



LEAP INTO LOVE is an attempt to explore the Spirituality of Mother Veronica of the Passion, a remarkable woman whose story is told both in *A Strange Destiny* by Sister M. Carol A.C., and *As Clay In Hands* by Sister M. Valeria A.C., published by the Apostolic Carmel.

The strange workings of Providence, who sought to bring about a new element in the Church's work of education in the last century, comes alive in the unfolding of the story of Mother Veronica. The vivification of Christian education with the Carmelites contemplative spirit was something new at the time. Because of this need, Mother Veronica was drawn by the Holy Spirit into an intense experience of the life of contemplation, both through her mystical gifts and her participation in the life of Carmel. The active missionary elements in this work flowed from the zeal and self-giving service of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition to which she was first called. A happy amalgam of both elements has resulted in the emphasis on the experience of God in the work of education, making the "community of learning" into a school "of grace, where the teaching programme contributes to uniting into a harmonious whole the human and the divine, the Gospel and culture, faith and life" (V.C.96).

LEAP INTO LOVE seeks to trace the process of painful growth that went into the creation of this Divine work of art.

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Sister M. Valeria, A.C.

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHER VERONICA OF  
THE PASSION

A Spirituality for our Times

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## Foreword

There is an emerging understanding of spirituality as the person's inner core; the shape in which the Holy Spirit has moulded Himself into a person's life. It is a style or form of Christian life lived 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit'. It is a life of faith, lived in hope and expressed in love.

Spirituality is not part of life but rather the whole of life. It refers to a quality the Spirit stamps on us. It is also coupled with action inspired by the Spirit. It is made up of all that an individual has experienced and encountered, out of which arises the motivation, the longing, the quest, the inspiration and the commitment that makes one alive, choose and decide in a particular way. Our basic life-orientations, authentic and significant acts are rooted in it.

The core is influenced by one's genetic heritage, environment, knowledge and largely by the deep experiences and options in life. It is at this core of our being that the Spirit moves us, acts in us, transforms and energizes us through His grace.

Spirituality is experienced most as a 'presence' and an 'awareness' that points to the Holy; something we sense is beyond our human limits. Though it often manifests itself religiously, it does so mainly in the ordinary ebb and flow of everyday life. It has a distinctly

mystical, human, ecological and social significance. Holding together the diverse energies of life, it integrates them, discovers their inter-relatedness and enables one to connect meaningfully with God, people and the universe.

We find a unity in Christian life and a diversity of spirituality because of the richness of its make-up and the circumstances in which it expresses itself. Consecrated life is a way of living Christian Life. Its springboard is the Charism given by the Spirit to the foundress for following Jesus in a consecration, lived in communion for mission. Faith, hope and love are expressed and lived in a way that emphasizes a particular aspect of the mystery, personality and mission of Christ and the Church. A person's spirituality shines in the lantern of a particular affiliation to a religious family.

It is the Spirit who grants all of us the capacity to form part of the journey taken by a person, singularly endowed with the gift of a special charism and who courageously advanced on her pilgrimage of faith to manifest to all the faithful "the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvellously working in the Church".

In order to be relevant, our consecrated life must find its way of spirituality, within the people of God, in each stage of history. At present consecrated life emphasises fundamental aspects of the way of spirituality proper to the people of God but with different nuances tied to individual charisms and the social and cultural context. These give them an identity and convert spirituality into a sign that stimulates.

Sister Valeria has tried to isolate some of the salient features of the spirituality of Mother Veronica whose

life is a living testimony of heroic faith, hope and love and has presented these in a coherent way like tracings that have a promise about them. These provide us with signs and markings about the path available to our progress in sanctity.

Our beloved Mother Veronica who was totally captured by God's love was deeply aware of being loved and she carried this awareness into the furthest corners of life - to the fingertips. Her life was coloured, charged and changed by this Love to which she responded with every fibre of her being.

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Sister M. Vincent A.C.  
*Superior General*



## INTRODUCTION

The fast-changing world of today poses a threat of constant insecurity to those who live in it. Faced with new challenges in never-ending succession, immersed in a multi-faceted culture made still more complex by a technology that moves forward in giant strides from day to day, battered on every side by growing forces of globalization, our outlook on reality is repeatedly attacked by a need for change, for adjustment, for relevance. Yet, the human heart is hungry for a stability that lies deeper than all this continual chaos. We seek a basic security that can face up to the daily demands of life with wisdom and hope.

In other words, we need a spirituality that is stronger than the forces of change and yet adequate to deal courageously and positively with them. No longer can we be content with an unrealistic withdrawal from the world around us, nor with a wild abandon to its varying demands. True, we can choose to disregard much of what the multiple media of communication fling at our minds and hearts in never-ending profusion. But then, we run the danger of being dubbed as irrelevant, and out of touch with our present-day world. And we recognize the truth of such an accusation. On the other hand, immersion in the whirlpool of today's chaos will destroy our inner balance and leave us victims of the vagaries of our circumstances.

To live authentically in these times means to be fully aware of what is happening around and in us, of its significance in our lives and of the challenges it poses to us as human beings.

More, we need to be deeply rooted in the Changeless as well as to respond dynamically to the changeable. Our mature response to both is what contributes to the worthwhileness of our human living. To be able to meet these demands is not a readymade ability acquired by some quirk of fate. Rather, it is the fruit of a process of growth, often of painful maturing, in a steadfast striving towards the fruition of our lives.

What provides the basis for such striving springs from a Source beyond natural human capacities. How it affects different persons varies with the circumstances of their existence. In Mother Veronica of the Passion, we find a pattern of living that can well be a model for our times: steadfast, yet dynamic; graced and given, even while daring and full of risk; strangely directed by a series of surprising events, yet based on trust in a Changeless Providence. Seeking the secret of her spirituality, we find the dynamic reality of our own being stirred to greater life and zest.

Hers was a strange life. Born in 1823 to middleclass Anglican parents, Sophie Leeves could very well have grown into the typical Victorian woman pictured by later 19th century English novelists as the refined, genteel, retiring and domesticated woman of beauty and virtue, with little academic learning and much less initiative.

Yet the Divine Potter had a special pattern for the vessel He was fashioning. He moulded His clay with a



multitude of materials drawn from various experiences of life. He seasoned the mixture with grace. He placed his choice compound of clay on the Potter's wheel, whirling it through various countries and cultures and peoples of different strata of society, through varying activities and manifold changes of time and place. Using His pointed tools of pain and heartache, He carved and chiselled exquisite forms of beauty in the clay that was taking shape, perfecting His designs with the delicate touch of the Master Craftsman. And then He fired His work of art in the furnace of suffering and humiliation, glazing it in His own lustrous radiance. The finished Product was indeed a unique masterpiece to delight His heart, but also to serve the needs of thousands who came to quench their thirst at the Master's fount.

What was the secret of her steadfastness all through the challenging and contradictory circumstances that seemed to dog her life? It was undoubtedly her single-hearted search for God, a total commitment directed relentlessly to respond to His lightest touch, a disregard for the consequences to herself of such unflinching devotion, a reaching out to Him even from the depths of darkness and near-despair.

What happened to her can be expressed in three short sentences:

She risked all.  
She lost all.  
She found All.

In these three statements, her life encapsulates a spirituality that makes meaning for all of us who live in the world of today.

She had everything life could offer. A good family background, sound religious principles, material comfort, a superior education, natural gifts encompassing various spheres of human activity, the promise of a bright and happy future. She could hold her own in any society, hobnobbing with nobility as well as reaching out in loving respect to an illiterate Arab girl and to the poor and outcast, to the sick and the needy anywhere. She was at home with people of any nation. Born in Turkey, of English parentage, immersed in Greek culture from her infancy, conversant with the major European languages and even with Malayalam in South India, this widely-travelled woman spent her chequered life in Turkey, Greece, England, Malta, Italy, India, Burma, France and Palestine, also visiting countries like Switzerland, Germany and Austria and even touching parts of North Africa, Arabia and Ceylon. She relates that she had voyaged in the Mediterranean twenty-five times, and had seen many places of interest denied to most women of her time. Her international experience would certainly qualify her to be a citizen of today's world with its global vision and multi-cultural character.

A woman of many parts, she could ply her needle with delicate skill to embroider church vestments as well as wield a versatile pen to write delightful letters and even books. She could play classical music on the piano, sing a rich soprano and teach restless children in a village classroom. She could nurse the sick with tender care and even make a building plan without a degree in architecture. She could counsel those in trouble and also champion the cause of the oppressed. She could dance, and ride on horseback, but she could also remain still in rapt prayer before her God. She could happily



contemplate marriage with a promising young officer, and she could, with a will of steel, give up her earthly love to turn completely to her Divine Lover.

All this and more, Mother Veronica threw away for a dream, an impossible dream that became a reality and then escaped her hold. She was left with nothing but an empty promise and a bleak and barren future. Even the fragments of hope that remained in her personal life of hiddenness were shattered little by little until she was entirely stripped of every claim to standing, either in the material or spiritual sphere.

It was then that God's workmanship came to perfection in her life. Giving up all, she was given All. And even in her obscurity, she saw the dream take shape beyond her wildest imagination. It was with empty hands that she received All she could ever hope for. She saw with a heart full of gratitude that all human achievement could do nothing before the Power of an infinitely generous God who gave abundantly without one's deserving, without measure, without end. And in His Allness, she found infinitely more than she had lost and everything she could desire.

The spiritual journey of Mother Veronica is patterned on that of Christ Himself in His sojourn on earth. The most perfect of human beings, endowed with gifts of nature and grace surpassing all others, Jesus emptied Himself both in His Incarnation and in His ministry, ending His life in the annihilation of the Cross. It was then He was crowned lord of creation with "all power in heaven and earth," living forever triumphant in His victory over sin and death, in the glory of the supreme Godhead. Thus He became the means of salvation for the whole of creation.

This is the Christian paradox. All who are called to follow Jesus must, in their own way, lose their lives for His sake that they may find themselves again in His Risen Glory, sharing in the Fullness of the Trinitarian Life forever.

What is unique about Mother Veronica is the unusual succession of God's calls within her, leading her to respond in utter trust and surrender, and so to reach that pinnacle of restful bliss in Him who is our Peace. Accompanying her on this journey, we see reflected in our own lives a certain likeness even if much less extraordinary, and hear the echo of God's voice inviting us to that fullness of surrender which brings complete fulfilment. Her faith and courage invite us to take that leap of trust in letting go of tangible securities to find our true rootedness in Him who is all-sufficient for our needs.

For every Christian is called to live the pattern of the Christ-life in its Paschal dimension through the particular circumstances in which he or she is placed. Inasmuch as we open ourselves in humble trust to the Divine action that seeks to form Christ within us, we shall reach that maturity that Paul speaks of in the Letter to the Colossians (1:28), exhorting everyone to enter into the Mystery of Christ that is our inheritance through Baptism. And it is only in the measure that we find ourselves in His fullness that the fruitfulness of our lives is effected both within us and in the world around. For, as V.C.72 so forcefully reminds us, the more we allow ourselves "to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all". The most ardent missionary is not necessarily the one who gives his or her self



#### FOREWORD

in tireless service for the much-needed works of the apostolate, but the one who takes a daring leap into the Heart of Love, releasing abundant streams of grace and mercy into a world thirsting for happiness.

This is why Thérèse of Lisieux is today regarded as Patroness of the Missions, having found her vocation to be "love in the heart of Mother Church", and so a channel of vitality for all the missionary endeavours of the Mystical Body. In Mother Veronica, we find both the total self-giving of the contemplative life as well as the apostolic zeal of the active life. She herself marvelled at how fulfilled she was in both these vocations. The secret of this vitality is to be found in the totality of her surrender to God, making her conformed to the image of Him who came to do the will of His Father. Thus He effected the salvation of the world.

April 14, 2003

Sister M. Valeria A.C.

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Sister M. Valeria A.C.

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## PART I THE SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHER VERONICA



1. THE SPIRITUALITY OF RISK
  - A. FAITH
  - B. OBEDIENCE
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  - A. HOPE
  - B. FORTITUDE
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  - B. FULFILMENT

## 1. THE SPIRITUALITY OF RISK

*She risked all.*

Watching a trapeze artist perform his act often leaves us breathless in fear for his safety, wonder at the ease with which he flies across space, admiration of his courage, and enjoyment of the harmony of his mental control and bodily skill. Where two people are involved in the act, the relationship between flyer and catcher is a special one. Henri Nouwen in his "Sabbatical Journey" refers more than once to the attraction the Flying Rodleights held for him. He was never tired of watching this family of trapeze artists perform at various shows. "The flyer must never catch the catcher," Rodleigh had told him. "He must wait in absolute trust".<sup>1</sup> Any lack of confidence on the part of one or the other can have disastrous consequences for both of them. Letting go in complete trust is the secret of success in this art. It is the insecurity that makes the whole performance so risky, and the risk that adds excitement and a sense of worthwhile achievement to the artists as well as to the spectators.

In the life of the spirit, to let go into the Hands of God demands an invincible faith and trust in Him who is unseen and beyond the grasp of the human faculties.

1. Nouwen, Henri J.M., *Sabbatical Journey* (St. Paul's, Mumbai, 2000), cf. pp. 8,80, 177-78.

Our happiness is somehow bound up with what we can see and hear and feel. Risking what is within the scope of our human experience for what lies beyond it involves great insecurity and the consequent fear of failure. It borders on foolishness, and in fact, is termed foolishness by those without faith.

However, salvation history is replete with instances of God's calls to such insecurity in a living faith and trust in Him. "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you," (He says to Abram (Gen.12:1). Abram left his worldly securities to live the life of a nomad in a land that was alien to him, alive only to God's word and trusting in His promises. No wonder he is called our "father in faith" (Heb. 4). Moses was called likewise from the security of his family life in the land of Midian to lead an enslaved and spiritless people across the desert to a Promised Land that they had never seen.

"Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth," Jeremiah pleads in response to his call to be a prophet. "Behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (Jer. 1:6,18-19).

Esther risked her life to deliver the persecuted Jews at God's behest. Judith singlehandedly exterminated Holofernes and set her people free, depending solely on God to support her in her dangerous enterprise. There was every possibility of failure in the plans of these two women. It was only their faith in Yahweh

that gave them the courage to take the initiative denied to strong men. Their utter insecurity was a sure claim on the invincible protection of Yahweh.

The list goes on endlessly through the New Testament into our own times and continues into the future as long as time shall last. Peter and Andrew, James and John left the security of their fishing-nets and their father's house to follow Jesus. Francis of Assisi cast off the very clothes he wore and returned them to his father, covering himself with an old sack to live a life of utter poverty in joy at the call of God. In our own day, we have a Mother Teresa who left her country and the security of her congregation to care for the dying destitute on the streets of Calcutta. And Thérèse of Lisieux gave up a comfortable life in the bosom of a cherished family to live her sacrificial response to God's call in an obscure Carmelite cell.

It is to this heroic group of persons enthused by an ardent faith in God and a missionary zeal that Mother Veronica of the Passion belongs. She risked all. For she was first given all, that she might have the joy of surrendering it in faith and love to the God who kept on asking until she had nothing more to give but her stripped and denuded being.

## A. FAITH

To take risks needs courage, but such courage must spring from the awareness of a security to be found outside one's own meagre resources. Risk needs to be supported by an invincible faith if it is to be saved from rashness. The only stable security offered by faith is that of an infinitely loving and infinitely



powerful God whose goodness and providence are believed in beyond the bounds of reason.

It is a faith like that of Elijah who risked his life and ministry before the prophets of Baal and the people of Israel when he called on Yahweh to send down fire from heaven to consume his sacrificial offering (1 Kgs. 18). It is a faith like that of Mary who believed that the helpless infant she held in her arms as she fled to Egypt was indeed the Son of the Most High, the promised Messiah who would redeem the world. The faith of the Good Thief who recognized the Divine in the quivering, writhing, humiliated and blood-spattered man crucified beside him, and made his prayer for mercy, smote the Heart of God with a power that no human might could achieve (Lk. 23: 39-43). The torch of faith has burnt brightly through the centuries, transforming weak and helpless human beings into heroic saints who risked life and reputation to serve the God who was their only security.

Brought up as a pious Protestant, Mother Veronica was gifted with a deeply-rooted heritage of faith through generations of Anglican ministers on her father's side. Henry Daniel Leeves was himself a Protestant clergyman whose life was pervaded by a living faith in God and in the truths of Christianity as he knew them. The whole Leeves household was permeated by the spirit of Christian piety, of charity, and of zeal. Morning and evening prayer in the family was an accepted custom. Reading the accounts of the last days of the grandparents of Sophie Leeves, one is struck by their constant awareness of God's Presence and action in their lives, and their peaceful and humble surrender to His will in death. Her grandfather was the revered Rector of the Wrington parish for fifty years when he died at the age of ninety.

"My father," writes Mother Veronica, "was a man of great virtue...I had never seen him do or say anything that could be called a sin...Sometimes we used to go and look through the key-hole and we saw and heard him pray aloud on his knees and with joined hands—and what is rare among Protestants, he had a depth of humility which astonished me."<sup>2</sup>

"My mother," she also writes, "was very charitable to the poor, she accustomed us to work for them, and there was one evening each week when all the ladies of our acquaintance met together in our house to sew garments for the poor."<sup>3</sup> Faith in this household, then, was not a closed-in piety, but one that reached out to others in love and service.

Nothing unseemly was allowed in the house. Music, the arts, good conversation, reading and creative activity were encouraged. A superior education gave the children an intelligent approach to the things of faith. Sophie could translate the Greek New Testament with ease, and she was also familiar with French, German and Italian. Naturally, then, religion was for her not just a blind set of observances. It mattered very much to her and she took it seriously.

It was on a visit to England at the age of seventeen that Sophie first came under the influence of the Oxford Movement which drew many Anglicans to the Catholic faith. To Sophie and her sister Mary Ann it was the Puseyite sect in Anglicanism that most appealed to them. Adopting Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, the Puseyites held out only on their separation from

2. *Autobiography* (unpublished), Vol. I, p. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.



Rome. The Protestant faith the two girls professed was now enriched by sacramental rites, by penitential practices, by pro-Catholic beliefs fed on literature that had so far been denied to them.

In this process of change, Sophie had a deeply moving experience that made a profound impact on her spiritual growth. It was the spring of 1840. Sophie describes this experience as follows: "It was very early in the morning, no one in the house had yet risen, and even I was still in bed alone in my small room. Suddenly I was awakened by a sweet and clear voice that I heard with the ears of the soul as well as with those of the body. It said in English: 'Peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you not as the world giveth, give I unto you'....I opened my eyes and remained motionless to listen to the celestial harmony of this voice which seemed to die away in the distance. I cannot express the effect that it had in my soul...I knew Who it was who had uttered these words and I kept them to myself like a treasure that I never wished to communicate except after long years when I had entered the Church."<sup>4</sup>

The things of the spirit now seemed to take on special significance in Sophie's life. After her father's death in 1845, she was engaged to be married to a young marine officer whom she loved very much. However, at the same time, her stay in Italy and her visits to the Catholic churches there began to exercise an unsettling influence on her. She seemed to feel that there was something in these places of worship that was missing in Protestant churches. "My heart seemed empty and languishing after I know not what," she

writes.<sup>5</sup> Gradually there grew within her the desire to lead a life wholly given to God. Seeking the help of an Anglican confessor, she finally decided to break off her engagement in the conviction that she was called to be a Religious.

While her heart was now given to God, Sophie was led by "an irresistible power" to the tabernacles in Catholic churches. Listening to a Jesuit priest speak on the Real Presence touched her spirit so profoundly that she could only weep in response. The priest understood that the grace of God had taken hold of her and she now admitted that she doubted whether she was in the true church or not. She felt the need of exploring further in quest of the truth.

If faith is above reason, faith is certainly not opposed to reason. Proper instruction, much prayer, reading and reflection convinced Sophie at last that she should enter the Catholic Church. Her faith, however, had to stand the test of great anguish of heart and mind and the prospect of causing sorrow and division in the family. "It seemed to me like being in the agony of death. Chaos was going to intrude between me and all that I held dear in this world. I was going to leave the known, to plunge myself into the unknown." It was clear to her that great risk was involved in the change she envisaged. "My mind was convinced, but my heart was broken. My God, what anguish! It is necessary to have passed through it to understand it. So I have very often said that when a soul has passed through the tortures of conversion, God can indeed make it endure all other anguishes."<sup>6</sup>

4. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

5. Ibid., p. 28.

6. Ibid., pp. 39-40.



The fruit of such a price paid for her faith was an even stronger faith. "A whole eternity will not suffice to render Him thanks for that inestimable, unspeakable gift He bestowed on me....It was indeed the Gift of Faith—and what faith!—and I trust to carry it intact before the throne of God for all eternity....What a marvellous change came over me!"<sup>7</sup>

The consequences of Sophie's baptism in the Catholic Church were indeed painful, and the domestic storms which followed could be borne only in the courage that faith gave her. Social ostracism was another source of suffering, for the Protestant milieu to which her family belonged was unforgiving towards her becoming a 'papist'. In the strength of that faith, she even took the risk of entering religious life in spite of her mother's strong opposition in declaring that she would never consent to such a step, nor would she ever see her daughter in the religious habit even on her deathbed.

As a result of this courageous step, Sophie's faith was further strengthened with special graces and favours: "During some months only I too was as if intoxicated with favours and celestial delights—I heard the music of the angels, I saw things that I would not know to describe; prayer was my delight. When the Blessed Sacrament was exposed I could not tear myself away from the church. I noticed above all that on the feast of St. Peter I received an astonishing increase of faith. I seemed to see and touch all that the Church teaches and not only to believe. This happened to me several consecutive years after my conversion. I was as if drunk with faith that day."<sup>8</sup>

7. Epistolary Autobiography dated 23rd January, 1893.

8. Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 58.

However, for faith to grow, it needs the bitter soil of dryness and darkness. This, too, was given to Sophie in abundance, so that she could thrive on a faith that would be needed for still greater challenges ahead. Called to a missionary life through her vocation, she had to spend herself unto exhaustion for the demands of the apostolate, her poor health adding to the poverty and fatiguing service that awaited her. In Piraeus and Tremorel, we see meet these challenges with a courage and perseverance that could only spring from her deep faith in Providence.

Transferred in course of time to Calicut, she had not only the hardships of the Indian climate and the poverty and difficult circumstances of her change of environment to bear, but God sent her a real campaign of calumny which even estranged the Bishop from her for a time. In faith, she saw only God's loving hand in this bitter trial, desiring that He might form her into another 'Veronica'—the name that she was given when she received the religious habit.

And now, a new challenge entered her life: the inner call to Carmel which she could not disregard in spite of her repugnance at the thought of leaving her dearly loved congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition for an unknown destination. More, it became clear to her that she was called to found a Third Order of Carmelites for active ministry in the Missions. One by one, obstacles were placed upon her path. One by one, God cleared the way for her, but she needed to take a daring step despite the odds, again causing suffering to those she loved and who loved her. She took the risk once more, banking only on her faith in God's power to do for her what she could not do.



With great courage and zeal she left her beloved Sisters of St. Joseph to enter the Carmel of Pau as a novice. And again, God flooded her soul with graces and favours to prepare her for a higher level of risk and surrender. When she left the security of her new religious family to venture into the unknown at the call of obedience to found the Third Order, she met with obstacles and difficulties on every side. Rebuffs, suspicions that she was an impostor and an adventuress, loneliness, inability to find a suitable place to start, poverty and misunderstanding were not enough to daunt her. It was the seeming abandonment by her superiors that brought her to the brink of despair. Yet, she persevered, until obedience brought her its fruits in the offer of a poor dilapidated building at Bayonne which she accepted in joy.

Stark poverty now stared her in the face. She had to provide for the little community that grew up around the new venture. A total dependence on Divine Providence sustained by her unshakeable faith made their hand-to-mouth existence a joyful experience of His all-sufficient love and care. Gradually the Little Carmel grew to the point when Sisters could now be sent to the missions in India.

At this stage of hopeful achievement in the foundation, God began a new work of grace in His chosen instrument. She had to eat the bitter bread of humiliation and defeat at the hands of one whom she had loved and trusted. Her beloved director and guide, Father Marie Ephrem, had now become the Bishop of the Diocese where the Sisters worked in India. In fact, it was he who had asked for them and taken them to provide much-needed education for the children of the Malabar coast of India. Now, through a complex

set of circumstances outside her control, Mother Veronica's role as foundress was completely disregarded by the Bishop who began to exercise sole authority over the infant congregation in his diocese.

In the face of the disastrous happenings in India, the Bishop of Bayonne, in whose diocese the Apostolic Carmel had been founded, refused to allow any Sisters under his jurisdiction to go to India. The very *raison d'être* of the new foundation had been written off by this peremptory decision. The house at Bayonne had to be closed. All Mother Veronica's life had been moving through change after change and challenge after challenge to effect its culmination in the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel. She had suffered in moving from one call to the next. She had risked everything: her traditional faith, her family, the prospect of marriage, stability in her former congregation, the love and support of so many dear ones, the security of a peaceful life in the cloister of Carmel, to carry out what God asked of her. It looked as if everything had been thrown back in her face with nothing accomplished. She was a failure. Ill-health and a broken spirit were all that was left to her.

There was still her faith in God, however. She could not understand, but she could still bank on Him in some painful, dark and groping way. She answered this new challenge in going back to the Carmel of Pau to live an obscure and penitential life for Him alone. For some time this dark and steady faith was nurtured in peace and quiet surrender. And then, God visited His beloved one with a raging storm within her that threatened to sink her frail barque. It was at the Carmel of Bethlehem where she was transferred in 1875 that Mother Veronica underwent that drastic purification of her faith and hope



and love that consumed even the ragged remnants of self-achievement that lurked within her.

Perhaps the best way to describe the interior trials that now possessed her soul is by quoting from St. Teresa of Avila in describing the state of those in the Sixth Mansions of the 'Interior Castle': "There are many things which assault the soul with an interior oppression so keenly felt and so intolerable that I do not know to what it can be compared, save to the torment of those who suffer in hell, for in this spiritual tempest no consolation is possible."<sup>9</sup> Plunged into interior darkness and confusion, Mother became aware of her own sinfulness and believed she had been "cast off by God." No reassurance from her confessor could comfort her. Besides, the Jansenistic atmosphere of the convent at that time only encouraged her continual self-condemnation. She examined herself day and night to see where she had failed, and though she could pinpoint nothing specific, she was overwhelmed by a consciousness of sinfulness which seemed ineradicable.

More, her interior sufferings were intensified by exterior misunderstandings, calumnies, abandonment by all save her confessor, and accusations which she believed though she could not ascertain their truth. As St. Teresa says, for such a state, "there is no help for it but to wait upon the mercy of God." Having found herself completely powerless, Mother Veronica learned to accept her own helplessness, and to be grateful for all the humiliations to which she was subjected.

9. *The Complete Works of St. Teresa* (Allison Peers; (tr. and ed.) J. Sheed and Ward, London, Seventh Impression, 1973), *The Interior Castle*: VI:19.

Reduced to the minimum of her being, she lived out the risk she took in striving for humility. She risked her health, the remnants of her reputation, her standing in the community, her claim on the love and understanding she needed. Incapable of receiving comfort, she was forced to rely blindly on the workings of Providence to restore her soul.

Returning to Pau on the advice of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Mother Veronica slowly recovered her seemingly-lost faith. Indeed, it had all along been sustained by a hidden, deep-seated hope and by an unfelt love that kept her looking towards God in spite of His apparent abandonment of her. She prized this faith even more as time went on. She proclaimed it as her greatest Treasure. Begging the superior not to have an obituary account of her life circulated after her death as is the custom in Carmel, Mother Veronica asked only that the Sisters be requested to thank God for the gift of Faith bestowed on her which she hoped to carry intact before the Throne of God.

## B. OBEDIENCE

The security that faith offers to one who takes a risk must be matched by the courage to let go, to surrender, to obey. Otherwise, it remains barren. This is not the spineless submission of mere compliance nor the mechanical discipline of an enforced surrender motivated by fear. Neither is it of the nature of a diplomatic docility which seeks its own self-advancement through external compliance. All these attitudes parading falsely under the name of obedience are adopted just to escape the risk involved in true obedience. Their purpose is to protect the individual



who complies, whereas real abandonment into the hands of another courageously accepts the insecurity and the suffering that taking risks offers. It can be motivated only by love. This is true both on the human as well as on the Divine levels of our lives.

To follow the ways of God with His loved ones is to enter into the mystery of an engrossing love story as varied and unique as the persons who play a part in it. The Divine Lover is always beyond our reach, inviting us to newer levels of surrender and intimacy, and always eluding the beloved until there is nothing left to give. For God asks to be loved "with all one's heart, and all one's soul, and with all one's strength and with all one's mind" (Lk 10:27). To do this, one is invited to say a continual series of 'Yeses' to a chain of challenges, each one more demanding than the one before.

In the life of Mother Veronica, we are fascinated by the strange and unexpected pattern of these challenges which always drew from her a whole-hearted, even if painful 'Yes'. "Obedience is my life," is what she wrote to Father Marie Ephrem from Bayonne in a letter of the 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1869. And truly, it is the heroic practice of this virtue that stands out in the varied events of her life's unfolding.

The beginning of this engrossing love story is rooted in the abundance of God's gifts of nature and grace showered on His chosen one from the very start of her life. He gave that she might enjoy them and then have the joy of losing them for His sake. His basic gift was a rich family life, rich not so much in material goods, as in love. The close intimacy that bound the Leeves family together was nurtured by a loving father and

mother, and by common interests fostered through their traditional Protestant faith as well as through a superior education which gave them access to intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. Music "was a passion in our family," writes Sophie. "Whole mornings were spent in practising and the evenings in singing. We would do without eating to enjoy music..."<sup>10</sup> When the family sang in harmony, the mother listened in a kind of enchantment, enjoying her husband's rich bass, her son's clear tenor and the first and second soprano sung by Sophie and Mary Ann. Travelling together and visiting places of interest as well as their annual stay at Castaniotissa in the idyllic scenic setting of the Euboean countryside were occasions of family togetherness and joy.

The first break-up of this closeness came with the unexpected death of the father. "When God took him from us," writes Sophie, "the family seemed broken". Yet their sorrow drew them closer in a way. A new element now came in to attract Sophie in the form of a young naval officer who sought her hand in marriage. She loved him deeply, and her mother was happy about the forthcoming marriage. It was now that God began to lay siege to her heart. He so captured her being that she could no longer envisage marriage as a fulfilment of her deepest yearnings. The depthless void within her could be filled only by God who asked her to belong to Him alone. Breaking off her engagement in spite of her love for her fiancé, she had to bear the angry reproaches of her mother as well as observations from those around her that she had brought needless suffering to the young man, and illness on herself. In her anguish,

10. *Autobiography*, Vol. I p. 15.



she fell on her knees before a small crucifix and made a vow of perpetual virginity. Peace flooded her soul and from that day her health improved.<sup>11</sup>

A new assault on her mind and heart now came from the Divine Lover to demand a fresh surrender from His beloved one. It was the unrelenting search for Truth that began to absorb her. The Oxford Movement in England, her own growing conviction of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, a wave of unsettling doubts regarding the Protestant stand, and an interior attraction towards Catholicism drew her unerringly to the conviction that God was calling her to enter the Church. There was no doubt that she must surrender, but the very real risk of breaking up her family had to be faced. The thought of wounding her mother whom she dearly loved and who depended so much on her was veritable torture. Her sister Mary Ann was with her in this demanding step they were both about to take. But it was a truly painful "Yes" they said to the inner promptings of grace.)

(Obedience bore its fruit in the peace within, but could not allay the anguish of broken family ties. The suffering of the Protestant mother who found it intolerable that her own children should turn Papist, the sorrow that added to the loss of her husband and of her daughter Emily who had died in 1847, the social ostracism that kept her apart from the milieu that she was at home with, was a burden that lay heavy on Sophie's heart. But did not the Lord Himself say, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword"? (Mt. 10: 34).

11. Ibid., p. 33.

The sword continued to ply its cutting edge as God placed within Sophie's heart the urge to give herself to Him in the consecrated life. With Mary Ann also revealing her religious vocation, Mrs Leeves was indeed a woman to be pitied. She refused her daughters' plea for permission to enter the convent and stated that even on her deathbed she would never agree to see Sophie in the religious habit. The girls were of an age to decide for themselves. Their decision to surrender to God's call left the lonely woman heartbroken, with only a ray of hope left. It was directed towards her son.

Henry's marriage and the subsequent birth of a charming grandchild to her brought some assuagement to the disappointed mother. But tragedy struck her a cruel blow in the murder of the young couple on their estate in Castaniotissa, followed soon after by the death of the little child. For Sophie to see the mother's terrible grief, loneliness and hopelessness was a constant reproach to her loving heart. However, she remained steadfast in her 'Yes' to the Lord's unmistakable call. Her one comfort in this situation was that, as Sister Veronica of the Passion, which was her name in religion, she could occasionally visit her mother in Athens where she had been transferred.

For a religious, obedience in change of assignments and place of work is part of one's commitment. Sister Veronica was no exception. From Syros to Athens, from Athens to Piraeus as superior, from Piraeus to Rome and then to Tremorel, from Tremorel to India, from India to Burma, all in the space of thirteen years, gave her the heartaches and the detachment that transfers ordinarily effect within a religious. Every new assignment was accepted promptly and with love, for, as she wrote to the Carmelite priest in charge of the missions, obedience was



her "only infallible guide".<sup>12</sup> That such changes cost her comes through in her letters. One to her superior general, dated June 28 (probably in 1864) from Rangoon says very simply, "I believe, Mother, that Our Lord permits that you should send me to places where our Sisters have difficulties," and then she begins to expose these difficulties to get guidance in dealing with them.

It was something much more demanding than a transfer, however, that came to test Sister Veronica's obedience. Happy as she was in her apostolate in India, there recurred within her an insistent voice that repeated "I want you in Carmel". She rejected it "as being impossible and ridiculous", adding, "I was convinced that nobody could get me to do it, because I detested any change and I always hoped to live and die in our humble congregation of St. Joseph". Gradually, the inner voice began to exert its power in an unseen way, urging her "gently but firmly on", until she had the interior conviction that it was God's will for her.

Yet with characteristic prudence, she first opened her heart to her spiritual guides: to Father Marie Ephrem, to the Carmelite superiors of the missions, to Cardinal Howard, and finally, to Father Villefort S.J. After the authenticity of this call had been confirmed, she courageously surrendered to its demands. "The good God will guard me as He always does. I know too well that our Reverend Mother General will be grieved if I go to Carmel but...I have given her all the proofs possible, of my attachment to her and to our dear congregation, if it is the will of God that I should be elsewhere".<sup>13</sup> It became clear to her that she was

not only to enter Carmel, but also to found a new congregation of Active Carmelites for the missions of India. Gifted not only with special graces in mystical prayer, she was also blest with a love for the poor and outcast, a motherly approach to her young charges, a zeal that reached out to others in service. All this was to be harnessed towards the mission held out to her.

It was a painful surrender, but Sister Veronica took the path of obedience with courage and trust in Providence. She was rewarded with the sense of joy and fulfilment she experienced in Carmel. "The austerities of Carmel were a delight to me...when I thought that soon I would have to uproot myself from this paradise and return to the world to work at the foundation of the Third Order, my heart was torn".<sup>14</sup> Yet, this courageous woman tore herself away from her new and beloved religious family to venture into the unknown on what seemed to be a wild-goose chase.

Obstacles reared barriers on every side. Broken promises, suspicions regarding her authenticity, refusals and rank coldness coupled with her poverty and loneliness were enough to break any spirit. But not the faith and perseverance of this heroic woman. The silence of her superior, namely the Father General of the Discalced Carmelites, and of her guide, Father Marie Ephrem, was caused by circumstances beyond their control. But to Mother Veronica, it signified real abandonment when she most needed support in the isolation and the painful situation in which she found herself.

Reading a letter of Father Marie Ephrem from Trivandrum, dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 1868, one can

12. Letter of April 25, 1864 to Father Syndique.

13. Letter of April 21, 1864 to Father Syndique.

14. *Autobiography*, Vol. II, p. 11.



understand a little of the difficulties that "holy and sweet obedience" led her to encounter. Finding herself in an unpromising situation with dead-ends on every side, she yet could not move from it, for she considered herself bound by obedience to remain there until her superiors freed her to go elsewhere.

"You ask me for a word of encouragement", writes Father Marie Ephrem, "and one word to assure you that you are really acting under obedience. That, my very dear child, I will send you with all my heart....Have no fear of the path which you now tread. Or for the work which you have undertaken through obedience...You will succeed in accomplishing what Our Lord wishes, as He wishes, when He wishes. You are in the path of obedience...."

When the Father General of the Discalced Carmelites heard of her painful situation, he immediately wrote to direct her elsewhere, and again she obeyed. In his letter of July 11, 1868, after the little house at Bayonne had been promised to Mother Veronica for the first foundation, we find Father Marie Ephrem again writing, "I see with true satisfaction that you are always guided by holy obedience. However little the success you may have had at La Roche, it will always be a great gain to you and the work, that you are able to say to yourself, 'I have obeyed'. Oh! how much strength and merit there is in those simple words, 'I have obeyed'; therefore have confidence still".

Again, the Provincial of Aquitaine wrote to Mother Veronica on June 17, 1868, "It is...at Bayonne, that Our Lord desires to place the cradle of the family that obedience has called you to found".

The Little Carmel began to function on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1868, and now the foundress had to seek God's will with regard to every aspirant to the infant congregation. With rare openness to the Spirit, she was given the gift of discernment to exercise her wisdom in retaining the genuine candidates and rejecting the greater number whose motivation and antecedents were questionable. One was under diabolical possession and displayed extraordinary mystical phenomena under evil influence. Another, a butcher by profession, even posed a threat of physical danger to the community, wielding a sharp knife to carry out her ugly designs. Others could not face the challenge of poverty or obedience that the life at Bayonne asked of them, or they showed mental instability.<sup>15</sup>

In the spirit of true obedience, Mother Veronica guided her little community, taking care always to abide by the counsel of those placed over her. She had been directed to follow the instructions of the Father General: "Obey him; do whatever he may tell you; go wherever he may send you; and rest assured that God will be with you".<sup>16</sup> The Constitutions drawn up by the foundress were approved by Father General who added, "The Religious of the Regular Third Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel shall be under the obedience of the bishops of the dioceses where they are established as well as under the Very Rev. Father General of the Discalced Carmelites".<sup>17</sup>

This multiple jurisdiction became the cause of much misunderstanding and heartache to Mother Veronica. She was given episcopal enclosure by the Bishop of

15. *Ibid.*, Ch. II, pp. 34-37, 41-43.

16. Letter of Father Marie Ephrem dated July 11, 1868.

17. Mother Veronica, *Carmel in India*, (1895), p. 84



Bayonne, Monsignor La Croix, who promised her canonical enclosure later on. Monsignor Inchauspé who was the superior appointed by the bishop, guided the foundress in all matters. Father General on a visit in September, 1868, approved of everything including enclosure and the modified habit of the Third Order.

When Father Marie-Ephrem, who was now appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Malabar, arrived in Bayonne to arrange for the first batch of Apostolic Carmelites to go to India, he was displeased with several arrangements, including food, the enclosure and the pattern of the habits. Mother Veronica was in a dilemma. She had obeyed in everything. Now there was a crisis of authority. Bishop Marie-Ephrem, of course, had certain rights as the Administrator of the Diocese where the Sisters were to work, and also as spiritual guide of the foundress when she was in India. It is true that the first idea for the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel was put forward by the Carmelites of the coast of Malabar: "Monsignor Bernadino, Archbishop of Verapoly, the Rev. Father Marie-Ephrem...who was then my confessor, and the Rev. Father Cherubino, a Carmelite missionary", each of whom had communicated the need for such a congregation to Mother Veronica.<sup>18</sup> However, she had also been placed under the authority of Father General, of the Bishop of Bayonne and of Monsignor Inchauspé. Whom was she to obey in these circumstances?

The situation was a difficult one. It was not understood by Monsignor Marie-Ephrem. Without waiting to discuss the matter with the local Bishop or with Monsignor Inchauspé, the Apostolic Administrator left

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

Bayonne peremptorily. When Mother Veronica made special efforts at resolving the issue, writing to him humbly and explaining the situation, he accused her of disobedience and disloyalty. She who had always obeyed, found this charge very painful. Being advised to yield to Bishop Marie-Ephrem by Father Gratian of Montpellier, who explained to her that Father General would definitely want the Bishop's wishes to be carried out, Mother Veronica surrendered humbly.

However, this was just the beginning of a painful period for the foundress. From Rome, where he had gone for the first Vatican Council, the Bishop sent word to her to keep a fourth Sister ready to set sail with the three who had been chosen for the first batch to go to India. Unfortunately, his letter never reached her and a verbal message arrived too late for the clothes of the Sister to be provided. Mother Veronica left Bayonne for Pau with the other three, ready to explain the situation to the Bishop and promising to send the fourth Sister as soon as possible. The Bishop in high indignation stormed at her. He would not listen to any explanation. His shouting could be heard all over the convent. The humiliated foundress could not reconcile this highhanded prelate with her own dear Father Marie-Ephrem who had been so kind, understanding and respectful to her in India. The Prioress of Pau gently drew her into the shelter of the cloister, embracing her in silent sympathy. She was devastated. What would become of her little Sisters under such an overbearing Bishop? She would not be there to protect and guide them. She surrendered them to the Providence of a loving Father.

In India, though matters seemed to be going on well at first, the Bishop overstepped his powers in admitting to the infant congregation the Sisters of St. Joseph of the



Apparition from Calicut, without a novitiate. Imprudently he also appointed them superiors over the superiors of the Apostolic Carmel who were already in office. When this disorder was brought to his notice by the young superior Sister Agnes, by the Carmelite superior Father Lazare and by Mother Veronica herself, the Bishop reacted with harsh measures. One can discern in this situation the polarity of vision manifested by the foundress and the prelate. While the latter seemed to emphasise the work of education as of prior importance, making the amalgamation a management tool for the sake of expediency and administrative convenience to the detriment of the deep spiritual foundation needed for apostolic effectiveness, the former was emphatic in her stance that the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel were not just "pious teachers".

Reading Mother Veronica's letter to the Bishop, one is struck by her courageous yet humble representation of the situation. Obedience sometimes demands such a stand in response to God rather than a spineless acquiescence with what is evidently not in keeping with His plans. But the Bishop could not brook any questioning of his authority. Sister Agnes' resignation was accepted. Father Lazare was transferred in disgrace to an outstation, and all communication with Mother Veronica was forbidden.

She could not but see that this was a high-handed action, but she could do nothing. She could only see the fruit of her labours torn out of her hands with no respect for her as foundress. More, when Monsignor La Croix saw what was happening, he forbade any Sisters of his diocese from going to India. The house at Bayonne had lost its purpose. It had to be closed down.

Mother Veronica was broken-hearted. Her whole life up till now had been slowly building up to achieve the work of the foundation. She had surrendered one thing after another, even what was dearest to her, to carry out God's plans in her regard. What was now happening seemed a contradiction in every way. All her strivings were written off with one stroke. She was left with nothing but failure. She bowed in submission.

Broken in body and spirit, she yet surrendered to God's action in her, without understanding the why of it all. Christ's obedience was unto death, the death of the Cross. She must follow Him in her submission, too, to another kind of death, the death of her hopes of achieving her life's seeming purpose in the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel. Obedience is the heart of mission, for mission is the being sent to do the Father's will. Christ's obedience was unto death cutting off His public life after only three short years and she must obey in the same spirit. Who can doubt that this surrender was more effective in the accomplishment of her mission than all her works of the apostolate?

Brokenly she made her way to the Carmel of Pau to live out her remaining years in quiet obscurity. Obedience still governed her life. One small incident from the early period of her stay in Pau reveals her attitude to the demands of her Lord. Being allowed the comfort of a little tea daily in her ill-health, she was told by the mystic of Pau, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, that Jesus wanted her to give up this habit of taking tea. Mother Veronica's response was: "Why didn't you tell me immediately! I would have given my eyes if Jesus had asked for them."

"But you are ill, and I feared that it would give you pain to deprive you of tea".



"Jesus will give me the grace to take anything else and I promise you that I will never have it again."<sup>19</sup>

Chosen for the foundation of a Carmel at Bethlehem, Mother Veronica obeyed willingly. There, after the death of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, her obedience was severely put to the test. Interior trials, unjust accusations, humiliations and severe penances, too harsh for an enfeebled physique, were laid upon her. What was particularly confusing to her spirit were the many changes in the primitive observance, introduced by the clerical superior who claimed to be guided supernaturally but who had no powers to alter the rule. She felt this was not the way of life God was asking of her. In her interior darkness and confusion, she opened her heart to the Patriarch of Jerusalem to whom she owed religious obedience. His reassurance in her self-recriminations, his support in her interior anguish, his guidance in her difficulties, brought her some measure of peace. Finally, with his willing consent, she obeyed the interior urge to return to the Carmel of Pau, believing that God was directing her thither.

Back at Pau, she found to her chagrin that many of the innovations of Bethlehem had been adopted in this convent, and again she passed through an unsettling period of search, desiring only to do God's will, and convinced that He wanted the primitive observances of Carmel as she had found them on her entry into the Order. Much as she loved this cradle of her Carmelite vocation, she was ready to leave Pau for another convent if she could find there what she sought. Finally, the Bishop of Bayonne put an end to

the matter by ruling that all the Carmels in his diocese should keep to the original observances introduced at their foundation. Mother Veronica was at peace.

She now devoted herself to live the daily surrenders of her obscure old age, accepting infirmities, setbacks, difficulties in the spirit of humble obedience. The death of her sister Mary Ann turned her thoughts more than ever to her own much-awaited going Home. Yet, even here, she was content to await the will of Him who had directed her whole life in His loving wisdom.

Before the end came, He gave her a mark of his joy at her obedient surrender. The missionary effectiveness of her death to her earlier hopes and ambitions in order to accomplish God's mysterious plan for her was manifested clearly in the life that surged up unknown to her. She saw the goal of her labours take shape in the growth and fruitfulness of the Apostolic Carmel in far-off India. She had believed it doomed to die when the house at Bayonne was closed, when Bishop Marie-Ephrem died a few months later, when the Mission subsequently passed over into the hands of the Jesuits. But now she saw that God's power was not limited by human deficiencies, that He could write straight with crooked lines, that He could bring life from death, rather, that He awaited the death of human self-sufficiency in order to breathe new life and vitality born of His own creative power. She was content. All things were wisely wrought by Him and she rested peacefully in this conviction. Her community was edified by "the humility and indifference, the obedience and fraternal love with which she accepted all the hardships of the religious life."<sup>20</sup>

20. Written evidence from Sister Madeleine of the Carmel of Pau (Archives of the Apostolic Carmel).

19. *Autobiography*, Vol 11, Ch. III, p. 69.



Her death was her final act of obedience that crowned a life of constant surrender to the calls of the Divine Lover. As the community chanted the 'Te Deum' at Matins, she answered his summons to join the heavenly chorus of praise soaring up to Him from the Church Triumphant. Living and dying, her adherence to the Church had marked her as a woman of heroic faith and obedience to the Word of God.



## 2. THE SPIRITUALITY OF DIMINISHMENT

*She risked all.*

*She lost all.*

"Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk. 8:35).

There is only one goal to true fulfilment as human beings, and that is union with God. It is this goal that fills us with desire, and invites us to risk all to achieve it. If we risk, it is only in response to love, that our insecurity is charged with the power of a flaming courage. To surrender unconditionally to the Beloved, to achieve for His sake at His behest, to dare without counting the cost, to brave the possibility of personal loss, of failure, of death, has only one purpose: to be united with Him.

That such an undertaking demands detachment from all else, the willingness to suffer, the acceptance of difficulties, challenges and obstacles, is an understood thing. Such negative consequences are to be expected and taken in stride. In fact, they add to the value of one's self-offering and are like the battle scars of a warrior who has conquered the enemy. They are the proof of a genuine love that disregards personal safety for the sake of the loved one. These are diminishments

that contribute to the personal stature and even to the reputation of the one who suffers them.

In the spiritual sphere, we often measure the greatness of the apostle by the hardships he or she endured to proclaim the Good News. St. Paul himself boasts of having undergone "far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death". And then he goes on to enumerate the number of times he suffered lashes, shipwreck, hunger, thirst and other calamities in the service of Christ (2 Cor 11:23-28). Reading the life of St. Teresa of Avila, we admire her courage in undertaking the spread of the Reform of Carmel in the face of physical suffering, and more, of attacks from within the Order of Carmel, of possible threats from the Inquisition, of the precarious situation in which her poor convents often found themselves. The arduous labours of missionaries, the danger of persecution and the threat of death certainly add to the glory of achievement and a certain sense of having accomplished something in the service of God. The life of every saint is full of such challenges in the search for union with Him.

However, there is an internal process of diminishment that is a necessary condition for union with God. Jesus talks about leaving all things, all persons and places to follow Him. But above all, one is called to deny self and to take up one's cross (Mt.16:24). To "lose life" is not merely to die physically, but to suffer an inner—and perhaps outer—disintegration that lets a person taste the desperate uselessness of his own achievements, that leaves one powerless, helpless, and utterly empty. This painful hollowing out is a necessary condition for God to penetrate and possess us so as to re-cast and re-model us into the

fullness of our being in Him. It is this process of diminishment that truly effects holiness, a holiness flowing totally from God's grace, and not from human efforts. The human will is only required to surrender in peaceful submission to the Divine action within.

The dual process of diminishment takes place gradually, usually with active self-conquest and conscious choice of one's response to God's constant invitations. For such a process to take place within a human being, it is necessary that an unwavering hope supports the human will. Without such a trust in the mercy and power of God who will surely bring good out of everything, the person will never have the fortitude needed to endure suffering. As Paul says in the Letter to the Romans: "We can boast about our sufferings. These sufferings bring patience...and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom.5:3-5).

### A. HOPE

Christian hope is based on an unshakeable confidence in the goodness of God and a trust in His promises and His power. The abundance of His love is so manifest to us that we continue to hope even when everything looks dark and desperate. Such hope is a gift of the Spirit, and as creation groans while waiting for fulfilment in Christ, it still "retains the hope of being freed" in the power of the same Spirit (Rom.8:20-25).

Hope springs from faith. It was Abraham's heroic faith in Yahweh that kept him hopeful, looking "forward



to a city founded, designed and built by God" (Heb. 11:8-10). Faith in a God of love who never fails us is the basis of hope. But the love of God has many degrees in its application to our lives. While we accept that God's very nature is Love and He cannot but love us, there are two other aspects of this Divine Benevolence that are specially endearing to us sinners.

The medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich, speaks of Divine Love in touching terms: "As the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin; and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed in it; yes, and more inwardly, because all these may waste and wear away, but God's goodness is always strong, and incomparably near to us; for truly our loving God wants our souls to cling to him with all their might, and wants us to cling to his goodness for ever."<sup>1</sup>

Yet she goes further and speaks of God's mercy and grace as even surpassing this concept of God's love. For the Divine mercy reaches out very specially to human misery, and in particular to the sinner with a tenderness that seeks to protect, revive and heal, even more than to the person in grace. Further, the working of grace transforms weak human beings into participators in the Divine Life, raising us to a level beyond our wildest desires and expectations.<sup>2</sup>

Hope in God, therefore, is built on "a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away" (1 Pet 1:4), for the mercy of God has guaranteed our salvation through

1. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin Classics, London, 1998 ed.), p. 49.

2. Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 110-111.

the redemption bought for us in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. And the grace of God clothes us in the Holy Spirit, making us indeed children of God and heirs of heaven.

This quality of hope can be traced in the spirituality of Mother Veronica all through her life: a hope that gave her strength to suffer with fortitude. In one of her early letters to her superior general as a Sister of St. Joseph in Piraeus, she writes: "I think God loves us very much, my dear Mother, for we are not spared crosses and sacrifices.... Yet, we see so clearly his fatherly hand... and we must of necessity draw new strength and courageously go forward".<sup>3</sup> She knows that "God is so good, and he feeds the birds of the air", and she cannot but trust Him to provide for her orphans in their stark poverty.

Faced with deteriorating health, lack of Sisters to help with the work and dire poverty, she again writes from Tremorel: "The good God permits everything.... I have placed everything in His hands, and I am asking Him to give me strength to teach and to do all that has to be done..."<sup>4</sup> Again in the midst of difficulties she states with confidence: "The good God will come to our help..."<sup>5</sup>

Later, in Calicut, still as a Sister of St. Joseph, Mother Veronica writes: "If you know, Mother, how happy and content I am.... How well Our Lord knows how to fulfil his promise to repay a hundredfold... the smallest

3. *Letters*, dated 14th June, 1860.

4. *Letters* dated 6th February (year not mentioned; probably 1861)

5. *Letters*, dated 14th February.



sacrifices made for him".<sup>6</sup> Her hope does not focus on the desire to be freed from suffering. Rather, she waits for the inner freedom that attends on the formation of Christ within her. Writing to Father Syndique in Rome in the midst of suffering caused by an unjust campaign of calumny against the convent, she says in a letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1863: "Here is also the reason, Reverend Father, which urges me not to wish for and ever ask for a change from this Mission, just because I fear that Our Lord will punish me for not wanting to profit from these graces which He lavishes on me in the form of persecutions and calumnies. It is now that I have the assurance that He thinks of His poor servant with a love of predilection, because He permits that almost everything should turn out against me and that I should be worth nothing in the eyes of others.— So much the better, very dear Father, Our Saviour has called me Veronica—He is beginning to carve the shapeless block—Must I restrain His hand? Oh, pray, rather, that He deigns to strengthen my weakness and renew my courage, so that I become in *truth*, and not merely in *name*, *Veronica* of the *Passion*. This is the sole desire, the only goal of my life."

Again, in April, 1864, Mother Veronica writes to Father Syndique of her sufferings in a strange land, where she is without support and without human consolations. She is only sustained by thinking of Our Lord's Passion. She begs the priest: "Pray only, Father, that my courage does not fail, and that having undertaken the road to Calvary with my Lord, I follow Him up to the summit, to die there crucified with Him and like Him". We see her hope, therefore directed to

6. Letters, dated 7th September (1862?)

the fulfilment of union with the Beloved rather than in release from pain.

The Divine Mercy is another source of her hope. Writing from Bayonne to one of the Sisters in Mangalore, she says:

"I am so completely left to myself, so swallowed up in the darkness and ocean of my sins and my infinite miseries that it's a miracle God works to keep me from despair. The only thing that sustains me is that from the depths in which I am, I have an unlimited confidence in the mercy of God....".<sup>7</sup>

Again, after the disastrous events which took place in the initial stages of the Apostolic Carmel in India, Mother Veronica writes to Father Lazare:

"Oh, Father, if you only knew what a desperate fight the devil wages here! Truly it would be difficult to fight him without that confidence in God which says always, 'Even if you kill me, Lord, I shall trust in you'. It seems to me that Jesus cannot resist this abandonment to his pity, to his mercy. The more I feel and see my total misery...the more I cling to Jesus...the more wicked I am, the kinder he is, I cannot say it enough. How happy one feels when one trusts in Jesus".<sup>8</sup>

This unshakeable hope in God's mercy is specially drawn on during the terrible period of suffering that Mother Veronica experienced towards the closing years of her stay in Bethlehem. Both interior and exterior trials submerged her in darkness. Crying out for mercy in the awareness of her sinfulness, she finally tells the Patriarch of Jerusalem:

7. Letters (undated, No. 16 in the A.C. archives).

8. Letters, July 1st, 1872.



"It seems as if the good Jesus had pity on my poor soul...The joy and peace I experienced was a foretaste of Paradise, for one moment of which I would willingly undergo all the sufferings which would henceforth be my lot".<sup>9</sup> It was this strong hope in God that sustained the suffering woman. According to the account of her behaviour under trial, given to the Patriarch by Sister Louis Gonzague of the same community,

"Her heart seeks only God, who gives her the grace to benefit so well from all the very painful ordeals she has undergone, and which she has always borne with so much resignation and patience, seeing the will of God in everything without any ill will against those who made her suffer, returning them good for evil..."<sup>10</sup>

Such heroic hope urged Mother Veronica to endure, with equally heroic fortitude the terrible humiliations, physical pain and interior anguish with which God gifted her in order to fashion her into an image of His Son Jesus in His suffering and humiliation unto death, and in her apostolic effectiveness to a world steeped in pride and self-sufficiency.

Finally, towards the end of her life, we see the virtue of hope take on a new dimension: the desire and expectation of heaven in 'peace and thankfulness'. Looking forward to the eternal joys in store for her, she bears with her customary fortitude all the ills of old age together with a crippling rheumatism and a growing deafness. She looks forward with expectation and special joy to the spectre of death, seeing in it only the open door that leads to union with the Beloved.

9. *Letters*, dated June 10 (1880?)

10. Sister Louis Gonzague, *Letters*, dated (1881?)

## B. FORTITUDE

In the life of Mother Veronica, we are struck by that steadfast and relentless obedience to the Spirit that renounces with single-hearted commitment every satisfaction that comes in the way of her total surrender to God. First it is the joy of family life which she gives up painfully in breaking with her fiancé and then in entering the Catholic Church. For a woman whose whole make-up is geared to nurturing life in the home, and moreover, for a nineteenth-century woman without a career, whose life was intimately bound up with her family, such a step would be assuredly impoverishing, unless it were immersed in the joy of an Infinite Love. God called her to a life of consecration in a religious community, where her rich prayer experience was companioned by that interchange of true charity that characterises genuine religious commitment. Moreover, the overflow of her apostolic zeal brought its own rewards of recognition from those she served in spite of personal difficulties and hardships. Among the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Mother Veronica truly poured out her love on others, and was loved in return.

If she had to bear the painful, weakening ill-health of her stay in Tremorel, the misunderstanding of the Bishop in Calicut and the loss of her reputation in a campaign of calumny lauded against the convent, she still had the support of a good and understanding Spiritual Director in Father Marie-Ephrem and the consciousness of her call to the Cross as another Veronica. If she felt the anguish of her seemingly inopportune transfer to Rangoon, the deprivation of her Spiritual Director and the pain of isolation caused by the silence of her superior general in Rome, she could



still wait in patience, knowing that it was obedience that brought these sufferings to purify her spirit.

What was much more demanding was the insistent call to Carmel that made itself felt within her. To leave her loved religious family, to plunge into the unknown, to venture on the foundation of an active Third Order of Carmel would be a threatening situation. Loneliness and insecurity stared her in the face. And still, this courageous woman remained true to her Divine Lover, determinedly uprooting herself from the Sisters of St. Joseph in order to begin her novitiate in the Carmel of Pau. God poured out an abundance of graces on her in Carmel, so that she now found herself in 'her element' in the solitude and rich prayer life of her new call.

But this, too, could not last. Obedience called her to leave the security of her new-found happiness to begin the congregation that was envisaged as a much-needed apostolate in the missions of India. Equipped only with the courage and fortitude of the Spirit, she set about her task. Clad in an outlandish outfit to cover her Carmelite habit, Mother Veronica started for Annecy, where a priest who was related to the Bishop, had assured her of a welcome and of his assistance. Both were not forthcoming. The Bishop did not seem to know anything of the arrangement, and, moreover, did not want another congregation of women in Annecy. If she wished, she could go to La Roche in Savoy, where she could start a foundation if possible. La Roche proved to be an isolated place with no promise of an opening.

Without financial resources, without the support of her Carmelite superiors (for the Carmelite Superior General had been taken ill in Germany and did not know of her plight), without the authorisation to move

to any other diocese for a possible opening, Mother Veronica was in dire straits. Taking a tiny room on rent and a handicapped girl to cook and assist her, the lonely foundress was forced to depend on the charity of some good ladies for her daily sustenance. Meanwhile she awaited instructions from those in authority.

"On Christmas Day, as I was praying in the church which was deserted at nightfall", she writes, "I found myself as it were in a desert, quite barren, with a huge cross set up in front of me, to which I clung as my only support. It was indeed the bare cross which was waiting for me during my sojourn in Savoy".<sup>11</sup>

A visit from her mother at this stage only aggravated the problem, for Mrs. Leevs was utterly devastated by the destitution and the apparent hopelessness of her daughter's situation, and, seeing she could do nothing to change the latter's mind, left her and went away to Geneva. Rumours spread even as far as Geneva that a runaway Carmelite was staying at La Roche under false pretences. Moreover, the Bishop was asked to remedy the matter to prevent the scandal arising from such a situation!

Finally, after five months of fruitless waiting, Mother Veronica received a comforting letter from Father General, advising her to leave for other places and recommending her to the Carmelite houses for assistance in her mission. Unfortunately, the letter did not have the seal of the Order affixed to it, and so gave rise to the suspicion among some of the Carmelite Fathers that she was an adventuress!

When, after wandering through Geneva, Lyons, Montpellier, Carcassone and Bordeaux, where she did

11. *Autobiography*, Vol III, Ch 1, p. 56.



make a few contacts for the new foundation, Mother Veronica was offered a poor little house close to the Carmel of Bayonne, she accepted it gratefully. Monsignor La Croix, the Bishop of Bayonne, was most gracious to her and welcomed her to start the new work in his diocese.

The early months at Bayonne were blessed with extreme poverty and with debts that arose from necessary repairs to the dilapidated building, with some troublesome candidates who had to be disposed of, and with the ridicule of some persons who laughed at the new foundation. These challenges were taken in stride, and met with a strong trust in Providence. To offset them, the foundress had some good candidates, a devoted and charitable ecclesiastical superior in the person of Canon Inchauspé and the approval of the Father General and the Bishop. Her successful venture now began to be seasoned with the spice of bitter humiliation.

Her erstwhile spiritual director, Father Marie Ephrem, had since become the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Malabar where the new Apostolic Carmel was to work in India. Visiting Europe for the First Vatican Council, His Excellency wanted to take back with him to Mangalore, a nucleus of Cloistered Carmelites for a new foundation as well as the first batch of Apostolic Carmelites for the education of Catholic girls in his diocese. Mother Veronica looked forward with joy to the visit of the new Bishop whom she had loved and trusted so much during her stay in Calicut as a Sister of St. Joseph.

He came. Far from being satisfied with the new foundation, he showed much displeasure at some of

the arrangements including the grilles, the habits of the Sisters, the food, the fasts. These could have been quietly discussed and altered in view of conditions in India, though they had been approved by the Father General, the Bishop of Bayonne and Canon Inchauspé, on whose guidance she had relied. But Monsignor Marie Ephrem was outraged by her representations. He left the place peremptorily without meeting either the Canon or the Bishop, or informing Mother Veronica of his departure from Bayonne.<sup>12</sup>

She was utterly devastated. All along, Father Marie-Ephrem had guided her, called the new venture 'our work', had encouraged her, paid half the debts of the foundation, and even chosen the Sisters who were to go back to India with him. Now he went off in high dudgeon at the foundress. She wrote to him humbly, begging him to return, to talk to the Canon who was to accompany Monsignor La Croix to Rome for the Council, to come to some agreement. The Little Carmel had been founded for his mission, and had no purpose of existence if he did not want it. The Bishop disregarded her. Reading her letters, one sees how abject she made herself with him, this 'father of her soul' as she had once called him. Being advised by the Prior of Montpellier to abide by Monsignor Marie-Ephrem's instructions as the Father General would surely want things that way, Mother Veronica offered to change whatever he wanted. He accused her of disloyalty and grudgingly agreed to take the first batch of Sisters to India with the cloistered Carmel. Already she saw that he wanted complete authority over the group, regardless of her who had been its foundress. She had further proof of this before his departure for India.

12. Cf. *Letters of Mother Veronica*, dated 25th October, 1869.



When the incident of the fourth Sister he asked for at the last moment took place, Mother Veronica was utterly crushed. He shouted at her as no one would ever do to a woman in polite society. She was, moreover, a consecrated Religious, one who was possessed of a certain natural human dignity besides being a foundress worthy of respect. Already in her mid-forties, she was older than the newly-appointed Bishop, and had had the varied and maturing experiences of a much-travelled woman. She had been through much suffering to found the new congregation, and had brought it to a certain stability with a deeply spiritual foundation. Moreover, Monsignor Marie-Ephrem would not even listen to her explanation of why the fourth Sister could be got ready at the last moment. His high-handedness was beyond comprehension, especially in the light of their earlier relationship of mutual regard and respect.

Broken and humiliated, she was not only the first to make efforts at reconciliation, but continued to treat him with respect. Realising next morning that his letter from Rome had not reached her, he did not even have the decency to apologise to her for his outrageous behaviour. It looked as if he regarded his position as Apostolic Administrator as giving him the right to treat her as an abject underling not worthy of consideration. Reading her subsequent letters to the Bishop, one is struck by her spirit of forgiveness, her respect for authority, her willingness to forget the past and serve his mission wholeheartedly. But the inner hollowing-out process that had begun was not held back. Slowly but surely, the final blow was heading to a crushing end.<sup>13</sup>

13. *Autobiography*, Vol 111, Ch. II, pp. 68-69.

When her humble but sincere representations to the Bishop were made regarding the amalgamation of the Sisters of St. Joseph with her Little Carmel, his episcopal authority felt outraged. He not only did not deign to reply to her, but ruthlessly cut off all communication between the foundress and her own Sisters in India. It was like snatching a child from the arms of a nurturing mother and turning the mother away with cruel finality. More, it was a throwing back in her face all that she had been through for this new foundation. It was a kind of writing off all her life's efforts up to this point. If it was not physical death, it was far worse. It was a death to all her hopes, to her reputation, to all her continual and courageous surrenders to God's action in her, all her strivings to accomplish His will with regard to the mission entrusted to her.

Her crushed spirit in a body broken by ill-health found nowhere to turn except to the feet of the Crucified Christ. There she remained, and in her brokenness, questions must have risen unbidden within her. Why had she left the Sisters of St. Joseph where she had been so happy? Why had she persevered in this foundation when the situation had been so difficult? Why had she trusted her dear Father Marie-Ephrem without being aware of this autocratic streak in him? Why had she not remained in her dear Carmel of Pau? Why had her friends all deserted her and turned against her? Why had she to send away these committed Sisters under her care when they desired so ardently to give themselves to God? What would happen to the infant congregation in India, now left motherless, and how was it to measure up to the challenges of the mission entrusted to it? The questions surged up endlessly



within, seemingly without a meaningful answer. All she knew was that she had obeyed, she had risked all, she had lost all.<sup>14</sup>

From the ashes of the burnt-out phoenix, new life was slowly emerging. Mother Veronica slowly made her way to the Carmel of Pau, a failure in her own eyes and in the eyes of others. She knew that the Lord had room in His heart for the 'lost' (Lk.19:10). She took up the broken threads of her life to allow Him to weave anew a pattern of His own choice. His work in her was not done. He had given her much. She needed to be stripped of all before He could make a masterpiece out of His chosen one. On her entry into the Carmel of Pau, the Arab mystic Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified told her, "Be always very little, very little, for there is always place for the very little ones".<sup>15</sup>

Through all the vicissitudes of her remaining life in Carmel, both in Pau and in Bethlehem, we see now a specific goal emerging in her mind and heart. She saw clearly that she needed to grow in humility if the Lord was to possess her completely. Proud by nature, her pride had been fostered also by her upbringing. She must have been subconsciously aware of her natural superiority in the exercise of her God-given gifts of body, mind, heart and spirit. She was endowed with more than ordinary abilities, both intellectual and practical. She had used them in the service of her missionary vocation. God had also lavished upon her extraordinary gifts of grace. She did not trade on this largesse for herself, using everything to serve others generously. She was neither pompous nor haughty, nor did she stand on

14. *Autobiography*, Vol III, Ch. II, p. 77.

15. *Ibid.* Vol III, Ch III, p. 78.

ceremony with others. One with the poor and needy, the ignorant and unlettered, the sick and suffering, she exercised humility both in service and in her position of authority. She took the strokes of misfortune with an inner resilience, a fortitude and a trust in Providence that bespoke a certain growth in that holy virtue that she sought to attain.

And yet, there was an inner citadel that still had to be conquered: that selfhood that was possessed of strength and a certain wisdom, that was conscious of its integrity and all the spiritual achievements that had marked her life's journey. She struggled to capitulate. It was easier said than done. During her early years in Bethlehem, Mother Veronica had been inspired to make a vow of humility in imitation of Father Clement Cathary, a Jesuit priest, whose life she had read. Her confessor permitted her to embark on this vow from confession to confession lest it become too much of a burden to her. Yet she persevered with all her goodwill, realising at the same time that humility could only be acquired through humiliations. "Our Lord seemed to have taken charge of sending them to me," she writes, "until I was ground in such a way as to be a grain of dust under the feet of all. And still more, He gave me the grace of being able to thank Him for them with all my soul".<sup>16</sup>

The Carmelite mystic, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, had told her in no uncertain terms, "Now people flatter you, later on it will be just the opposite. You will suffer both in soul and body, but in the midst of all your trials, Jesus will never abandon you...The little birds will sing in the depths of your heart as in a grove"<sup>17</sup>.

16. *Ibid.* Vol II, Ch. V, pp. 121-122.

17. Sister Madeleine, recollections from the Carmel of Pau.



Interior warnings of an impending period of suffering were not lacking either. "Prepare yourself for suffering". These words spoken in the depths of her soul after Communion on more than one occasion told Mother Veronica of what lay ahead of her. And, indeed, the unutterable anguish of an impenetrable interior darkness took possession of her suddenly like 'a flash of lightning'. She describes her experience thus: "It seemed that God had abandoned me—had left me entirely to myself—I was overwhelmed, annihilated, under the weight of my sins and the anger of God! Pure suffering had taken up my whole being and I could see only my sins which were the cause of it. It seemed that I was going to die. I could see a huge mountain of my sins which stood between me and God".<sup>18</sup>

Nothing and no one could console the poor Sister—neither her confessor nor her repeated and futile attempts to examine herself and make reparation for her misdeeds. Her continual self-accusation did nothing to relieve her, in spite of her confessor telling her that she must not repeat such accusations as they were unfounded. Her terrible distress was so overpowering that she could neither sleep nor eat. "I did not know," she writes, "and did not understand that it was God who had put me in this pit and that it was He alone who could relieve me... No one understood me".

To add to all this anguish, the ecclesiastical superior of the convent and those in authority began to carry on a campaign of intimidation, of unjust accusations, of severe punishments against the ageing Sister, in the attempt to break her spirit. For, with her straightforward way of talking, she was an undesirable obstacle to the

<sup>18</sup> *Autobiography*, Vol II, Ch. IX, p. 196.

innovations being introduced into the Carmel by the priest who had no authority to make these changes. The torture of mind and soul that she was experiencing was intensified by these exterior trials. Weakened in body and confused in spirit, she was no longer the naturally strong and self-possessed woman of yore. What remained within her, unrecognised by her but evident to her confessor, was the fortitude born of an unquenchable desire for God, the search for His will, the continual recourse to His mercy, the longing for His peace. In fact, it was this very Presence within her that caused this overwhelming awareness of her sinfulness and was destroying the last vestiges of self-esteem that lingered in spite of all her efforts to grow in humility.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem, whose canonical visit to the Carmel was an occasion for her to unburden herself to him, managed to assuage the inner torment to some extent only after an extended period of suffering. As St. Teresa of Avila say<sup>-</sup> in discussing this aspect of the Sixth Mansions of her "Interior Castle", such a state often lasts for years, effecting a necessary purification before union with God. However, it demanded a courage and a fortitude that were truly heroic.

Returning to the Carmel of Pau after twelve years in Bethlehem, Mother Veronica had still to suffer the remnants of this interior storm for a time. For, when she spoke against the innovations that had crept into Pau from the Carmel of Bethlehem, and when she made known her intention of resorting to a Carmel where the original observances were maintained, her very presence in the community was not very welcome. The



Bishop of Bayonne spoke of her as being merely "tolerated" in the Carmel of Pau. It must have been a painful situation for this woman who had always been welcomed and loved, and who now found herself unwanted and accepted out of charity. Gradually the situation was remedied.

The last years of her life, spent in obscurity, were characterised by the peace of humble surrender to advancing old age and its ills. Her superior gifts were no longer in demand. Silent tasks of embroidering Church vestments, serving in the sacristy, helping wherever she could, diffusing sisterly charity in the community, faithfulness in prayer and in observance of the rule bore witness to her rest in the diminishment that God sent her. She wanted nothing but Him and His love. Mother Veronica had truly become one of God's little ones, and in that littleness of possessing nothing, of being utterly incapable of herself and dependent on Him for all, she found the joy of losing herself in Him, and so, of finding Him at last.

### 3. FINDING GOD

*She risked all.*

*She lost all.*

*She found All.*

It is not really we who find God, but God who seeks and finds us. It is He who takes the initiative in His search, He who leads His beloved through stages of closeness and apparent absence, who provides the challenges to surrender, who gradually hollows out an emptiness within the soul that He might fill it with Himself.

"Where have You hidden,  
Beloved, and left me moaning?  
You fled like the stag  
After wounding me;  
I went out calling You, and You were gone."

In this opening stanza of "The Spiritual Cantic" John of the Cross poetically describes the initial touch of God in the soul which awakens one to desire Him with an intense longing. His hiddenness drives her to seek Him everywhere, regarding all else as worthless in comparison with the joy of possessing Him. And the Divine Lover feeds this hunger by occasional touches of love which delight the soul and urge it to seek Him with ever greater desire. Since He is hidden, she lives by faith, and her faith is strengthened by her assiduity

in practising virtue and using all her gifts of mind and heart in His service.

The search for God passes through many stages of love, but it is always characterised by a growing self-gift which strengthens the bond with a God who is always giving. He wants to give Himself to the beloved, but He needs empty hands in order to be able to give of His fullness. Naturally, then, this interplay of love and its fulfilment is necessarily consummated in the climax of the Cross. God's infinite love cannot be expressed in the human Jesus but through the utter self-giving of Calvary, where every fibre of His being became a sacrifice for sin. His superabundant goodness and love overflowed in sacramental grace from His pierced Heart, so that nothing was kept back, no gift to us remained to be given. As Jesus said to Julian of Norwich in one of His apparitions to her: "It is a joy, a delight and an endless happiness to me that I ever endured suffering for you, and if I could suffer more, I would suffer more."<sup>1</sup>

Necessarily, then, the beloved can be one with such a Lover only in the utter self-giving of the Cross. The search for God must be marked with the seal of suffering love. In this is found fulfilment, as is witnessed by the saints, who, like Teresa of Avila, cry out in ardent longing: "To suffer or to die!"

## A. LOVE

(In the life of Mother Veronica, we see an early attraction to the things of God, a habitual listening to

1. *Op.cit.*, p. 72.

His Word in Scripture which was cultivated in the Protestant atmosphere of the Leeves family. Moral rectitude was an accepted standard of conduct. The incident in Sophie's childhood, when she was punished for taking a spoonful of milk from the dining-room gave her a horror of dishonesty in any form, whether lying or stealing. Still, we can see that her motivation was far from pure. "I was too proud to lie", she writes.<sup>2</sup> Daily family prayer, works of charity, self-denial and service of the poor contributed to preserve the centrality of God in her life. As she grew, this inherited faith led her devotion into an attraction towards High Church Anglicanism, and so to Puseyism, so satisfying in terms of liturgy and personal growth in holiness compared with the barrenness of Protestant worship.

The passion for music led her also to a love for Catholic devotional motets and chants. Her relationship with God had to cover every aspect of her existence: intellectual, practical and aesthetic as well as her life of worship. In her late teens, we see God touch her again with the beautiful experience of Easter Tuesday, 1840, when Sophie heard a celestial voice awaken her with the words: "Peace I leave with you, My Peace I give unto you". This experience remained with her as a revelation of Divine Love which must have fed her hunger for God to a greater intensity.

She began to seek Him more assiduously. He was also drawing her to Himself through the inexplicable attraction she felt towards the Catholic churches in Rome. She did not yet know of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and yet felt drawn to the tabernacles which held for her something she

2. *Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 11.



missed in Protestant places of worship. She fell on her knees and prayed, which was not a common practice among those of her faith.

After her father's death, Sophie began to turn her thoughts towards marriage when a young naval officer sought her hand. "He was very good and I loved him very much," she writes, "but I felt nonetheless in the depths of my heart that something was lacking to me. I searched for God and it seemed to me that I had a weight which I wished to be rid of".<sup>3</sup> After consulting a Puseyite director, Sophie broke off her engagement and felt she could not love any creature any more, since her heart belonged to God. It seemed to her that she was being called to be a Sister of Mercy as an Anglican. She was happy and began to do penance in imitation of the Catholics. The result of her excessive fasting was that she fell ill, and her illness was ascribed to her broken engagement. In real distress, she knelt before a small Crucifix and made a vow of perpetual virginity. From that day her health improved.

The family was then settled in Malta after the death of the Reverend Leves. An inexplicable magnetism drew Sophie to the tabernacle of the Cathedral of Valetta, and there, she fell on her knees and wept for her sins. She spent hours there without knowing why. "Later I knew," she writes, "it was Jesus the Good Shepherd who drew towards Him His poor lamb that was still outside the fold".<sup>4</sup>

It was Jesus, too, who led Sophie to meet the Jesuit, Father Giuliani, in the house of Mrs. Demech. For it

3. Ibid, p. 29.

4. Ibid, p. 35.

was his words on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that struck an answering chord in Sophie's vibrant heart. She recognised it for the work of grace and opened herself to its aftermath. There followed a painful and yet rewarding search for the Truth. God spoke to her through the written word, the verbal instruction, the movements of her own heart, the hidden action of His Spirit. And little by little, He brought her to the discovery of the next step that lay ahead, namely, baptism in the Catholic Church.

However painful it was to envisage the division in the family that this step would cause, there was also the inner joy and peace of finding what her heart longed for. Sophie describes her experience of the Eucharist in which she participated after her baptism in the words: "Jesus, He whom we had desired and sought so long, came to take possession of His two poor lambs. The Good Shepherd had at last brought us on His shoulders into His fold, and now He put His seal on our happiness by coming Himself to dwell in us. O my God! I had so many things to say to Him that I think I said nothing. I remained engulfed in silence but I felt that I possessed my God. I had everything. The whole world was nothing to me any more".<sup>5</sup>

She had found Him whom she sought. And in the strength of that love, she faced all the pain of domestic storms with courage and in peace. To suffer for the Beloved was a sweet wound, and she willingly paid the price for the Treasure she valued so much. "I enjoyed a happiness," she confesses, "which I had not known till then".<sup>6</sup> The desire to belong totally to Him

5. Ibid, p. 44.

6. Ibid, part II, p. 51.



who had captured her heart possessed her completely. Entering the congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in spite of her mother's strong opposition Mother Veronica was flooded with sensible consolations in the delight of her growth in prayer and in union with the Lord. Reading the works of St. Teresa given her by her confessor, the young Sister recognised that she was being taught by experience what this Mystical Doctor spoke about so clearly in her writings. One can recognise in what Mother Veronica reveals that she was probably in what St. Teresa calls the Fifth Mansions of "The Interior Castle", experiencing the Prayer of Union. "The fruit of my prayer", she adds, "was an insatiable desire to make penance, to suffer something for Jesus" which she asked for with so much fervour that her confessor had to moderate her longings. "I wished to die with so much ardour in order to see God that my confessor forbade me to think of death".

(We have already seen how faith flooded Mother Veronica's whole being after her entry into the convent. Her intoxication with the gifts of the Spirit rooted her even more deeply in the God who was drawing her so powerfully to Himself. She knew, however, that this state could not last. She had to expect the dry bread of aridity if she was to reach her goal of complete union with Him. Meanwhile, her zeal, her active charity, her desire to bring the whole world to love Him led her to serve His children selflessly wherever He called her: to the poor in the classroom, to the sick in need, to the bedside of sinners awaiting His healing through the ministry of word and action.

(Reading Mother Veronica's letters to her Superior as a Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition, one is struck by her rootedness in God, her spirit of faith, obedience

and zeal in His service. Take, for example, this one from Piraeus, dated April 6, 1860: "If you find it suitable to send me elsewhere, I shall even go to Australia when you tell me to, but I think I shall never, with God's grace, ask for any transfer, for I am happy everywhere. The holy cross is my portion everywhere, and will always be so and I am happy about it, for the sweet Love of my Jesus is my treasure and makes every cross light and even sweet at times". Or this from Tremorel, dated April 8, 1861: "I...shared in your affliction at the loss of our three dear Sisters, but finally I envy them—they died victims of their devotedness. And I tell myself, 'Who knows whether my turn will not come soon!' Personally, I would be very happy, for I do not worry about anything on this earth except doing the will of my God".

A period of growth in prayer and in her interior life marked Mother Veronica's stay in India. Being blessed with a spiritual director who recognised that she had been singularly favoured in grace, she found that all the painful challenges that she met with during this time were truly blessings in disguise. For they helped her grow in love for her crucified Lord and gave her joy in being asked to suffer something for His sake. Father Marie Ephrem called her 'God's favoured child' as she quotes in a letter of March 30, 1862, to her Superior General, adding, "...it is very true. The more unfaithful to Him I have proved to be, the more He lavishes on me His benefits and favours. Every time I think of it, dear Mother, I tell you sincerely that I feel so ashamed, that I would like to go and hide myself in a little hole".

Her apostolate also gave her 'heart-warming' consolations even with all the difficulties they entailed.



One of her letters to Father Syndique, dated 1 October, 1862, says: "If you only knew, dear Reverend Father, the joy one feels in presenting to Our Lord these dear souls, all radiant in their white baptismal robes, after having snatched them from the power of Satan! Ah! It is here that we thirst for souls..." While these words refer to converts she had the joy of serving, she also experienced deep satisfaction at the devotion and exemplary lives of those that were educated at the school. "I feel that I have never been happier and more contented", she writes to her Superior General on June 25<sup>th</sup>, referring to the daily Mass and Communion and the other devotions that her community and the children seemed to savour so much. In a letter of December 2, 1862, she says, "Personally, I am so happy and content right here, in India, that I would be happy to remain here always". And this in spite of the 'thorns' that abounded on her path.

After all the suffering and the ups and downs of Mother Veronica's leaving the congregation of St. Joseph for the novitiate of the Carmel of Pau, there awaited her in her new home, a still greater experience of joy in her closeness to God. "I was... more than happy", she writes. "It seemed to me I was in Paradise".<sup>7</sup> The austerities were "a delight" to her. Silence, solitude, fasts and vigils seemed to be her "element". At her profession, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified saw a great cross hover over her prostrate form. She was overjoyed in the awareness that the holy cross was thenceforward to be her portion.

And, indeed, God now drew her closer to Himself through adversity. Setting out to make the first

7. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 6.

foundation of the Apostolic Carmel alone and in poverty, she experienced refusals, misunderstanding, suspicion, loneliness, abandonment, calumny, physical suffering and obstacles of every kind. That she was able to go through all this with courage and faith speaks much for her union with God from whom she drew strength and the grace of fidelity. All through the five years at Bayonne, she was supported by Him even to the anguish of seeing the infant congregation she had brought to birth and nurtured lovingly, threatened with dissolution. More, her affectionate heart was battered and bruised by her changed relationship with Father Marie Ephrem, now Bishop of Mangalore, and by his high-handed rejection of her as foundress of the congregation that he wrenched from her grasp. No interior consolations were given to comfort her in her grief. The Lord was beginning slowly to destroy her inner citadel in order to possess her completely.

Her second novitiate at Pau was not marked by any special graces as at her first entry. She seems to have settled into a quiet peace after the turbulence of the preceding events. She had no extraordinary experiences save for her profession day, on which Mother Elias, who had died four years earlier, seems to have visited her. Embracing her, the former prioress said, "Happy suffering which produces so much joy".<sup>8</sup> And for that one evening, Mother Veronica was filled with joy and inundated with special graces. From that time on, her life seems to have been slowly moving towards its climax. The ups and downs of her stay at Bethlehem were lightened during the first years by the

8. Ibid. Vol. II, Ch. III, p. 76.



presence of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified who diffused the peace, joy, charity and grace of her sanctity throughout the little community.

After the death of the mystic, God seems to have intensified His mysterious action within the heart of Mother Veronica. She had to experience the depth of her own inner poverty and rest in her uselessness and helplessness, utterly dependent on His mercy, so that He could possess her completely. In fact, the very closeness of God to the soul causes it to walk in darkness as St. John of the Cross so clearly explains in his treatment of the Night of the Spirit. The sufferer feels that God has rejected her and she becomes aware of her misery and evil: "The sighs of death encircled me, the sorrows of hell surrounded me, in my tribulation I cried out" (Ps. 17:5-7). Feeling forsaken and despised by creatures, the person can find comfort nowhere, and feels condemned to hell without any hope.<sup>9</sup> (But while all this distress and affliction are reducing one to the greatest humility, Divine love is slowly being engendered within.) The period of such intense anguish may last for a long time as it did with Mother Veronica, but it was necessary to establish her in lowliness. Finally, she learned to accept in peace the nothingness of her creaturehood, the sinfulness of her fallen nature, the powerlessness of human weakness to accomplish even the slightest achievement in the realm of grace. Then it was that she really found God. Or rather, He found her.

9. cf. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, Bk. II, Chapters 6,7,8.

## B. FULFILMENT

The interplay of love and its fulfilment are difficult to trace in separate streams, because both flow together. In fact, love is its own fulfilment, for to love means to participate in the very life of God who is Love. At the beginning, this participation may be very limited, but it grows to a greatness as does the stream that empties itself into the ocean. To describe the growth in union with God that is the fulfilment of the seeker's aspirations is not easy, for it is a secret and mysterious action. One can judge to some extent only through its manifestation in the Christlike behaviour of the person concerned.

It is chiefly in prayer and in love of one's neighbour that one can discover evidence of such growth. Openness to God and to others go hand in hand, for genuine prayer will express itself in selfless service. As St. Teresa of Avila insists both in "The Way of Perfection" and in the "Interior Castle", the "aim of prayer" is "good works and good works alone".<sup>10</sup>

In the early life of Mother Veronica, we notice that the practice of prayer and its overflow in service of the poor are the normal Christian characteristics of the piety that was habitual to the Leever household. We might regard such signs as manifestations of inherited faith. However, when God touches a person and begins to possess her in love, the response becomes personal and oriented from within. From the time of her First Communion as a Protestant, when she had prepared for the event with great devotion, weeping over her sins and praying as best she could, she felt an inner change:

10. *The Interior Castle*, VII, iv, p. 346.



"It seems to me that from that time I became more pious". She was drawn into the devotional life of the Puseyites with her sister Mary Ann. "We sought God with all our heart but in the darkness as it were, with no one to guide us. My ideal was to become a minister's wife and apply myself to singing the offices of the church, teaching poor children and visiting and looking after the poor and the sick".<sup>11</sup>

At this time of interior growth, when she had the beautiful experience of hearing the words: "Peace I leave you..." in the quiet of early dawn, she confesses, "I cannot express the effect it had in my soul". It was like a hidden treasure cherished and nurtured within her.

Little by little an interior attraction for the Blessed Sacrament in Catholic churches made itself felt in her consciousness. Together with this came a change in her heart. God was intensifying His hold on her so that she could no longer go on with her engagement, feeling that He "had taken", her "heart for Himself". She began to dress very simply, to spend more time in prayer and in visiting the poor and the sick. "It seemed to me," she writes, "that God was calling me to be a religious and I did not love any creature any more." What she meant was that her love for others was transformed from possessiveness to self-giving service. In course of time she was led to make a vow of perpetual virginity in front of a small crucifix, and experienced an inner liberation from the after-effects of her broken engagement.

After the agonising period of her conversion to the Catholic Church, we notice two parallel experiences taking place in Sophie's heart. The first is the great

11. *Autobiography*, Part I, pp. 6,8,9.

peace and joy which we have already dwelt on: "Jesus, He whom we had desired and sought so long, came to take possession of the hearts of His two poor lambs....I possessed my God. I had everything. The whole world was nothing to me any more".

The second experience was the painful cleavage within the family which caused deep suffering to both the girls, and set the seal on their commitment to their faith. The peace of heart that remained with Sophie through all the ensuing domestic storms, bears witness to the inner fulfilment of suffering love which finds joy in the self-giving of the Cross.

She now began to devote herself to prayer without having been taught to meditate. The interior locutions she began to experience were new to her. But on reading the works of St. Teresa of Avila, she realised that God was now leading her through several stages of prayer described by the Spanish mystical doctor. The ardent desire for penance and the longing for final union with the Beloved in death were the other side of the coin, offsetting the joy of mystical oneness with the Lord.

With the acceptance of her religious vocation to the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, joy and consolation flooded her soul, being fed on a special devotion to the Passion of Our Lord on which she nourished herself "without intermission". We have already seen how God fulfilled her love in great spiritual consolations at the beginning of her religious life, and her faith was so deepened and strengthened that she felt "drunk with faith". All this interior experience overflowed in a special commitment to the poor children whom she was asked to teach, and in a special ministry to the sick when God gave her the strength "to bear



extreme fatigue in spite of" her "ordinary weak health". Her tireless missionary zeal bears witness to the authenticity of her prayer life.

After her period of service in Greece, Mother Veronica was called to Rome where she experienced a near-ecstatic love for the Church in St. Peter's and where her introduction to the Roman Pontiff strengthened her love and devotion to him and to everything Catholic.

And now, we see a period of ministry in Tremorel, a tiny village in Brittany where the cold and wet climate preyed on Mother Veronica's health to the point where her life was threatened. What comes across to us in the harrowing experience of this year of service is the total detachment and selfless commitment of Mother Veronica in the midst of her sufferings. The poor, illiterate children in the village school as well as the sick waiting to be served in distant places took their toll of the zealous Sister's health. In letter after letter she reports her ill-health, not in order to complain, but so that a Sister could be found to help out in the situation. "....in spite of all my goodwill, I can no longer go regularly to class...I have been having fever every night...I am perfectly content and happy everywhere, whether I be in poor or in good health"(21<sup>st</sup> January, 1861 ). Again, "...it tires me very much to bend over for a long time. I take courage, dear Mother, but do you know that it is for me a cross to have such poor health that I cannot carry out my duties as I would like to, nor keep to the exact observance of the rule"(24<sup>th</sup> January, 1861 ). On the 21<sup>st</sup> April, Mother Veronica writes: "I shall tell you quite simply what the doctor has told me I could tell you, when he learnt I had to teach every day. He told me that all the medicines I

may take will be of no use, that the good they can do me on the one hand will be neutralised entirely by the fatigue resulting from teaching—which I must entirely give up if I do not want to be more seriously ill than I am. I spat blood several times already, and as blood rushes to my head and chest when I make efforts to talk, the doctor tells me that if I continue teaching, I will soon have a much more serious haemoptysis, and it would then be very serious".

Feeling that she could not live much longer, she said: "I am happy, calm; nothing troubles me. I shall wholeheartedly do whatever I am told to do. I am suffering in body and mind, and I am happy about it..." A few days later, she talks about drawing up her last Will. On the 19<sup>th</sup> May, she says again, "I often spit a little blood, but what am I to do? Let me go on till the end". Coughing night and day, being "practically without voice", she was told by the doctor that going to class was killing her. However, since no substitute was sent to Tremorel, Mother Veronica went on patiently until she was recalled to Rome.

Regarding her charity to the Sisters, too, we see amidst other evidence her compassion for a troublesome Sister who annoyed the Rector so much that he threatened to write to the Bishop. "I begged of him not to do such a thing", she says, "telling him that we all belong to one body and that if a member misbehaves and is libelled, all of us suffer. I pleaded with him to say nothing and to consider that perhaps, her ill-health, her irritability and her nerves were the cause for her inability to control herself" (12<sup>th</sup> February, 1861).

These characteristics of selflessness in service and sisterly charity remain with Mother Veronica throughout her life as a Sister of St. Joseph. In India, her growth in



the spiritual sphere is marked also with suffering and calumny, with physical and psychological challenges which she takes in stride, considering herself as a favoured one of God, and remaining happy in her 'Paradise'. It is in Calicut that she experiences her mystical espousals with Jesus, which she relates with reticence to her confessor: "I was alone one day working and praying, for at that time I was very close to God, when suddenly I was drawn into a state of profound recollection and I saw the Most Blessed Virgin holding in her hand a ring which she offered me on behalf of her divine Son". She goes on to relate to her confessor, Father Lazare, how her mystical espousals took place on the feast of the Seven Dolours of Our Lady, and how this experience affected her profoundly.<sup>12</sup> Later she remarks, "I think that in all my life I have not tasted sweeter consolations than at Calicut. God was blessing our efforts....I loved all these dear Christians big and small as my children and they treated me as their mother".<sup>13</sup> The sense of fulfilment comes through both in her interior life and in her tireless self-giving in the apostolate.

On going to Carmel, Mother Veronica experiences anew 'great graces'. After receiving the habit she says, "I was, as it were, beside myself with joy and for several days afterwards I kept this intellectual presence of Our Lord beside me, who spoke to me and directed me in everything, as if I saw Him. Our Mother, St. Teresa, speaks of this grace as one of the greatest a soul may receive. I had already received it in my first days after my entry into St. Joseph's and now again Our Lord heaped me with delight".<sup>14</sup> However, all these marks

12. Ibid., p. 32.

13. Ibid., p. 34.

14. Ibid., Part III, Ch I, p. 51.

of love shown to His chosen one were a preparation for union with Him in greater suffering.

On the day of her profession, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified saw a great cross hover over her. And indeed, the bitter challenges of the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel and its aftermath in the closing of the convent at Bayonne were truly a crucifixion which enveloped every fibre of her being as we have seen already. She had no sense of fulfilment, but only of failure, yet the Lord was giving her a share in the apparent failure of Calvary, the sense of abandonment and the loss of everything but hope in Him.

If we reflect on the terrible experience of interior darkness coupled with exterior sufferings that Mother Veronica went through in Bethlehem, we see that with the near-despair that assails her, she shares also in the spirit of forgiveness that the crucified Lord showed forth on the Cross. The fact that she bore no resentment against those who caused her suffering, that she kept her peace and prayed for them, is attested to by Sister Louis Gonzague of the same community. It is this that constitutes the fulfilment of Love: total self-giving in charity without any consolation. In one of her letters to the Patriarch of Jerusalem written about this time, dated November 10, 1882, she writes: "I only say one thing, Lord make of me what you desire—let me suffer all that you will, as long as you will, at the hands of whoever you will, and as you will—only may I not offend you and may you not efface my name from your book of life. 'Even if you slay me, yet will I trust you, and I will remain clinging to your pierced feet'. In this way peace entered my soul and I am happy in spite of everything that is done."



Earlier, the Lord had spoken deep within her heart, "Love your abjection". For it was truly a mark of His predilection for His chosen one and she realised it in some way, writing to the Patriarch on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, 1880(?) : " I am happy now to be the last of all and I thank God for the humiliations that I receive". She had grown through all the initial joys of her relationship with the Divine Lover until He drew her with Him into the embrace of utter humiliation, pain and abandonment that characterised the ignominy of Calvary. She felt no interior exaltation, no assurance of having reached close to the goal. All that remained to her was the trustful surrender of Jesus to His Father: "Into Your Hands, I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). She, too, surrendered in faith to the complete denudation that now enveloped her, and finally made her way to Pau in the spirit of humble obedience and trustful commitment to His Providence.

However, the Resurrection follows the bitter Passion and Death of Calvary. God cannot leave His chosen one in perpetual darkness. He comes with joy to assure His beloved of His Peace, His Presence, His risen life in her. Though the Autobiography stops before describing this stage of her growth, the testimony of her letters and the evidence of those who lived with her bear witness to the fulfilment that now settled upon her in an aura of quiet peace and joy. In a letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1902, to Mother Elias of Trivandrum, she writes, "My tears overflow with thankfulness and consolation. Our Reverend Mother says I look happy and this is true. I feel it. Our Lord has permitted such a grain of dust to do and suffer something for Him. Is this not something to be thankful for?"

Indeed, as Sister Madeleine of the Carmel of Pau wrote of her, she was "pre-eminently a vibrant soul, who constantly pulsated with thanksgiving". She was particularly grateful to God for the gift of her Faith which "saw" and "touched" the things of the Spirit. It was a faith alive with enthusiasm and vitality, giving her the quality of operating always in the dimension of eternity. It filled her with the eagerness for sacrifice and the energy to serve right up to the end. She felt "plunged in a sea of thanksgiving" for all that God had done in her life.

This contentedness in Him overflowed into all her relationships. The community was struck by "her benevolent disposition which made her religious life so sweet and which she practised always". They found her "tender-hearted" and "touched by the least attention given to her". One of the Carmelites of Pau describes Mother Veronica as "a select soul, endowed with moral and intellectual qualities of the highest order, profound piety, rare delicacy of heart". Her conversation continually turned towards God, often centred on the Blessed Virgin and on the Blessed Sacrament, Treasures of the Faith that she prized very specially.

God's tenderness towards His chosen one was specially manifested during her last years on earth by the consolation He afforded her in seeing the work she had begun in so much suffering now yield a rich harvest of fruitfulness. The congregation to which she had given birth was growing to maturity and showed much promise of apostolic effectiveness in both the branches that had sprung from the parent tree. She continued to show interest in this missionary endeavour for which she had paid such a costly price. The failure of the Cross was the world's salvation. It was her self-



denudation and apparent failure, too, that brought to birth and nourished to vitality the work she had been commissioned to do.

She was content. She had risked all, she had lost all, but she found All in Him who now possessed her.

Like Abraham, she had been called to leave "her country, her kindred and her father's house" to follow where God led her. Like him, she too was made "a blessing" to many and she became "exceedingly fruitful" in her spiritual descendants.

Like Moses, she too saw the Lord in the burning bush of her faith afire with her love, and was called to lead a new people into the "Promised Land". And yet, like him too, she herself did not go to that land but was taken into the face-to-face vision of God.

Like the Bride in the canticle, she sought her Beloved, but "found him not" in the darkness of spiritual aridity and affliction of soul and body. She could say with the Bride:

"I called him but he gave no answer.  
The watchmen found me  
As they went about in the city  
They beat me, they wounded me,  
They took away my mantle,  
Those watchmen of the walls...  
Scarcely had I passed them,  
When I found him whom my soul loves.  
I held him and would not let him go."  
(Song of Songs: 5:6b-7; 2:4).

She is truly blessed in the eternal possession of Him who loved her with a love of predilection. And in that love, she is made exceedingly fruitful for the world she was called to serve.

## PART II

### A RETREAT WITH MOTHER VERONICA

## FIRST DAY

# FAITH : THE FOUNDATION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The gift of Faith bestowed in such generous measure on Mother Veronica was not only her most treasured possession, but also the springboard for the vitality of her life of love. The centrality of God in her whole outlook gave rise to a lifelong search for Him and a readiness to respond to all the graces He lavished on her. Faith was also the heart of her Carmelite heritage, a basic characteristic of Elijah the prophet of Carmel. He lived in God's Presence, opened his heart to God's word and referred his mission always to "the Lord God in Whose presence I stand" ( 1 Kgs.17: 1; 18: 15). Standing in God's Presence is the characteristic Carmelite attitude, giving meaning to a life of contemplation and zealous action in imitation of the prophet of Carmel.

## Standing in God's Presence

### A. In Nature

Find a place where you can quietly contemplate nature and spend a few moments breathing in and out deeply and restfully. Turn your attention slowly to any aspect of nature that calls to you : a flower emerging from



the hard soil, a tree standing strong and fruitful, a bird seated on a twig, even a leaf or an insect on the ground. Do not engage in reflection. Only let your gaze try to penetrate the mystery of whatever you are contemplating. Watch and listen. Allow the spirit of wonder to possess you: [e.g. What a delicate-coloured flower! How soft-petalled it is! How could such a fragile plant emerge unscathed from the hard ground! What is the secret of its beautiful colour? From where did its leaves get their fresh greenness? I gaze and gaze until I become aware of the miracle of God's Presence in the flower giving life and beauty and uniqueness in a mysterious and hidden manner.] Enjoy this Presence with gratitude. Little by little, become aware of His Presence in every creature, in the air you breathe, in the whole universe. Remain resting in this awareness in peace....

### B. In Me

Close your eyes, and breathe in and out quietly for a time. You, too, are a mystery. You have no reason for your existence within yourself. You become aware that you are emerging moment by moment from the heart of God. He surrounds you; He penetrates you; He is irrevocably your Source, your Atmosphere, your Support, creating you in love eternally. You cannot separate your being from Him who is your very life. You are a tiny manifestation of Him who gives birth to you constantly in a more intimate way than any mother with her child. Allow yourself to be immersed in Him, surrounded by His all-pervading Presence, embraced in His love. Recall the words of Julian of Norwich:

"As the body is clad in the cloth,  
and the flesh in the skin,

and the bones in the flesh,  
and the heart in the chest,  
so are we, soul and body,  
clad in the goodness of God and enclosed in it..."  
Rest in this embrace, allowing God's Presence to envelop you completely:

"God fills my being to the brim  
with floods of His immensity  
I drown within a drop of Him  
whose sea-bed is infinity..." (Jessica Powers)

Further texts: Ps 139; Is.49: 15-16; Acts 17: 28. .

### C. By Grace

God sometimes gives persons a mystical experience of His constant Presence with them, as He did with Mother Veronica during the early years of her religious life. However, most of us are called to live by faith. And it is on the word of Jesus Himself that we believe in the indwelling Presence of God within us:

"If anyone loves me he will keep my word,  
and my Father will love him,  
and we shall come to him  
and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23).

"He will give you another Advocate  
to be with you forever,  
that Spirit of truth...

he is with you, he is in you" (Jn. 14:16-17).

"Make your home in me, as I make mine in you"  
(Jn 15 :4).

To be at home anywhere means to live one's life freely. God's Presence within us is not a static existence. He lives the Trinitarian life within us, drawing us into

## PRAYER

the Divine Love, vivifying our human actions with His grace and sharing with us His joy and His peace. Resting in gratitude in this Presence, become aware that through grace, you are a partaker in the Divine Life (1 Pet.2: 9-10; 2Pet 1: 3-4; Ezek. 16: 1-14).

## D. In the Blessed Sacrament

Mother Veronica's faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was the climax of her conversion experience. All through her life we see her lively faith in the Eucharistic Presence as she takes part in the sacramental life of the Church. "When the Blessed Sacrament was exposed I could not tear myself away from the church," she recounts of her early days as a Catholic. Her First Communion was an experience of union that left her speechless in wonder and gratitude.

Sit before the Blessed Sacrament for some time, becoming aware of the Divine Presence, again not a static presence, but one that gives Life, Light and Love. There is no need to make any reflections. Only allow the rays of His Light to reach you, penetrate your being and fill you with Himself. Allow the vibrations of His Love to enter your being and fill you. When you have spent some time resting in this Presence, you in turn can spread vibrations of His Love to all the needy in the world: the sick, those in prison, those in trouble, the homeless, the poor, the depressed.

End with "Soul of Jesus, sanctify me..."

Spend the whole day in the awareness of God's Presence : in the food you eat; in the air you breathe; within you as you move about; around you as you rest; acting in everything to serve you in love and to make your life fruitful in Him.

Lord God

You invade my being on every side,  
Truly in You I live and move and have my being...  
I look around at Your creation  
And your reflected beauty captures my heart  
Your power fills me with wonder  
Your living Presence is everywhere...  
I hear You in birdsong  
in the roll of thunder  
in the gurgle of the little brook...  
I see You in the shining eyes of children  
in the littleness of the busy ant  
in the strength of the mighty elephant  
in the delicacy of the potted fern...  
I feel You in the warm sunshine  
In the cool breeze on my face  
In the comforting shelter of my clothing  
in the firmness of the ground I stand on...

Lord God

You wrap me round with Your love  
Drawing me from nothingness into life  
Penetrating and possessing me with tenderness...  
I rest in Your embrace  
Knowing You are ever faithful  
and will never abandon me...  
I cling to You as a child clings to a mother  
I remain at peace for You are with me...

Lord God

You make Your home in me  
Sharing your very life with me  
Drawing me into loving companionship with You



Vivifying my every thought and word and action  
 Calling me to be with You forever...  
 Teach me to make my home in You...

Lord God

You come to stay with me in Your Sacrament of  
 Love

being indeed my Way, My Truth, my life  
 Filling me with Your light and power and grace  
 Praise be to You, great God  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
 Now and forever. Amen.

## SECOND DAY

# TRUST IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND GOODNESS

If Mother Veronica was able to take the risk of obedience at all times, it was because of her unshakeable trust in the goodness of God. Convinced of His unfailing love and faithfulness even in the midst of difficulties, she continued to hope, knowing that ultimately He would bring good out of everything.

"Divine Providence prepared the way for me; I have no doubt Providence will assist me in all my needs" (Marseilles, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1852).

"I do not worry at all about the future" (Piraeus 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1860).

"I am sure that everything will turn out for our good" (Tremorel, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1861).

"I leave everything in His hands" (Tremorel, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1861).

"The good God permits everything...I have placed everything in His hands...The good God will come to our help" (Tremorel, February, 1861).

These are but a few of Mother Veronica's numerous references to God's unfailing Providence. And though

she was not spared either interior anguish or exterior suffering, she remained faithful, experiencing His power to bring His purposes to their end in His own unexpected way. Even in the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel, when all her hopes were shattered and all the circumstances of the situation pointed to the ensuing dissolution of her venture, God used the most unlikely instruments to carry out His purposes and brought them to a successful completion. Today, the very existence of the Apostolic Carmel is a testimony to the love, the power and the fidelity of God's Providence.

Ask for the grace of an unshakeable trust in God's goodness and love as you contemplate the Scriptural basis for such an attitude.

### 1. Abraham

(Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17, 18-21). We can only marvel at Abram's ready compliance with God's call to leave all his securities to venture into the unknown. His trust and hope were not misplaced and he became the father of a great nation and "our father in faith". But it is in the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Genesis that we see the extent to which Abram's rootedness in God led him to transcend the innermost urges of his human love for his son, and to carry out God's behest to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. It was a courageous plunge into the darkness of God's will, a helpless and total reliance on the goodness of his Creator who seemed to ask the impossible of him. At the climax of his terrifying surrender, God's Providence saved him in a wondrous manner, so that he could only gratefully call that place "Yahweh provides" (Gen. 18:14).

Try to fathom the anguish and the depth of Abraham's experience as you contemplate this mystery, sharing also the darkness of his trust in God and its ultimate vindication. He was rewarded a hundredfold by God who is never outdone in generosity.

### 2. Joseph

(Gen. 37, 39-45). The injustice and the cruelty of Jacob's sons towards their brother Joseph could have embittered him and led him to seek his revenge when they fell into his hands in Egypt. At least, he could have reproached them as he revealed his identity to them. But it is clear that Joseph lives by faith, that God's goodness is a reality in his life, that all that happens is to him a manifestation of Providence. What he says when he discloses his identity is a testimony to his rootedness in God: "...Do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here, since God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5-6).

### 3. Jesus in the Desert

(Mt. 4:1-4). Jesus' hunger in the desert after His extended fast could reasonably be satisfied by His changing stones into bread. What the tempter asked Him to do was an appeal to His charismatic power, to His ability to help Himself, to His human need for succour. Jesus prefers to rely on Divine Providence in spite of His suffering. He turns to God in faith and trust: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God".

Ask for a like grace as we see that God rewards His Son by ministering to His needs through the angels (Mt. 4:11).



#### 4. Mary

(Lk 1:25-38). Mary also reveals her unshakeable trust in Providence when, at the Annunciation, she blindly surrenders to God's will: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word". Mary knew the consequences of her action, the punishment of stoning to death if she were suspected of adultery. She was aware of the strictness of the Mosaic law in this regard. But more, she was aware of God's goodness and power, of His ability to carry out His purposes in His own way. Her trust was not misplaced, as we see in Mt. 1:18-25. This utter reliance on Divine Providence is characteristic of Mary throughout her life, coming to its climax at the foot of the Cross. It is through the failure of the Cross, that the victory of Redemption was obtained.

Ask Mary for a like trust in Providence.

#### PRAYER

God of goodness and love  
 You are not only able to carry out Your Will  
 Through every obstacle and seemingly impossible  
 situation  
 But You are also faithful and infinitely trustworthy.  
 Though I am so limited and often helpless  
 I try to be self-reliant  
 And often seek to carry out my purposes,  
 resenting all the obstacles that block my path...  
 You are the God who brings life from death...  
 Victory from failure...  
 Hope from despair...  
 Light from darkness...  
 Good from evil.

I turn to You in complete trust  
 And surrender myself to Your will  
 knowing that  
 "All things work together for good to those who  
 love God(Rom.8:28).  
 Teach me to say with Mary my Mother:  
 "Behold the handmaid of the Lord;  
 Be it done to me according to Thy word".  
 As I go through the past events of my life  
 Let me be grateful that You have sustained me  
 With Your all-powerful Providence  
 turning all my negative experiences  
 into opportunities for growth.  
 Jesus tells me that not a sparrow falls to the ground  
 Without Your tender care for Your creature,  
 that You clothe the lilies of the field  
 and provide for the birds of the air  
 with unfailing goodness and generosity.  
 Let me rest in the awareness of Your sustaining love,  
 Grateful for the past...  
 Peaceful for the present...  
 Hopeful for the future...  
 for I know who holds all time in His hands.  
 I rest in Your comforting assurance to Julian of  
 Norwich:  
 "I may make all things well  
 I can make all things well  
 and I will make all things well  
 and I shall make all things well; and you shall see  
 for yourself  
 that all manner of things shall be well."

## THIRD DAY CALL TO LOVE

"The voice of my beloved  
Behold he comes  
leaping over the mountains  
skipping over the hills.  
My beloved is like a gazelle  
or a young stag.  
Behold, there he stands  
behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows  
looking through the lattice.  
My beloved speaks and says to me:  
'Arise, my love, my fair one and come away...'"  
(Song of Songs: 2: 8-10)

This Biblical picture of God as lover manifests a God who cares with tenderness, with longing, with earnest seeking. He who is all-sufficient yet desires intimacy with each one, and He makes His voice heard in the soul in various ways. Once He touches the loved one in His goodness, the person is moved to respond. God's touches of love recur in life drawing each one to newer and newer levels of intimacy.

In the life of Mother Veronica, we see this initial call experienced by her that Easter Tuesday when she heard a heavenly voice awaken her with the words,

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives do I give unto you." She was stirred into joy. She would never be the same again. Little by little this voice made itself felt in new and unexpected ways, drawing her ever closer, until she felt moved to break all earthly ties to surrender to its demands: first, the promise of marital happiness, then family, her life of independence for that of religious consecration, her attachments to country, language, comfort, persons who mattered very specially, her own hard-won achievements, and finally, her reputation and self-reliance in the humiliations of her life at Bethlehem.

God is a Lover who demands a whole-hearted response. He cannot be loved with half-measures. In the Scriptures, we see how He called Abraham to leave his country and all his securities, even to surrender the son of his old age to the demands of His love. In the Gospel of St. Matthew (4:18-22; 9:9ff), we see the same pattern repeated in the call of the Apostles. Peter and Andrew, James and John, leave their father and their nets to follow Him. Matthew without a second thought, abandons his counter in the tax-office to respond to Jesus' call of love. The same experience is recounted by Paul in the Letter to the Philippians (3:4-11). His encounter with the Lord led him to put aside as garbage all that was dear to him in his life as a Pharisee: his social standing, his religious zeal in the cause of Judaism, his self-righteous observance of the law. Now he wants only to "know Christ", to share in His sufferings so as to live in the power of His resurrection. All the rest does not matter. It is refuse, rubbish, worthless, an encumbrance.

The call to belong exclusively to God is a precious gift. The single "yes" of response encompasses every



area of life. The vowed life is but a triple expression of this surrender. Though the initial call gave rise to a generous response, yet our attachments often come in the way of a whole-hearted self-gift. God calls us repeatedly to newer levels of self-giving until we are stripped of all else for His sake:

"What have I in heaven  
and what do I desire on earth ?  
My heart and my flesh may fail,  
but God is the rock of my heart  
and my portion for ever." (Ps 73: 25-26).

The process of this continual cutting off our attachments finds poetic expression in Tagore's "Gitanjali" No. LII which runs as follows:

"I thought I should ask of thee—but I dared not—the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck. Thus I waited for the morning, when thou didst depart, to find a few fragments on the bed. And like a beggar I searched in the dawn only for a stray petal or two.

"Ah me, what is it I find ? What token left of thy love ? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder. The young light of morning comes through the window and spreads itself upon thy bed. The morning bird twitters and asks, 'Woman, what hast thou got ?' No, it is no flower, nor spices, nor vase of perfumed water—it is thy dreadful sword.

"I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine. I can find no place where to hide it. I am ashamed to wear it, frail as I am, and it hurts me when I press it to my bosom. Yet shall I bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine.

"From now there shall be no fear left for me in this world, and thou shalt be victorious in all my strife. Thou hast left death for my companion and I shall crown him with my life. The sword is with me to cut asunder my bonds, and there shall be no fear left for me in the world.

"From now I leave off all petty decorations. Lord of my heart, no more shall there be for me waiting and weeping in corners, no more coyness and sweetness of demeanour. Thou hast given me thy sword for adornment. No more doll's decorations for me !"

## PRAYER

God of my heart  
With gracious longing You beseige my being  
calling me to surrender in love  
desiring to possess and transform me by Your grace.  
I have said a willing "Yes"  
to Your hidden invitations  
and I earnestly desire to belong wholly to You  
Yet I see with pain and helplessness  
that I am not Yours completely.  
John of the Cross tells me that a bird is prevented  
from flying  
as much by a silken cord tied to its feet  
as by a thick rope...  
I see with shame  
that my initial "Yes" cut off the rope indeed  
but I am bound by silken cords  
of my worldly attachments,  
of my self-will and desire for comfort,  
of my ambition and desire for honour

that keep me from mounting up to You.  
 Lord, lover of my soul,  
 I beg of You to cut my bonds  
 in Your great love and mercy.  
 I use the words of your servant John Donne:  
 "Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you  
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
 That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend  
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
 I, like an usurped town to another due,  
 Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.  
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
 But is captived and proves weak or untrue.  
 Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,  
 But am betrothed unto your enemy.  
 Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste except you ravish me."

## FOURTH DAY THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE

If there is one virtue that stands out in heroic dimensions in the life of Mother Veronica, it is her relentless obedience to God even in the most challenging circumstances. "Obedience is my life" is the way she summarised all her activity. Though she confesses to being "proud and disobedient" as a child, she could not resist the Divine Lover. He seemed to delight in testing her love by asking her to surrender to strange and unexpected demands. Always responsive to the promptings of His action in her, she obeys with alacrity, regardless of the consequences to herself.

The anguish of her conversion to the Catholic faith follows the pain of separation from a fiancé whom she loved. The agonising cleavage from her loving family is aggravated by her entry into religious life, into a congregation which initially held no attraction for her. As we follow her in her eventful journey through life, we cannot but marvel at the heroic obedience she always manifested, whether in the painful months preceding the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel or in the utter failure of the venture when the convent at Bayonne was closed.

Her willingness to surrender to the Lord even in small things is manifested in her readiness to give up



the comfort of a cup of tea in her illness at the statement of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified that Jesus asked for this sacrifice. "I would have given my eyes if He asked for them", was her rejoinder to the mystic's misgivings about the request. The difficulties of her closing years in Bethlehem were marked by the same ready obedience even when she could not see the reason behind the acting authority. Penalised by being deprived of every office in the community and not obtaining any explanation for the penance by the superior, all she said was, "I have always obeyed, and I will continue to obey".

The ultimate proof of love is obedience. "If you love me, keep my commandments," says Jesus at the Last Discourse (Jn. 14:15). Jesus is Himself the supreme exemplar of obedience to the Father: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God." (Ps.40: 6-8; Heb. 10:7). The letter to the Philippians expresses the utter self-emptying of Jesus in His obedience unto death in Phil 2:5-11. And the letter to the Hebrews states in plain terms, "Although He was a Son, he learned obedience, through what He suffered" (Heb.5:8). Contemplating the life of Jesus on earth in Bethlehem, at Nazareth, in His Public life and specially on the Cross, we see the climax of His heroic obedience manifest in the Agony at Gethsemane, where He shared our weakness by struggling against every human instinct in order to surrender to the Father: "Not my will, but thine be done" (Lk 22:42). His whole life on earth could be summed up in His words, "I do always the things that please him" (Jn.8: 29).

Obedience in the implications of our vowed life is quite easy ordinarily. Rarely or never are we commanded to do anything in virtue of holy obedience.

But to be constantly alive to the voice of God speaking in challenging circumstances, in unlikely persons, in demanding interior urges and to surrender our will in love demands generosity of a high order.

"Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed.

I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room. The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted". (Gitanjali XXVIII)

It is sometimes considered weak to obey another's behest, to deprive oneself of the power to decide for oneself. However, the decision to obey demands a greater strength than is demanded by the liberty to do as one pleases. Rather, it is weakness to yield to one's own whims and fancies, to be a slave to one's likes and dislikes. Looking at the agonising Jesus in Gethsemane, we become aware of the superhuman strength He needed to accept His Father's will in peace.

Obedience opens us to be guided by Divine wisdom rather than limited human considerations. We see in Mother Veronica's life how God brought His own work of grace to fulfilment through seeming obstacles, unreasonable situations and threatening conditions. Because she obeyed unquestioningly even in the most

demanding circumstances, God's all-wise Providence could work His will with power.

The inner freedom that is needed for obedience opens one to the ability to take risks for the sake of the Beloved. The outcome of these risks often appears to be failure, but in God's plans, turns out to be eventual triumph. As Paul tells us in the Letter to the Philippians, Christ emptied Himself and became "obedient unto death", and that is why He has been given "a name above all other names" as the Lord of creation. Blessed are those who follow in the footsteps of Him who is "the Way, the Truth and Life".

### PRAYER

God of infinite wisdom  
I pray with the poet Tagore:  
"Give me the strength to surrender my strength  
To Thy will with love".  
My weakness makes me a victim of fear.  
I am afraid of risks  
not realising that the only true security  
is to be found in Thee.  
I am often weak  
often too weak to face the challenges of obedience  
and prefer to yield to my own desires  
rather than to follow Thee to the Cross.  
Penetrate my wayward heart with Thy love  
that I may surrender in joy  
regardless of the consequences  
knowing only  
that Thy love is all-sufficient for me  
that Thou art the God of my heart

and my portion forever.  
Mary, humble handmaid of the Lord,  
whose response 'Be it done to me according to  
Thy word'  
came to a climax in the anguish of Calvary  
pray for me, a sinner,  
to be faithful like you  
now in the challenges of daily life,  
and at the hour of my death.

Amen

### Prayer of Charles de Foucauld

I abandon myself to your Hands O God  
Do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me and in all creation  
I ask no more than this, O Lord  
Into your hands I commend my soul  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart  
For I love you, Lord  
And so, need to give myself  
to surrender myself to you without reserve  
And with boundless confidence  
For you are my Father.

Amen



## FIFTH DAY

### LIVING BY GOD'S MERCY

Writing to one of the Apostolic Carmel Sisters in India from Bayonne, Mother Veronica uses her personal experience to rescue the Sister from discouragement:

".... I, my child, I am so completely left to myself, so swallowed up in the darkness and ocean of my sins and my infinite miseries that it is a miracle God works to keep me from despair. The only thing that sustains me is that from the depths in which I am, I have an unlimited confidence in the mercy of God and that He will direct everything for me according to His holy will..."

Again, the foundress writes (probably to Father Lazare) :

"Keep me, dear father, at the sacred altar, please, that I may not spoil God's work in these souls which are entrusted to me so that the designs of God may be accomplished in me and that my horrible infidelities may not bring an insurmountable obstacle to bear on them.

"In spite of it all, I hope always. I am even, as it were, sure that Jesus will have mercy on me because I cannot refrain from trusting in him with an unlimited confidence....".

In response to a request from the Sisters of the Carmelite Congregation of Religious at Trivandrum, Mother Veronica again wrote in 1892

"... Some details of my poor life which has indeed been very full of incidents, and above all full of the most wonderful proofs of the mercy of God towards me..."

This reliance on God's Mercy is the fruit of one's own experience of helplessness, of sinfulness, of utter uselessness in the spiritual life. The consciousness of one's own nothingness is matched by a growing awareness of God's Mercy as the only sustenance one can depend on—an abundance of Mercy attested to in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments.

In fact the history of the Chosen People seems to be an account of their repeated and incorrigible unfaithfulness to Him and of His unquenchable Mercy in forgiving them innumerable times.

"Though your sins are like scarlet," says the Lord in Isaiah 1:18ff, "they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool".

And again:

"I, I am He

Who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Is 43:25)

Numberless instances of God's forgiveness are not merely empty words; they are substantiated by incredible examples of His unconditional mercy. Let us, for example consider the heinous crime of King David, not only in his adultery, but also in the subsequent murder of the man he had wronged, Uriah the Hittite. His ugly treachery stands out all the more in contrast

with Uriah's noble refusal to go down to his wife when he has come on the king's business. (Cf. 2 Sam, 11). David was, moreover, a man after God's own heart, a man whom God had blessed in every way. In 2 Sam 12, the prophet Nathan is sent to David to bring home to him the enormity of the sin he has committed, which is fittingly illustrated in the parable related by Nathan to the King. As soon as Nathan says to him, "You are the man!" David realises the heinousness of his crime and confesses, "I have sinned against the Lord." What is so striking is the immediate answer given by Nathan, "The Lord also has put away your sin". What a forgiving God! No wonder David's experience of God's abundant mercy finds expression in Psalm 50, which is as much praise of God's mercy as a confession of sin!

If we come to the New Testament, we are faced with the inexhaustible mercy of God manifested in Jesus: "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (Jn 3:16-17). Jesus proclaimed God's mercy throughout His life of compassionate love, seeking out the sinner (Jn 4:1-35), calling outcasts to become His closest followers (Mt 9:9ff), expressing His mission in no uncertain terms (Lk 19:10), "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost".

In three forceful parables, Jesus tries to convey to the people that God is a God of Mercy and overlooks the sin in a humble and contrite heart".

Lk 15:3-10  
Lk 15:11-32  
Lk 18:9-14.

The Father who forgives even before the son shows repentance, the God who justifies a contrite heart rather than a self-righteous attitude, the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18) who rejoices over the lost sheep that is found;—these are only poor symbols of God's infinite Mercy that flows in torrents over a sinful world. The realisation of this unutterable tenderness in the Heart of God caused St. Therese of Lisieux to make her act of self-oblation to God's Merciful Love. It is truly by this love alone that we can live in trustful security in spite of our misery and our sinfulness.

In the life of Jesus, we see such mercy in action in many incidents, among which figure

The Call of Zaccheus : Lk 19:1-10

The Sinful Woman : Lk 7:36-50

The woman taken in Adultery: Jn 8: 1-11

But, above all, we see the depth of Jesus' compassion on the Cross where He readily promises Paradise to the repentant thief (Jn 23:39-43), and prays for forgiveness for His executioners (Jn 23:33-34).

What good reason we have then to approach our Father with the trustful confidence of an erring child who sees her own meanness in the light of the Father's goodness and love, who runs to Him in loving surrender, resolving to love Him even more in the future.

Today is a good day to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

## PRAYER

Merciful Father  
when I consider your infinite love  
I am filled with wonder



that such a great God should concern Himself  
 with such poor and miserable creatures.  
 But when I contemplate your inexpressible Mercy  
 poured out in greater abundance  
 on the weak, the sinful, those in misery,  
 I can only surrender in humble gratitude  
 for the gift of such unfathomable love.  
 And finally, when I see that your Divine Grace  
 raises me, a poor sinner,  
 to the level of your own Divine Life,  
 I am speechless with wonder....  
 And then my heart is moved to deeper sorrow  
 for my unfaithfulness to so great a love  
 that is beyond my limited understanding,  
 and yet consoles me in my misery.  
 For, God of my heart, I know I can live  
 by Your Mercy  
 and not by the vacillation of my own tawdry self  
 achievements

Mary, sinless Mother,  
 pray for me, a sinner  
 now, and at the hour of my death

Amen.

## SIXTH DAY IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Anyone who walks the path of love must necessarily live in the shadow of the Cross. For love, which means self-giving, finds its truest expression in doing difficult things for the Beloved, in proving its fidelity in the face of painful challenges, in disregarding self to give any pleasure to the Beloved. In fact, as Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15: 13).

That Mother Veronica realised this early in life is evident in her avowal at her reception of the habit as a Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition: "My special devotion was the Passion of Our Lord on which I nourished myself without intermission". She was given the habit on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in 1851, and with it the name "Mary Veronica of the Passion".

Writing to her Superior General from Piraeus about the difficulties the Sisters had to face with the local priests, she says, "I shall never, with God's grace, ask for any transfer, for I am satisfied everywhere and I shall always be so...for the sweet love of my Jesus is my treasure and makes every cross light". Then again in Tremorel, faced with the serious state of her health,

she says very calmly, "I don't think I shall live much longer...I am ever ready to do his holy will. I am happy, calm; nothing troubles me... I am suffering in body and mind, and I am happy about it..."

From Calicut, Mother Veronica writes to Father Syndique (Dec 22, 1863): "If Our Lord had even once made the soul understand the priceless value of the Cross and of suffering, it would never forego even a single one for anything in this world.

"Well, Reverend Father, that is also the reason that induces me not to desire or even ask for a change of mission, precisely because I fear that Our Lord might chastise me for my failure in not making use of graces with which He is overwhelming me in the form of persecutions and calumnies. It is now that I am sure that He is thinking of His poor servant with a love of predilection, since He wills only the adverse in almost everything that befalls me, and I feel that I am worthless in the estimation of others. So much the better...Our Lord has named me Veronica. He has begun to chisel the rough block, must I restrain his hand? Pray rather that He deign to strengthen my weakness and renew my courage in order that I may become in truth, and not merely be in name Veronica of the Passion. This is my only desire, the goal of my life".

Again from Calicut on April 21, 1864, she writes to the same priest: "...The thought of the Holy Passion of our Saviour and His Agony in the Garden where He suffered all manner of dereliction ...is a source of courage to rise up and continue the struggle....My Lord and my Spouse has chosen for himself and for all His elect ... this way of humiliations, persecutions and crosses; how then can I think of a different way, I who

am a soul so specially privileged, and chosen from the midst of darkness to be His own? It is not possible that He leads me by any other way, so what else should I desire? Only pray for me, Father, that my courage may not fail me, and having undertaken the road to Calvary with my Lord, I might follow Him to the summit and die there, crucified with Him and like Him."

Mother Veronica's call to Carmel was initially an experience of repugnance, "extreme distress both exterior and interior" and a source of pain in having to leave her dear congregation of St Joseph, but she relates that after the great graces and joys of her reception into the Carmel of Pau, she had a special grace on the day of her profession. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified "saw a great cross which hovered" over her as she lay prostrate before the altar. "Henceforward", she says, "the holy cross was to be my portion".

During the painful period preceding the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel, while she was in Savoy, Mother Veronica had another visionary experience of the cross in a little village near La Roche. The sufferings of body and mind and heart, which she went through during this period, witnessed to the reality of the Cross in her life. This was only the beginning of a series of challenges that increased in painful intensity through the dissolution of the Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne and especially during the awful period of darkness and self-stripping that took place in Bethlehem. Her commitment to the Cross was no empty show of words; it was borne out in her life.

The Cross poses a painful challenge to each of us as we follow Our Lord through our lives of consecrated commitment. However, contemplating Jesus himself as



He faced His Passion and Death, we can find strength to take up our own cross and follow Him. The love, burning in His Heart, was growing in intensity as He neared the end of His life on earth. "I have a baptism to be baptized with," He says in Lk 12:50, "and how I am constrained until it is accomplished."

As the time draws near, Jesus sets His face resolutely towards Jerusalem. At Caesarea Philippi, He reveals His identity to His Apostles, and then calmly speaks of what this identity means, teaching them about His forthcoming sufferings and death (Mark 8:27-38). But, like all of us, they find this teaching unacceptable. Peter immediately remonstrates with Him. But Jesus rebukes him and then explains that anyone who wishes to follow Him must take up his cross and follow the Lord. The whole paradox of the spiritual life is encapsulated in the words: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35).

The second prophecy of the Passion follows as the group passes through Galilee (Mk 9:30-37). Though Jesus is very explicit, what He says is so contrary to the apostles' values and their idea of the kingdom that "they did not understand what He said and they were afraid to ask Him". Moreover, they began to discuss the positions they would hold in the kingdom, and Jesus had to illustrate tangibly that His kingdom was founded on littleness and not on worldly honour, and this He did by bringing a little child into their midst. Again, the paradox of the spiritual life is set forth in clear terms: "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all". How different Christ's values are from those of the world! The Beatitudes, which seem

such a contradiction, are indeed concretised by Jesus' telling example. We need to be converted from our false values, from our worldly idea of happiness which is not only shallow, but transient and unreal.

Again, Jesus prophesies clearly His coming Passion as the apostles approach Jerusalem. They are afraid and linger behind. He is resolute and walks ahead of them (Mk 10:32-45). In this third prophecy, Jesus is even more explicit about His sufferings, and we would expect His hearers to understand at last. But again, we see the apostles contending for a place of honour in the kingdom, and Jesus repeats what He had said earlier about being "the slave of all", capping it with the statement: "The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

As the culminating statement of the principles of the kingdom, Jesus illustrates by His personal example in the *Washing of the Feet* (Jn 13: 1-20), what it means to be a leader, a Teacher and Lord. As we contemplate the Master at the feet of His servants, in the context of their subsequent abandonment of Him, in the forthcoming triple denial of Peter, in the painful betrayal of Judas, we can only remain in wonder, in humble adoration, in silent commitment to Him who is for us such an inspiring example of humble and forgiving love and service.

(Besides the above scriptural Passages, it would be beneficial at this stage to read the Imitation of Christ, BkII, Chapter XII : "The royal road of the Cross").

## PRAYER

Jesus, Beloved Lord,  
 You who suffered and died to save me  
 Because You loved me,  
 I want with all my heart to return Your love for love,  
 I too want to give myself to You  
 without counting the cost ...  
 But I am so cowardly  
 So afraid of suffering  
 Valuing worldly esteem and comfort  
 and fearing to lose them...  
 To lose my life is to gain Life, You said.  
 Give me the courage and the strength of love  
 To surrender to the Cross  
 To treasure it as my beloved foundress did  
 to allow You to accomplish in me  
 that work of art that You planned in creating me...  
 Teach me to be truly humble and little  
 to be the slave of all  
 so that I may follow in Your footsteps  
 and so reach Calvary with You.  
 Mary, Queen of Martyrs  
 faithful to the end  
 as you stood beneath the Cross,  
 a sword of sorrow piercing your heart  
 teach me how to suffer like you  
 lovingly and humbly  
 so that I may share the Divine Life  
 Jesus promised to those who lose their lives for Him  
 Pray for me, a sinner,  
 Now and at the hour of my death.

Amen

## SEVENTH DAY

## LOVE CONSUMMATED

Love is fulfilled only in the total self-giving that it demands. Jesus' love for us had to find expression in the complete self-annihilation of Calvary, tasting the denudation of His entire self until He had nothing left to give.

For Mother Veronica, the call to this final process as the crowning-point of a life of suffering love came to a head in the inner urge to practise humility in its perfection. She had always had to struggle against an innate pride, inculcated by her very upbringing. But now after she made a vow of humility, God took over, sending her painful humiliations, until, as she says "I was ground in such a way as to be a grain of dust under the feet of all". The exterior suffering of such experiences went so far as to deprive her of any standing in the community, since the Prioress herself exposed to the Sisters suspicious and bad impressions of the Sister without proper foundation, and on the basis of these unjust accusations, inflicted severe penances on her. However, it was the interior anguish of the night of the spirit that she went through, that far surpassed whatever others did to her. For, believing she was guilty even after reassurance from her confessor, she felt the impenetrable barrier of her sins arising between her and God. This was, to her, the ultimate annihilation of her



pride, for she had lived all her life for Him who now seemed to be absent from her, so that "pure suffering" penetrated her whole being with her despair.

"My God what anguish!" she writes to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. "I saw myself outside the range of God's grace...I dared not pray. I was not able to ... I asked for forgiveness and mercy but I did not dare to say to the good God, 'I love you', because I felt I was unworthy to love Him... I was afraid of dying and of being damned... Tormented by a thousand thoughts ... isolated from the community, not allowed to speak to anyone, what a life I led!"

Opening her heart to the Patriarch in confession, she was reassured and encouraged to surrender to all that she experienced, for he understood that it was God who was fashioning his beloved in the crucible of suffering. Indeed, it was the culmination of the process, which the Patriarch described as "the greatest graces that God can give a soul". He told her that they were intended to make her "resemble Jesus in His Passion where He deigns to endure all sorts of torments and calumnies".

She was transformed by this death to herself and a new peace which came to her on her return to Pau made her a Sister who now exuded benevolence, humility and charity and was a source of deep edification in her community.

We can do no better than turn to Jesus Himself as we contemplate the climax of His bitter Passion and Death, drawing strength from His riven heart on the Cross. The following scriptural texts may help our contemplation:

Isaiah: 53

### **The Agony in the Garden:**

Heb: 2 : 10-18

Heb: 4 : 15-16

Heb: 5 : 7-10

Lk : 22 : 39-46

Mk: 14 : 32-50

What compassion Jesus manifests in this Mystery, as He lowers Himself to experience all the weakness of our human nature! Exposed to the fear of suffering, repugnance in the weight of sin He was bearing for the world, disgust at the cruelties in store for Him, shrinking from the shame, the insults and the pain that were to be His, Jesus struggled like any of us to accept the Father's will, pleading for the chalice to be removed, crying out in agony for relief, for consolation, and knowing the abandonment of being deserted by all who had professed loyalty to Him.

As we enter into His sufferings, we are strengthened to accept our own human weakness and fear in the face of pain; we learn that true heroism does not consist in Stoic endurance, but in faithfulness up to the end. We offer Him our silent companionship as we accept in advance all that His love may ask of us now and in future.

### **The Passion and Death of Jesus**

Phil : 2 : 5-11

Mt : 26 : 57-27 : 66

Mk : 14 : 53-15 : 47

Lk : 22 : 54-23 : 56

Jn : 18 : 12-19 : 42

Throughout our contemplation, it is good to focus on the Heart of Jesus possessed by a consuming love

for the Father and for a sinful world. It is only this love that keeps Him faithful to the end. As He said to Julian of Norwich who was given a mystical experience of the Passion, "It is a joy, a delight and an endless happiness to me that I ever endured suffering for you, and if I could suffer more, I would suffer more". The wonder of so great a love grows as we see His heart broken by the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, abandonment by His apostles. To be isolated in suffering,—even as was our foundress—is one of the most painful aspects of the Cross.

This isolation comes to a head in the unjust trial of Jesus, where Pilate presents Him to the crowd, asking if He can be released for the festival. But the cruel rejection of His people: "Not this man, but Barabbas", is compounded by the vociferous demand: "Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Rejected by those whom He had come to save, standing alone in the name of sinful humanity to expiate our transgressions, hearing His people throw back God's offer of salvation into His Face as it were, Jesus is truly "the Lamb that was slain", the Victim whom the Father did not rescue from death as He did Isaac in Gen 22. For both Father and Son were possessed by the same Infinite Love demanding its consummation in the total self-giving of Calvary. If we have experienced rejection in any form, we have a source of grace and consolation in this Mystery of the Passion.

Contemplating the Seven Words on the Cross, it is specially fruitful to enter into the forgiving love of Jesus expressed both with regard to His executioners (Lk 23:34) and the Good Thief (Lk 23:39-43). This is one characteristic of our foundress that comes through forcefully in her life. The Patriarch advises her, "Take

care that no feelings of resentment remain in your heart, whatever adverse things may happen to you; and when He has accomplished His will in you, then the pain will cease". In fact, she herself says that God gave her, "the grace of being able to thank Him" for all her humiliations. As a fruit of our contemplation, let no residue of unforgiveness remain within us.

Finally, we enter into the Mystery of Jesus's apparent abandonment on the Cross. Crying out to His Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" and sensing His near-despair, we cannot fathom the depth of His suffering. For, if the deprivation of God is so great a torment to us, His creatures, what must it have meant to Him who is one with the Father, whose very being is inalienably and eternally generated from the Source of life, who stood faithful up to this point only in the consciousness of God's loving support, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (Jn 16:32). All those who have passed through the night of the spirit have shared in the same interior desolation in varying degrees as a preliminary purification to final union. In fact, it is the very closeness of God that makes Him seem absent. For when God, who is about to possess the soul completely, envelops the loved one, she naturally feels the utter denudation of her own self as a participation in this love. Though she cannot understand her darkness, saints like John of the Cross are very clear in explaining why the truest experience of God in Himself is darkness and emptiness, for the human faculties are utterly incapable of perceiving God or experiencing him in any sensible way. The triumph of Jesus in this excruciating ordeal is His leap of faith, "Into your hands I commend my Spirit" which admits Him directly into the Father's eternal embrace. This is truly the Resurrection.



Standing in silence at the foot of the Cross with Mary our Mother, bequeathed to us specially on Calvary, we ask for the grace of faithful love and a surrender to the circumstances of our own death, whatever they may be.

### PRAYER

"Soul of Jesus, sanctify me"...  
 Mary my Mother  
 as I sit with you on Calvary,  
 the lifeless Body of the Crucified placed in your hands  
 I sense your inexpressible sorrow  
 Your deep pain at the cruelty,  
 injustice, humiliation, shame  
 and physical torture inflicted on Jesus  
 And with it, there is the deep peace  
 of sharing His victory over sin and death  
 of having accomplished His mission  
 of surrender to the Father in spite of not  
 understanding the full meaning of  
 the mystery.  
 Truly, you have been the "handmaid of the Lord"  
 one possessed by love  
 and now fulfilled in love  
 even as you await the Resurrection in peace  
 Obtain for me, your child,  
 A consuming love for Jesus  
 That will only be satisfied with total self-giving  
 that will learn to trust in every circumstance  
 A love that will urge me to surrender  
 to risk all that I may lose all  
 in order to find Him that my Soul loves,  
 I shall hold him and not let Him go (Song 3:4)  
 Pray for me, a sinner,  
 Now and at the hour of my death. Amen

### EIGHTH DAY

## LOVE IN ACTION: ZEAL IN MISSION

In the chapters dealing with the Seventh Mansions of "The Interior Castle", St Teresa of Avila says very clearly in (VII, IV): "This, my daughters, is the aim of prayer; this is the purpose of the Spiritual Marriage, of which are born good works and good works alone. Such works....are the sign of every genuine favour and of everything else that comes from God." This is why Jesus left to us as His final commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." (Jn 13:34; 15:12,17). It is a love that reaches out to the whole of creation, but chiefly to the needy, the oppressed, those in pain, the lonely and the outcast.

Reaching out to others was inculcated in the Leeves family from their earliest years. Instructing the poor and ignorant, sewing clothes for those in need, visiting the sick, were regular activities of their Christian lives. But we see this zeal in service come to a climax in Mother Veronica's life as a Sister, both in the congregation of St. Joseph and in the Apostolic Carmel. Indeed, even before, when Jesus took possession of her heart, she gave up all thought of marriage, spent her time visiting the poor and the sick, and seeking only to give herself

to God in the religious life as a Puseyite Sister. However, together with her commitment to a life of prayer, we see her in Piraeus, in Tremorel, in Calicut, straining her physical capacity to the utmost to serve those in need: in the classroom, in sickrooms and in the homes for orphans and outcasts that she fostered. All this, in spite of serious health hazards, and having to travel on horseback for hours to serve the sick in distant places took their toll of the selfless Sister, so that the Rector of Tremorel had to tell her, "You shall not commit suicide!" Her letters from Calicut tell of the struggles of the Sisters to take in the poor and outcast, to educate the young girls entrusted to them, to reach out to those in need.

One of the reasons for Mother Veronica's decision to found the Apostolic Carmel was, in fact, to cater to the needs of the missions in India. Dearth of personnel and difficulty in communication with Europe made the foundation a stark necessity. She gave up her dear congregation of St. Joseph to enter Carmel and to start the active group of teaching Sisters so much needed by the Carmelite dioceses of the West Coast of India. Reading the account of the painful challenges she had to face at La Roche, at all the places she visited in obedience to the Father General, we can only marvel at the single-minded persistence and zeal she evinced even when things looked hopeless and threatening.

When the Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne had to be closed down, we do not see Mother Veronica give up her commitment to the Lord. She goes to Pau, there to spend her life in prayer and sacrifice for a needy world.

Contemplating Jesus in His Risen Life, we see Him spread Peace and Consolation to all the apostles. But

there is always the commission they are charged with : to spread the Good News over the whole world.

Journey to Emmaus: Lk 23 : 13-50

Apparition to Mary Magdalen : Jn : 20:11-18, 19-23, 21: 1-23

His final behest is, "Follow Me!" and it is truly in following Him faithfully that our mission is mainly carried out. All the documents of the Church on religious life bear out this reminder that our consecrated commitment is more important for the apostolate than any activity we undertake, no matter how effective and opportune.

"Though the many different apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the truly fundamental work of the apostolate remains always what (and at the same time who) you are in the Church" (Redemptionis Donum 15).

"Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge; this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all" (V.C. 72).

St. Therese of Lisieux understood this very well when she discovered her vocation to be "Love in the heart of Mother Church", so that all vocations would be hers. Her zeal so ably expressed in Chapter XII of her Autobiography, has caused her to be named Patroness of the Missions on a par with St. Francis Xavier, though she never left her cloister for any external apostolate.



This assurance is also borne out by our Constitutions Art. No. 96, which speaks of the vitality of our lives as Apostolic Carmelites being a life-giving force for the Kingdom.

However, we have been founded as an active congregation. Our many apostolic works, chiefly education, call on us to serve in the spirit of Christ and of our foundress. The basic attitude of such apostolic work is religious obedience. There is no such thing as an individual apostolate in religious life. "At whatever stage, the apostolic work of the individual is that of a religious sent in communion with an ecclesially missioned institute. Such work has its source in religious obedience .... It is distinct in its character from those apostolates proper to the laity." (Essential Elements. No. 16)

Whatever work we undertake is also to be done in a spirit of *humble service*, not of authoritarian superiority. Jesus leads us in this matter, telling us that the "Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." Our predilection for the poor and needy must also characterise our service, for Jesus came preaching the Gospel to the poor.

Lastly, to be effective, we need to employ whatever human means we have to make our apostolate fruitful: modern technology, educational qualifications, resourcefulness in using available materials, collaboration with others, evaluation and proper planning. But all these are fruitless without the spirit of the apostle in which we need constantly to grow.

## PRAYER

Risen Lord,  
 You came to spread "fire on the earth" (Lk 12; 49)  
 but while you kindled it through your own life and death  
 You have entrusted your Church  
 with the work of continuing your mission.  
 Touch me with your Fire  
 the Fire of the Holy Spirit  
 who inflamed the hearts of the apostles  
 at the first Pentecost  
 transforming them into zealous bearers of your word  
 in place of the frightened and weak creatures  
 they showed themselves to be before.  
 Transform me, I beseech you,  
 Make me burn with your Love and Light  
 So that my very presence reveals your Presence,  
 So that my poor human toil  
 in the service of others  
 may be empowered by Your Grace  
 to bear much fruit for the kingdom,  
 that truly, the Fire you came to cast on the earth  
 May become a consuming Flame  
 Filling creation with your Love and Power.  
 Amen

Mary Mother of the Church,  
 Pray for us. Amen.

### Some Important Dates in the Life of Mother Veronica.

- 1 Oct. 1823: Birth of Sophie Leeves  
(Constantinople)
- 8 May 1845 : Death of Henry Daniel Leeves,  
Sophie's father, who was an  
Anglican minister.
- 2 Feb 1850 : Sophie and her sister Mary Ann are  
received into the Catholic Church.
- 19 March, 1851 : Sophie becomes a postulant among  
the Sisters of St. Joseph of the  
Apparition, Syros, receiving the  
name Sister Veronica of the Passion  
on the 14<sup>th</sup> September.
- 7 March 1862 : After serving in Athens, Piraeus and  
Tremorel in Europe, Sister Veronica  
is sent to Calicut in India as  
Superior.
- 1863 : Hearing an interior call to Carmel  
Mother Veronica comes to  
understand after a period of  
discernment that she is called to  
found an order of Active Carmelites  
for the Missions.
- 1867 : Mother Veronica is admitted into the  
Carmel of Pau as a novice. After



her profession she begins her painful search for a place for the new foundation.

- 16<sup>th</sup> July 1868 : The Apostolic Carmel is founded at Bayonne, France.
- 1870 : Bishop Marie Ephrem takes the first batch of Apostolic Carmelites to Mangalore India, where they begin the work of education in the schools entrusted to them.
- 1873 : Differences causing a rift between the Bishop and the foundress lead to the painful closure of Bayonne. The Bishop dies in Mangalore that same year. Mother Veronica re-enters the Carmel of Pau as a Novice.
- 1875 : Mother Veronica leaves Pau for the new foundation of the Carmel at Bethlehem. She undergoes a period of intense suffering during the last nine years of her stay there.
- 1887: Mother Veronica returns to the Carmel of Pau, where she spends the last years of her life. Meanwhile, the Apostolic Carmel flourishes in India.
- 1906 : Death of the foundress at Pau on November 16.

## SOURCES

Apart from the published works referred to in this book, sources include some of the unpublished *Letters* and the *Autobiography* which are to be found in the Archives of the Apostolic Carmel.

The *Letters* have been collected over the years from

- The Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition at Paris.
- The Archives of the Discalced Carmelites at Rome.
- The Archives of the Latin Catholic Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
- The Archives of the Apostolic Carmel and the Congregation of Carmelite Religious of Trivandrum.

The *Autobiography* was written at Pau in 1887 in obedience to Mother Veronica's confessor, Father Lazare, and completed in 1889. Only in 1940, was a copy of this interesting work sent to the Apostolic Carmel by the Carmel of Pau. Some of the chapters were meant only for Father Lazare and have been left out of this edition. The entire text was preserved in the Archives of the Bishop of Bayonne and a copy released to the Apostolic Carmel only a few years ago.

*Recollections* of Sisters from the Carmel of Pau were recorded after the visit of three of our Sisters to the Carmel. Written records were also sent by them to the Apostolic Carmel and are to be found in the Archives of the Congregation.

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