,’* was his solemn answer. Mother Laura made sure, *‘You will bring all the Indians here on Sunday?’* *‘Yes, when you chase away the locusts.’* *‘Agreed,’* she con-

firmed their accord and the Indian left in peace. On Sunday, he really came with a great number of Indians to the mission house. *‘You promised to chase away the locusts!’* he reminded her, making claim to their agreement, *‘so send them away now!’* Madre Laura replied, *‘Of course, but do all of you promise to learn God’s law?’* *‘Yes, but get rid of the locusts. Now! We came to see you chase away the locusts. We will not wait!’* pressed Juan de Jesús, the spokesman.

Thereupon, the missionary asked one of the sisters to go with her to the nearby church to ask God for this grace. As they passed by, they both saw that the entire area in front of the church was covered with an enormous coat of locusts and more were flying in.

Entering into the church, Mother Laura pleaded, *‘O Lord, this is something serious! It is important that the Indians really see your hand in this matter so that belief in you may be sown into their hearts!’* Shortly thereafter, the two sisters stepped back out in front of the church. At that moment, a thick cloud of loud buzzing locusts lifted off the ground in a huge swarm. The Indians, all deeply touched, awaited the sisters in silence. Mother Laura guaranteed them, *‘You will see, the locusts won’t come back.’*

They never saw them there again. Strangely enough, the locusts were never seen anywhere else either, dead or alive. Nobody could explain where they had flown. The Indians, however, were certain, *‘God chased the locusts away through your words.’*

From that day on, the Indians, who had been so shy and wary, had much more trust in the missionaries and their God, and they came to visit regularly.

On April 25, 2004, the Holy Father made Mother Laura the first beatified woman from Colombia. When she was in Rome in November 1930, she wrote after an hour of prayer at St. Peter’s, *‘It seemed way to little to me to live just one life for the mission, so I gave the Lord my desire to live a million lives, each to be offered for him in the mission among the unbelievers.’*

The Lifeless Chicks of Columba Schonath

*Columba Schonath (1730-1787), a modest Dominican lay sister
from the Holy Tomb Convent in Bamberg, Germany,
was often misunderstood, mocked, and judged falsely, even by her own sisters,
because of her extraordinary gifts and her coredemptive, expiatory suffering.*

*In spite of everything, this great Bavarian stigmatic,
who suffered in silence, maintained a happy, child-like disposition.
Her own records show how God, already at the beginning of her time
in the convent, used an event involving a chicken coop
to teach Sr. Columba a lesson for her religious life.*

*E*ven before I made my profession, the Mother Prioress entrusted the care of the chickens to me. I gladly performed this duty because nothing is too small in the eyes of God when it is done with love. Among my animals, there were many young ducks and chickens, which I especially enjoyed. They moved me to meditate about the Creator of all, and their cuteness helped me to praise our Creator in thanksgiving. Once I was overcome by a tired spell and I fell asleep with all the little chicks around me. It was on Pentecost at 3 o'clock in the afternoon when, actually, I should have been in the church for vespers and benediction. The ringing church bells awoke me and, startled, I jumped to my feet. In my rush, I fell down and, tragically, buried ten of the little birds beneath me. They were all lying there motionless, none of them stood up. I was so shocked, that in my clumsiness I made it worse by stepping right on the head of another one. It wobbled for a second and then fell over lifeless as well. I was so shocked, that I did not know what to do and just started to cry. Since I did not want to miss the Eucharistic Blessing, I gathered them all into my apron and went to the hidden corner of the barn where I had hung an old cross and a picture of our holy founder, St. Dominic. There, I spread the chicks out on the ground. I put the

little one I stepped on into the pocket of my habit and hurried in tears to the church. I felt so sick about these chicks that I thought my heart would break. I said, "Oh Holy Father Dominic, I entrust these little animals to you. I don't know what to do!" After I had been in the church for a little while, the little one in my pocket began to fidget so I could not stay there any longer. Full of joy, and grief as well, I returned to the stall and thought, "You will not find any of the others alive though." Yet as I drew closer, I saw all the chicks healthy and happy underneath the clucking hens. The one that I had taken with me was also healthy and happy again. Since I had seen them all laying lifeless before me, I was very amazed because all this was naturally impossible! The following night, I had a dream. A Dominican was standing next to me and said, "As it happened to your chicks today, so will it be with you also. They were practically trampled to death and yet they came back to life, gathered and hidden under the wings of their mother. You will also be forced to the ground in this world with suffering, humiliated and trampled by the enemy. Be courageous! I may save you with God's help and bring you back to life again and lead you to the flock of my children who live in heaven for eternity." She understood then, that this Dominican was none other than the founder, St. Dominic.

St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) and the Crab

There is a biography with a comprehensive description of how St. Francis Xavier, the temperamental and proud Basque nobleman and gifted Masters student at the university in Paris, became the most faithful companion and spiritual son of his fellow countryman Ignatius of Loyola. It is also written there how he hurried untiringly like St. Paul on foot and by ship for 12 years through the countries and islands of the Far East. The restless *Apostle of India and Japan* paved the way for the missions of the new time and is truly the founder of the Jesuit missions (see *Triumph of the Heart* # 9). His famous letters from the missions and his radiant example inspired thousands in Europe to follow him and made him *The Patron of Catholic Missions throughout the World*. No difficulty, be it the tropical climate, storms or illness, pirates, the insurmountable language barriers, or despondent companions, could keep him from his vast missionary work.

The following story from Francis Xavier's adventurous life could easily be written off as an unbelievable legend, had it not been recounted by Cardinal de Monte in a talk with Pope Gregory XV on January 19, 1622. The cardinal spoke about the time that Francis Xavier was aboard a ship from Moluccas, known as the "*Spice Islands*", to Baranula. A fierce storm broke out and threatened to sink the ship. The desperate crew pleaded with Francis Xavier that he pray they be saved. He took the cross which he wore on a chain around his neck, stretched out his arm, and held it against the ferocious wind. The storm calmed down, but the ship

was jerked unexpectedly whereby the cross was snatched from his hand and flung into the sea. The following day, the ship safely reached Baranula and Francis Xavier disembarked with the others. As he was walking along the beach, a large crab came out of the sea, Francis's lost cross between his pincers. It went directly to Francis Xavier, laid the cross down before him, and returned to the sea. Inexpressibly thankful, the missionary crossed his arms over his chest, knelt down in the sand, and remained for half an hour in deep prayer. Everyone who hurried past him to greet the ship was a witness to this miracle. It demonstrates well how the animals were originally made by their Creator to help man.

There is another remarkable fact about the authenticity of this event which was made known when the Jesuits were driven out of Portugal in 1670. A Portuguese member of the Society of Jesus swore in a written statement that an 8-inch long, silver gilded, wooden cross with a 3-inch Corpus was taken from the chapel of the college in Coimbra. On the backside was engraved that it is the cross which was brought back by a crab to St. Francis Xavier in an extraordinary miracle.

Additionally, there are written testimonies from six other Jesuits, and so even the Vatican accepted this amazing event as one of the three miracles that were necessary for his canonization process.

St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833)

St. Seraphim of Sarov lived as a hermit for 32 years in a wooden hut which he built himself in a Russian forest near his monastery. When he had to return to the monastery, weakened by illness, he also withdrew silently to his cell. He spoke to no one. In prayer and extreme selfdenial, he sought unity with God and thereby helped countless souls well beyond the Russian border. He is known for saying, *“Seek peace and thousands of souls will find salvation.”*

It was only on August 15, 1825, at the age of 66, that he finally opened his cell, according to *and tell me everything as if I were still living and know that all your concerns will be transformed*

the wishes of Our Lady. Very soon people seeking help came from all over to ask him for advice and healing. In this time, the Blessed Virgin, who had already healed him several times from deadly diseases, also appeared to him and asked him to found an order of sisters for whom she wanted to be the Mother Superior. St. Seraphim cared for his protégées like a true father. Until he went to heaven, the sisters had his full attention and loving care. Knowing in advance his hour of death, he told them not to give in to sadness. *“When I die, come to my grave often and tell me everything as if I were still living and know that all your concerns will be transformed into joy because I live for you always!”*

A wild bear for a tame companion

Only through an act of providence did an eyewitness come forward to tell us how wild animals became tame in the presence of St. Seraphim. The faithful had recounted again and again how they saw the saint accompanied by a big bear. Matrona, one of the sisters of the community which Seraphim founded at the request of Our Lady, was looking for her spiritual father around his hermitage. From far off, she saw him sitting on a tree stump, feeding a bear next to him out of his hand. She screamed in her surprise.

Father Seraphim parted from the bear with a pat and went over to Matrona to calm her down. As soon as he sat down again on the tree stump, his dear friend came back out of the forest and lay down at Seraphim’s feet, who fed him like a lamb.

“I gradually became calmer,” Matrona recounted later. *“As I watched Father Seraphim, I was dazzled by the expression on his face, which to me became as beautiful and radiant as that of an angel. Then he gave me the last piece of bread so that I too could give the bear something to eat.”*

Matrona only told about this event 11 years after this saint’s death. It just so happened that she was in the studio of the convent’s painter when she saw that the picture he was working on was St. Seraphim sitting on the stump of a tree in the forest. It reminded her vividly of her impressive experience. *“But you have to paint the bear next to Seraphim too!”* she said spontaneously. Then she told the painter the story. We have her to thank for the many icons where St. Seraphim is depicted with his friend, the bear.

Blessed Bishop Rafael Guízar Valenzia (1878-1938)

When persecution and oppression broke out heavily in the Mexican Church in 1913, Rafael Guízar Valenzia, a young priest and spiritual director at the seminary, began to fight for the Church there with all his might. Dressed as a traveling salesman, a peddler or an accordion player, he continued his work as an untiring missionary throughout the country in the underground.

At the same time he cared for the fighting soldiers, getting them to secretly receive the sacraments, and rescuing the severely wounded from the front line. Many died in his arms, and he was often grazed by bullets, but never wounded. His daring priestly efforts, similar to those of his compatriot Bl. Miguel Pro S.J. (1891-1927), could not remain hidden forever. He himself said, *"My situation became worse each day. They followed my every move. Finally they nabbed me as a 'suspicious person' and condemned me to death."* Through his ingenuity, and a certain amount of stealth and humor, Rafael Guízar was able to escape death in the

last moment several times. One time he smiled and said, *"Everybody is born once and yet I have been born several times."*

Of the 20 years that he was the holy Bishop of Veracruz, Mexico, he had to spend half of them incognito or in exile. When he took over the diocese at the age of 42, the majority of it was then destroyed by a terrible earthquake.

Bishop Guízar, who cleverly and untiringly supported his priests and faithful in secret, would now become known far and wide for his sheer love and unbounded charity for those suffering from the earthquake and for the poor. They possessed his undivided affection, and he gave them everything he owned. In this time, an amazing miracle also occurred. At first, it seemed so unbelievable that we seriously considered whether we should tell it. However, since this event has been confirmed by a number of people, we decided in favor of it. Through it, though, we see how this bishop of the 20th century was given extraordinary power over creation so that his dedicated service to the poor could continue.

The Valuable Scorpion

One day, a totally impoverished woman came to Bishop Guízar and asked him to help her family. As always, he really wanted to help. He looked around before concluding that he had nothing left. He had already given away everything he owned furniture, rugs, lamps, as well as the wallpaper and the dining ware! He had even given away his pectoral cross and bishop's ring. In the great pain that he was unable to help this begging woman in her life-threatening need, he closed his eyes and prayed. Then he looked around the empty room again,

but he did not find anything except a scorpion on the wall. In Mexico, there are many scorpions. The bishop blessed it, took it from the wall with his bare hands, and handed this poisonous animal to the poor family mother without saying much.

As she was hesitantly taking it, it was transformed, to her great surprise, into a precious scorpion set with jewels. Having thanked him, she brought the diamond studded scorpion to the pawnshop and, with the money she received, she was able to help her family out of

their terrible distress. After a year of selling fruits and vegetables, she had enough money to buy back the precious scorpion and brought it thankfully back to the bishop's residence. Smiling, the bishop received it back without saying much and placed the jeweled scorpion back on the wall. It instantly returned to life and disappeared through a crack in the wall.

Dear reader, now you understand why we hesitated in the beginning to recount such a miracle to you. Rafael Guízar, however, was no charlatan who played tricks on the people but

a holy bishop of whom the Holy Father said the following at his beatification in 1995,

“He bravely overcame the dramatic situation in his Catholic country when the Church was heavily persecuted. He was helped and inspired by his close unity with the Holy Eucharist and Our Lady, the support of his spiritual life. In fact, on his coat of arms was Our Lady of Guadalupe depicted as kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament.”