Prayer composed by :
Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified in ecstasy

Holy Sprit, inspire me,
Love of God, consume me,
On the true path lead me,
Mary, my Mother, look down upon me,
With Jesus bless me,
From all evil, from all illusion,
From all danger, preserve me.

THE FLIGHT OF THE EAGLES

SISTER M. CARMELA A.C.

The Flight of the Eagles

Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified and Mother Veronica

THE FLIGHT OF THE EAGLES

An appraisal of the relationship
between
the Servant of God
Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion
and
Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

The Apostolic Carmel Generalate
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FOREWORD

The 'Flight of the Eagles' is a humble attempt to acquaint those who know Blessed Mary and Mother Veronica, with the close spiritual relationship that existed between them. A human relationship enriches lives and inspires the friends to pursue a common goal on the journey of life. A spiritual friendship, on the other hand, challenges them and beckons them to soar upward and onward towards their goal, God Himself.

This upward and onward climb of life's journey has been compared by Sister Carmilla A.C., the author, to the flight of the eagles. In her preface she has given the characteristic features of these birds that have a tendency to soar upward towards the sun, the center of the solar system. The two persons, whose spiritual friendship features in the pages of this book, are different in many ways but, at the same time, have some things in common–their mystical dimension, their deep longing for God, and their desire to do God's will.

The 'Flight of the Eagles' highlights only the spiritual journey of the two mystics. The lives of both are inspirational. Those who hunger for God will find food for thought and spiritual nourishment in the present book. For biographical details the readers are recommended to refer to the books mentioned in the Bibliography.

I owe my gratitude to Sister Carmilla, for presenting the spiritual friendship between the two Carmelite sisters, with an apt title, 'The Flight of the Eagles.' I have no doubt that the readers will find sufficient inspiration for their own flight towards the 'Sun,' the eternal Bridegroom.

Sister Agatha Mary A.C.
Superior General
Apostolic Carmel, Bangalore.

PREFACE

This little book is titled 'The Flight of the Eagles'. It is an appraisal of the relationship between the Servant of God, Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion and Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified.

The cover picture denotes the flight of the eagles and their close intimacy. The eagles are metaphors for these two mystics in their flight to God. They were two kindred souls that soared to the heights of sanctity. Theirs was a veritable ascent to the summit of Mount Carmel, a relentless search for God's will and an unflinching, total response to the exigencies of God's love.

The eagle is a bird admired the entire world over for its distinctive characteristics. It is mentioned in the Bible at strategic moments in the history of the Jewish people. A very striking example is Ex.19:4 where God says: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings," referring to the marvellous way He saved Israel, from the slavery of Egypt, fostered them in the wilderness and brought them to the promised land.

The eagle is a bird that dwells in the clefts of high mountains. A rocky crag is its stronghold. The habitat of our mystics was the supernatural region of God's all-sufficing love.

The eagle is endowed with a keen vision. It sits still, moving only its eyes from side to side, spots its prey and stoops down swiftly to snatch it by surprise. Our protagonists were also gifted with a sharp, supernatural vision that enabled them to keep their gaze always focused on God and carry out stupendous tasks and innovations. Vision is also a strong characteristic of leadership which Mother Veronica and Mary of Jesus Crucified, though the latter was only an illiterate, lay sister, possessed.

The eagle is endowed with power and transcendence. Our mystics, too, strengthened by power from on high, were able to rise above the mundane interests and trivialities of the world in order to pursue their goals. Like the high flyers, their eyes were always set on God; they kept to their arduous route, never swerving from it.

The swiftness with which the eagle soars high up in the sky or swoops down to catch its prey is mentioned in the Bible. Deut. 28:49 says, "... From the ends of the earth like an eagle swooping down..." the Lord will bring a nation against the disobedient people. And in 2 Sam. 1:23 we have Saul and Jonathan described as being "swifter than eagles." Mother Veronica and Mary were remarkable for the quick flight they made to the heights of sanctity.

In Deut. 32:11 the Word of God says, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions, the Lord alone led him." In teaching the young ones to fly, the eagle

nudges and pushes them out of the nest, high into the air and then hovers under them to catch them with its wings as they fall through the air. This illustrates the way Mother Veronica groomed her charge.

The eagle is a fearless bird, never surrendering to the size or strength of its foe. The two mystics fought and conquered the assaults of the evil one and the temptations that beset them and never succumbed to their wiles.

The eagle is absolutely tenacious; it spreads its mighty wings and uses the air current to scale great heights and weathers the storm that lesser creatures fear. So too did Mother Veronica and Mary. They faced problems head on, never shirking the challenges that came their way.

The eagle flies high but makes less noise than other birds. It is in the great silence and solitude of their hearts and the celestial realms of Carmel, that our mystics found their solace and strength.

The eagle can also land very gently on the ground. So were our mystics who always had their feet on the ground of earthly realities and never lost touch with the sorrows and demands of human exigencies.

The eagle is always full of life and has the capacity to re-energize itself from time to time. It is proverbial for its youthfulness, for it undergoes a metamorphosis over a five-month period. The fasts, vigils and austerities of Carmel served to renew the inner strength of the

Carmelite mystics. In Psalm103:5, we have the Psalmist praising God for satisfying his desires with good things, "... so that his youth is renewed like the eagles."

Though the eagle is a ferocious bird, what is astonishing is that it nurtures its young ones. No member of the bird family is more gentle and attentive to its young ones than the eagle. The tenderness and gentleness with which Mother Veronica nurtured Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified were remarkable. When the latter was applauded and honoured by those around, she took care that the canker of pride may not enter her soul. On the other hand, when she was denounced and persecuted, she surrounded her with understanding, love and appreciation.

The eagle is a symbol of mercy in Jewish thought. It is a bird of prey, yet they say, it has a kind heart. Naturalists are amazed by the delicate consideration it shows to the young ones. Though it arrives at its nest with a flourish and a swish of its wings, it lands slowly and gently on its edge without disturbing the sleeping eaglets. Mother Veronica hardly referred to her charge except by calling her 'my child', 'my dear and holy child', or 'the lamb, my darling child'. She was full of consideration and concern but did not shrink from correcting her when necessary. The latter was unafraid to relate the prophecies and sound judgments that occurred to her during her ecstasies. Always there was a unique combination of sensitivity and strength in their relationship which is the essence of mercy, the perfect blend of love and justice.

Towards the latter part of their life together, however great be the maternal solicitude of Mother Veronica for Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, she was humble enough to ask for messages of enlightenment and guidance through the little one when she was in ecstasy. This reversal of roles resulted in their mutual bond becoming stronger.

The majesty and magnificence of these eagles merit our praise and perennial admiration. Together they soared–these two mystics - higher and higher till they lost themselves in heavenly felicity in the bosom of God.

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this book turned out to be a grace to me. I thank God for it, as it gave me an opportunity to delve deeper into the lives of these two mystics, the Servant of God, Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion and Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified.

I thank Sister Agatha Mary A.C., my Superior General for assigning me this task. It was a labour of love. I shall always remain grateful to Sister M. Vincent A.C., the former Superior General, for launching me into the apostolate of the written word.

To Sister M. Liceria A.C., an authority on Mother Veronica, I owe my thanks, for she was a great help in giving timely guidance.

Sister M. Violita A.C. was the one responsible for collecting the material for this work. May God bless and reward her for her selfless toil!

Sister Beatrice Pereira A.C. who prepared the typescript was a great blessing. Her helpful suggestions, given from time to time, were a great boon. I am immensely grateful to her.

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To Mrs. Susan Tommy I say a hearty thank you for assembling the information about the metaphorical aspect of the title.

Mrs. Gertrude Celestine's critical reading of the manuscript was a great help. May God bless her!

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

It was the year 1867. Mother Veronica of the Passion, a Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition, had accompanied her Superior General to Marseilles. On the way they stopped at La Capelette, their Mother House. It was Easter Saturday. Two or three days had hardly passed when Mother Veronica was sent for by the Mother General. Canon Olive, the superior of the Carmelites, was also present in the parlour.

"Sister, you really wish to be a good religious and be obedient, don't you?" asked Father Olive.

"Yes, Father," replied Mother Veronica not knowing what the matter was.

"Well, Sister, we want to entrust to you the care of the novitiate and to name you mistress of novices."

Mother Veronica was astounded. She looked at the Superior General helplessly, for she was all set to enter Carmel in order to imbibe its spirit before founding the Third Order Regular for the missions in India, and for this she was awaiting permission from Rome.

Father Olive waived aside the Superior General's explanation.

"That would be no obstacle," he said. "On the contrary, we would be very happy if a little of the spirit of Carmel could

be inculcated into our novitiate, that is to say, the spirit of prayer and mortification... You will then obey and accept the charge?"

Mother Veronica could only bow her head in submission.

The next day the Superior General took her to the novitiate. There were some twenty novices and postulants from different nations, France, England, the Arab countries. The congregation had a large number of houses in the Holy Land. The candidates from there were formed in the novitiate and then sent to various establishments.

It was Easter Wednesday. Mother Veronica was stopped on her way to the Chapel by a small Arab postulant.

"Mother, I must do the washing today. Will you please give me some of the novices to help me because I am often ill on Thursdays and I would like to finish it today?"

Her French was very bad. Her dress and bonnet dirty, worn out, as if she were the trash of the novitiate. Mother Veronica looked at her only for a moment. But it was enough. A flash of interior light told her that she was special. Somebody very special! This young girl participated in the Passion of Our Lord.

"Yes, my child, go and begin. I shall send you some sisters to help you," replied Mother Veronica at once. She was to say later:

> "This child is a part of me, no matter what they say or do, and at what distance she is. Jesus has put a tie between

> the two of us from the first moment that we met each other, which I believe, in spite of my misery and unworthiness will never be broken." (Letter to Father Lazare, 18 Jan, 1872).

She lost no time in hurrying to see Mother Honorine, whom she had replaced as novice mistress. Mother Honorine was ill in bed.

"Have you seen Mary the Arab?" she asked Mother Veronica.

"Who is Mary the Arab?" Mother Veronica wanted to know.

"She is the same one who has gone to the wash house. The day you arrived from Rome, the child came to me and said, 'Mother, a tall sister has arrived with our Mother General. I like her very much. You will see that she will be the next novice mistress.' I don't think so, I remarked. But she was insistent. 'You will see,' she said confidently."

With one look, Mary had taken a liking to Mother Veronica. Seen something special in her, knew what was God's will in regard to her. Was it a case of the mystic in the one recognizing the mystic in the other...some supernatural attraction that drew their hearts together?

Mother Honorine had a series of events to relate about Mary. "Every Friday she is ill." She traced the stigmata on her hand as if afraid to pronounce the word aloud.

"I understand so," added Mother Veronica. Mother Honorine looked surprised. She had many more things to state.

"Three or four Fridays before, she received the grace of the stigmata in the hands, the feet, the side and the crown of thorns around her head. The blood flowed from them profusely. Our Superior General knows about it. Several of the sisters, especially some old ones, have seen these extraordinary things and the ecstasies."

"But they would not believe?" asked Mother Veronica.

"No, not at all, it's all from the devil, they declared. Some dared even to strike this innocent lamb; gave her nothing to eat; only left-overs from the boarders' table; the worst of clothes were enough for her. Not a moment's rest, washing and emptying the garbage. She has to sleep in the garret. The sister, who was with her, ill-treated her, refusing even a little water one Friday to wet her parched lips. Oh! She was like Jesus on the cross."

"And you, being bed-ridden, could do nothing about it."

"That was it. I couldn't even observe her closely in those extraordinary states, or protect her. And Mary never complained."

"How then did you come to know of her sufferings?"

"From the novices who loved her very much. Mary would never tell the names of the persons who were cruel to her."

It was decided between Mother Honorine and Mother Veronica that Mary would sleep in Mother Honorine's room

on the days she was ill, that is to say, from Wednesday evening to Friday.

Mother Veronica went to see Mary on Thursday. She was seated on a chair beside her bed, suffering very much. She could not remain standing, because of the blister-like wounds on her feet. Mother Veronica began examining her very carefully. In the palm of her hand corresponding to the blister, a red and painful point had formed; when the blood had flowed, one could see the light through the hand. There were three well-impressed points on the left side, in the form of a red cross. She suffered intense pain in the head. It became extreme towards evening. Mother Veronica offered her some water to quench her burning thirst. It was like gall to her. She prayed with her and helped her to offer her sufferings for the Church and the Holy Father in union with the Passion of Our Lord.

"Mother, go and lie down, I pray you. Do not stay close to me; you'll catch my malady," Mary cried out.

Malady indeed! How simple and ignorant and innocent was this child, thought Mother Veronica.

"Be quiet, my child," she said. "It is not probable that I shall catch your malady, and then, in any case, it would be well to do the will of God."

At 5.00 a.m, the next day, Mary's hands were all stained with blood. The wounds had opened. The feet too began to bleed; the blisters disappeared and a hole was

formed. It pierced to the other side. Around 9.00 a.m Mary covered her face with her hands. Small moans escaped her. She had suffered much from her head. Her whole face was covered with blood. There was no trace of wounds.

Mother Veronica prayed earnestly:

"Lord, I pray you; make me see from where this blood is coming, so that I may give witness to this child."

Marvel of marvels! She saw a little above the right eyebrow, a hole as if big enough for a thorn narrowed down as it went deeper. Waves of blood spurted from this hole. Mother Veronica continued soaking up the blood. Suddenly the hole closed, leaving the skin perfectly smooth. Not a trace of a lesion!

Mother Veronica could not believe her eyes.

"Never in my life shall I forget what I felt in that moment," she confided to Mother Honorine, who could not see what was taking place as she was unable to move to a side on the bed.

It all lasted only a few seconds.

"I touched with my hands, I saw with my eyes so astonishing a marvel. The omnipotence of God only could, in a few moments, wound and heal without leaving the least trace," she exclaimed to herself.

"Oh! How filthy! Let me wash myself," cried Mary, now out of her ecstasy and rubbing her face and hands clean.

After midday the stigmata began to dry up and she even had supper with the community. Till then for two days she had eaten nothing.

Mother Veronica treasured all these things in her heart and carefully kept a note of everything.

"Mother, I shall die in your arms," Mary told her shortly after.

"That is not probable my child," answered Mother Veronica, for she was to leave for Carmel, and Mary was to take the habit of a sister of the Apparition of St. Joseph.

And yet it was to happen eleven years later.

She realized that she was to play a large role in the life of Mary and their destinies were to be linked in an inseparable manner.

CHAPTER 2

TOGETHER IN CARMEL

Mary related to Mother Veronica the past events of her life. What a succession of extraordinary happenings!

Mary, as she was called at baptism, was born on 5 January 1846 at Abellin, a modest Muslim village on a hill in Galilee. It had a handful of Greek Catholics. Her parents were George Baouardy and Mariam Shahym. They had twelve boys who died one after another in childhood. The parents made a pilgrimage on foot to the grotto of the Nativity at Nazareth and promised the Virgin Mother to call the child Mary if they were blessed with a daughter. When Mary was two years old, she had a little brother Paul (Boulos). She was not yet three when her parents died within a few days of each other. Paul was adopted by a maternal aunt and Mary by a well-to-do uncle.

Looking at a picture of St. Joseph, her father on his deathbed had prayed:

"Great saint, here is my child; the Blessed Virgin is her mother. Deign to look after her and be her father."

Mary always enjoyed the patronage of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin. One day the little child was lamenting the death of some birds which died when she accidentally washed them. She heard a voice in the depths of her heart:

"This is how everything passes! If you will give me your heart, I shall always remain with you."

Mary never forgot those words. To Mother Veronica it was not a surprise, for had she not heard a sweet, small voice in her heart that said:

"My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give my peace to you." *

It was on the unforgettable Easter Tuesday of 1840 after the inauguration of the Church, Papa, an Anglican minister, had built in Athens. How she would treasure those words, never breathing a word of it to any one, lest they lose their heavenly fragrance!

Mary was nearing her thirteenth birthday. Her uncle was now settled in Alexandria and was busy trying to marry her off. But Mary had set her heart on having Jesus as her spouse. On the eve of her proposed wedding day, she was praying before an icon of the Blessed Virgin, when she heard a voice which said:

"Mary, I am with you! Follow the inspiration I shall give you. I will help you."

Mary cut off her long, lovely braids, entwined them with the jewels she carried in the tray to the guests on the eve of her wedding. That she spurned the idea of marriage was now obvious to every one. Like Mary, Mother Veronica, too, had given up the idea of marriage and wanted only Jesus as her spouse. How similar their experiences were, she told herself! No amount of persuasion from her uncle could change Mary's mind. Enraged, the man put her to work in the kitchen.

*Autobiography, P. 15.

Mary's desire to meet her brother prompted her to send him a letter through a former Muslim servant of her uncle. The Muslim received her kindly but was furious at her fidelity to her Christian religion when he tried to make her renounce it. He slashed her neck with his scimitar, covered her with a cloak and threw her into a dark alley. It took place on 7 September 1858.

"How did you survive?" asked Mother Veronica aghast with wonder.

"I found myself in a grotto. Near me was a Religious in blue, who had picked me up, stitched up the wound and gave me some delicious soup and led me to the Church of St. Catherine at Alexandria. I am certain that it was the Virgin Mary. See, Mother, the scar."

All around the front of the neck was the scar, fully visible. Her voice ever after had remained hoarse.

"What happened to you after that?" asked Mother Veronica.

"A friar found me and sent me to work as a domestic help at Beirut and then at Jaffa. When I went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, I made a vow of perpetual chastity at the tomb of Our Lord."

Ah! So very much like what happened to her, thought Mother Veronica. How well she remembered that Holy Saturday when she was engaged in an argument with their family doctor, a staunch Presbyterian, about the meaning of

the Greek word 'est' in 'Hic est Corpus meus', the words of the Consecration at Mass. 'Est' meant 'is' and not 'represents', she had insisted. She had fallen into a swoon and came to, as the church bells were ringing 'the first Resurrection.' Her rigorous Lenten fast had made her ill. But the family forced her to rethink about the engagement with the young naval officer, she had broken, in order to belong to Christ. She was the cause of his unhappiness, they insisted. She had finally decided to put an end to it. Kneeling down before a small crucifix, she made a vow of perpetual chastity. From that day her health improved.

Mary continued, "I again took up a job with a Naggiar family who had settled down at Marseilles. Father Philippe Abdou, my confessor and Rector of the Church of St. Nicholas, directed me to the Sisters of St. Joseph."

The inexplicable ways of Providence, thought Mother Veronica! She recalled the marvels God had worked in her own life. The happy, close-knit family, her solid and pious upbringing as a devout Anglican, her father's sudden death on his way to the Holy Land that broke up the family circle, the attraction for the Eucharist that she and her sister, Mary Ann experienced when they prayed in the Catholic Church at Malta, their subsequent conversion to the Catholic Church from Anglicanism, their entry into the Order of St. Joseph of the Apparition, the tragic death of their only brother Henry and his family, the still, soft voice in her heart saying, "I want you in Carmel," while she was superior and headmistress at St. Joseph's European school at Calicut, the desire of Father

Marie Ephrem, a Carmelite missionary in India, who wanted to establish a Carmelite Third Order of active sisters to run the schools in Malabar of which she was to be the foundress... A thousand memories came crowding in.

And now she was awaiting permission from Rome to join Carmel. At this juncture, God has given into her hands this little Arab, whom Mother Honorine called, "a hidden treasure."

She clearly understood that she would have to let the little one, as Mary liked to be called, pursue her own course, for she was led unerringly by the Spirit of God along the way of perfection and was endowed with myriad, mystical gifts. At the same time, she must keep Mary close to her and protect her against those who try to harm her.

She was like the mother eagle that keeps nudging the eaglet, to stir it out its nest and teaches it to learn to fly and then, stretches out its wings beneath its young one to shield it from falling to the earth. But the eaglet had already outstripped its mother in dexterity and agility of movement, with its gaze transfixed on the dazzling sun. Mother Veronica was convinced that Mary had already scaled the heights of sanctity and was soaring higher and higher in her flight to God

"I wish this child to go to Carmel with you." It was the irresistible voice of Christ to Mother Veronica one morning after Communion. She was amazed. To take this precious soul to nourish and nurture it in the garden of Carmel – God's ways were inscrutable! But how could she do it?

"Lord, if you wish it, do everything yourself, for you understand that it is not for me to act in this matter," said Mother Veronica. The message was repeated.

She waited patiently for God to act. And God did act most wondrously.

The Chapter for deciding which postulants would receive the habit, took place shortly after. Mary the Arab lost by one vote. Mother Veronica's heart leaped.

"The finger of God is here; Lord, what you do is well done," she exclaimed. Now she could take Mary along with her to Carmel.

Mother Veronica had put Mary back in the garret. She went to see her. It was a Friday. Mary, as usual, was ill the whole day but the stigmata were not visible.

"My child," she said, "I must tell you that you have not been accepted at the Chapter and, therefore, you will not be able to take the habit. So I am free to tell you something I couldn't tell you before."

Mary took the rejection calmly.

"Would you like to come with me to Carmel where I am going?"

Mary responded, "Mother, where you go I shall go, and where you are I shall also be, and where you die I shall die," echoing Ruth's words in the Bible.

"Well, dear child, I am going to write to Mother Prioress to ask her if she is willing to receive you."

Mary did not know what Carmel was but just to hear of it made her radiant and filled her with joy.

"Now, my dear little one, I want to see if you are willing to be obedient. You are always ill on Thursdays and Fridays and you understand well that every week I can't leave all the novices in order to be near you and look after you. I am quite willing that you should suffer all that Our Lord wishes, but you will ask Him to be able to get up and work like the others.

"Mother," Mary replied joyfully, "I promise."

Mother Veronica then told her to get up at once and go down for supper with the community. Mary obeyed instantly.

Early next morning she entered her room and prostrated.

"What is it, speak," said Mother Veronica for it was the time of the Great Silence.

"Mother, last night the Holy Virgin came and told me that I would not have this illness any more until next year during Lent for five weeks."

"Very good, we shall see," Mother Veronica remarked.

Mary continued to suffer on Fridays but the stigmata were no longer visible.

Mother Veronica wrote to Mother Elias, the Prioress of the Carmel of Pau, asking permission for herself and the young Arab girl from Nazareth who had no vocation to be a sister of St. Joseph, to join the Great Carmel. She was very virtuous and was obedient to the point of a miracle, she remarked. Not a word did she say about the great mystical

gifts Mary possessed. Mother Elias was only too happy to receive both of them.

Father Philippe Abdou, the parish priest of the Greek United Church, had known Mary since her arrival in France. He was delighted that she was going to Carmel.

"She needs to be in a cloister, and I thank God that she has found someone to protect her."

Yes, Mother Veronica would do all in her power to protect her as they were destined to grow together in the love and experience of God. Each had a large and permanent place in the life and heart of the other.

The permission from Rome to enter Carmel arrived. She had finished her work with the novices at La Capelette. One day after Holy Communion Our Lord said to Mother Veronica. "Now, my daughter, go, you have accomplished what you have to do here."

Mother Veronica sent Mary ahead of her to be with Father Abdou's mother, while she discussed some business regarding the new foundation of the Third Order with Mgr. Howard and Mgr. Magnin at Annecy. After ten days they left Marseilles for the Carmel of Pau.

They arrived at the Carmel of Pau at 3.00 pm on 15 June 1867. The sisters were reciting the First Vespers of the Blessed Trinity. The great door of the cloister opened. Mother Veronica and Mary fell on their knees. Mother Elias and the sisters welcomed them with open arms.

The long, blood-stained ascent of Mount Carmel had begun.

CHAPTER 3

A TASTE OF PARADISE

Mary was given the postulant's dress and the name Mary of Jesus Crucified. Jesus Crucified–was it a presage of things to come? Mother Veronica wondered. She knew Mary was to be one of those crucified mystics to whom the Holy Spirit had granted the inebriating ways of reproducing and proclaiming the mystery of Christ's crucifixion.

On 2 July Mother Veronica received the holy Carmelite habit at a private ceremony without outward pomp. But graces flowed into her soul; she was, as it were, beside herself with joy. For several days she kept the intellectual presence of Our Lord beside her. He spoke to her and directed her in everything, as if she saw Him. She had already received this grace on the first days after her entry into the congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Prayer was her joy. She had almost no distraction. Praying the Holy Office was her delight. "Sweet tears flooded me," she recalled later. Her desire for penance waxed stronger. It was like a second spiritual childhood. She confided everything to the prioress Mother Elias, a mother par excellence! She was in another element. Her health improved and she was able to observe the entire rule of Carmel.

How well Mother Veronica remembered St. Veronica Giuliani, the Capuchin stigmatist, who was the inspiration behind her name, Veronica of the Passion, given to her at the prompting of her confessor, on the day of her Vestition!

The ascent of Carmel was to be an ascent of Calvary for both Mary and her and the love for the passion of Christ would be furthered still more. Mary's extraordinary gifts were not made known to the sisters but intuitively they surrounded her with curiosity and admiration. Mother Veronica was afraid. This might instil pride in her and spoil God's work in the innocent child. Wisely, she put the matter before Mother Elias, who forbade the sisters to show excessive admiration that might harm the simple sister.

Mary longed for the Carmelite habit. She prayed to St. Elias to whom she had a great devotion. On his feast day, at table, she was lost in ecstasy. All thought she had fallen into a swoon and carried her to a room close by. Mother Veronica whispered to the Prioress:

"She is in ecstasy; you have only to tell her to come back to herself out of obedience. She will do it instantly."

"Child, out of obedience, get up and come back!" said the Prioress.

Mary seemed to awake with a start and walked back to the refectory. St. Elias had appeared to her and told her she would soon wear the holy habit of Carmel. When she returned to the refectory she was back in ecstasy again. This was the first time it happened in public in Carmel.

On 27 July, the Octave of St. Elias' feast she received the holy habit. Mother Veronica found her in an ecstatic state, though it was not very visible.

The community thought she would draw down more blessings as a choir sister. But try as they might, they could not make her read the Breviary as she was totally illiterate. Mother Veronica, kneeling at her side, pointed out the versicles. But Mary did not succeed in reading a single line. It was clear that God did not want her to be a choir sister.

As per the instructions of the Father General, Father Dominic of St. Joseph, Mother Veronica underwent a shortened novitiate. She clung more and more to her holy vocation. Her health was quite normal; the austerities of Carmel – silence, solitude, fasts, abstinence and vigils – a delight. She was astonished at the two vocations so markedly different. She had been happy doing the works of charity, as a sister of St. Joseph and now she is delighted to live as a cloistered nun. She was God's chosen instrument to fill the void she saw in the vision of a globe in which a portion was lacking. This took place during her retreat and she was made to understand that this void would be filled by the foundation of an active Carmelite order.

"Mother, do you believe that I have the spirit of Carmel?" she asked Mother Elias.

"Yes, my daughter, I believe," answered the good Mother.

During her profession ceremony on 15 September 1867, while receiving the black veil, she prostrated, as was customary, in the form of a cross in the Chapel. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified at that moment saw a great cross hovering over her. Mother Veronica had confided only to Mother Elias,

that during the preparatory retreat, she had imprinted the sign of the cross over her heart, with a metal cross heated in the fire. Henceforth the holy cross was to be her portion.

And that was Mary's too. The passionate devotion of both of them to the Passion of Christ knit them still closer.

"I was like her, all that we saw, all that we heard was delicious to us," observed Mother Veronica. She now had the grace of state to draw up the Constitutions of the new congregation, the Apostolic Carmel, said Mother Elias. Mother Veronica obeyed. She had scarcely tasted the happiness of the heavenly life of Carmel, when she had to set out to find a place to found the novitiate for the Third Order Regular.

Mother Veronica was directed by Father Dominic of St. Joseph, the Carmelite Superior General, to begin a foundation in Savoy. She had Mother Elias' promise that when she had done the work obedience demanded of her, she would again be received back into the Carmel of Pau. Donning a black skirt over her habit, a big mantle and a hat and black veil, she looked like an adventuress and was taken as one. On 15 December 1857, she left the Carmel of Pau alone. God showed sensibly to Mary, who wanted to follow her, that it was not His will. She was to remain hidden in the cloister. Who can deny that her prayers, penances and sufferings in the solitude of Carmel, must have gone a long way to help found the Third Order Regular by Mother Veronica!

On Christmas day, as Mother Veronica was praying in a deserted Chapel in a village near La Roche, she found herself as it were, in a desert, quite barren, with a big cross in front of her. She clung to it as her only support. It was indeed, the bare cross awaiting her during her sojourn in Savoy.

She spent five months in La Roche, receiving no reply to her letters from Father General. She did not know that he was ill. His letters of recommendation had his signature but not his seal. In this complete solitude Mother Elias' correspondence alone consoled her. She kept informing her about Sister Mary who had again received the grace of the stigmata during the Lent of 1868, as she had foretold.

After a long sojourn, Mother Veronica returned to Pau utterly dejected. But Mother Elias advised her to try a house at Bayonne recently vacated by the cloistered Carmel sisters. Joy and peace filled her desolate heart and a new courage to work for the glory of God and for the good of the missions of India, as she approached this house. She regained the strength which she had lacked totally for some time. Mgr. La Croix gave her the permission to accept candidates, make the necessary repairs, set up the Episcopal enclosure and enter the choir of the Carmel of Pau, while waiting for the house to be vacated by the new tenants.

She found Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified going through terrible trials - possession by the devil, who tried to kill her, putting in her food bits of pointed glass and bent pins to choke her to death. One day Mother Veronica seated at table by her side, stirred her soup to make sure that there was nothing

harmful in it. Sister Mary had just started eating it, when she turned purple. Under the influence of Satan, blasphemies, sacrileges and calls to disobedience were a common occurrence in her life during the 40 days of possession, as Sister Mary had predicted.

Sometimes this villain, Satan took her form. On one occasion, Mother Veronica thought it was Sister Mary of Jesus who made a sign to accompany her to the terrace. Seated beside her, she told her several things about the proposed foundation, showed her great affection and a number of little bottles of distilled waters, essence of orange flowers she claimed she had made herself. Pouring a little in Mother Veronica's hand, she insisted that she tasted it.

"No, we can't eat or drink between meals without permission," said Mother Veronica.

"But, it's just a little."

"I'm astonished that you wish me to break the rule, but I don't want to do it."

The sham Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified put the bottle back and left the place, saying that she had something to do. Mother Veronica looked for her all over the terrace, exclaiming:

"Where has this child gone? She has been so very brisk." It was long after that she came to know that the devil confessed that he had deceived 'that wicked Mother Veronica' taking the form of the '*little nothing*' – the name by

which Mary preferred to be called – and leading her to the terrace on the roof.

On 24 May 1868 in the hermitage of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mary received the holy name of Jesus marked on her heart. On the following Fridays, her heart bled and the letters OJS were impressed on bits of cloth with which she tried to stop the flow of blood. One day Mother Veronica found her seated on the floor, her hand resting on her heart as she suffered intense pain.

"Mother, look, what does OJS mean?" Mary asked.

"I think it means the name of Jesus, O Jesus Savior."

Mother Veronica collected a few of these compresses which later on were used to heal illnesses.

The exorcism conducted by Father Manuadas and the prayers of the sisters with relics, gave Mary of Jesus Crucified only momentary relief. At the end of forty days of diabolical possession, which biographer, Father Brunot, SCJ, calls the first season in hell, Satan left her. This was followed by four days of angelic possession. Mary looked transfigured all of a sudden. It was 4 September 1868 exactly as the *little one* had predicted. All this suffering had been permitted by God and was redemptive. In moments of respite she had only called out to the Holy name of Jesus, saying, "I want to suffer more for Jesus."

CHAPTER 4

THE LITTLE CARMEL

Foundation and Dissolution

After a long search and overcoming all adverse circumstances, Mother Veronica had decided to begin the novitiate at Bayonne. It was a dilapidated building rented out by the cloistered Carmelites who lived there earlier.

On 16 July 1868 along with two novices she took possession of the new house. The religious training she gave the novices was sound, along the right principles. The Carmel of Pau and of Bayonne, generously shared their farm produce. Yet there was great poverty. But joy and peace abounded in the little community of Mother Veronica and the novices. They called their house the Little Carmel.

Meanwhile, preparations were going on at the Carmel of Pau for the foundation of a cloistered Carmel and a Third Order Regular of active Carmelites in Mangalore, India. This was the great desire of Mgr. Marie Ephrem, the Vicar Apostolic of Mangalore. Six of the former, among whom were the Prioress, Mother Elias and the novice, Mary of Jesus Crucified, and three of the Tertiaries of the Little Carmel at Bayonne, were to go to India to start these foundations along with the Carmelite Fathers, Gratian and Lazare. The Tertiaries were Sister Marie des Anges from Nimes, the Irish Sister Elias of St. Teresa and a white-veiled sister, Sister Mary of Joseph.

It was on 19 August 1870 that they embarked on their voyage which was to be fraught with disaster.

Sisters Euphrasia and Stephanie fell sick and died on the way and were buried at Aden. Mother Elias also, who headed the group, passed away after a bout of severe illness at St. Joseph's European school, Calicut, India. This was the same house that Mother Veronica had founded in India, about nine years ago as a sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Mother Elias' last advice to Mary of Jesus Crucified as she died in her arms was:

"Do what you are told."

What a striking coincidence! A re-inforcement of the deep spiritual orientation that Mary of Jesus Crucified and Mother Veronica shared! For Mother Veronica, her motto was 'Obedience is my life,' as she often reiterated.

They reached Mangalore on 19 November 1870. All went well for a time with the cloistered Carmelites, and the Tertiaries, living in separate houses on the same campus at St. Ann's, Mangalore. Sister Agnes, who came later, was made superior of the Tertiaries by Bishop Marie Ephrem. They began teaching in the school. Peace and union reigned in the community. Mother Veronica in Bayonne was consoled to hear from Bishop Marie Ephrem that he was very happy with her sisters in India.

However, the responsibility as mother and foundress weighed on her heavily. She opened her heart to Mary of the Crucified expressing her innermost feelings in late 1871:

> ... I am so completely left to myself and 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 unlimited confidence in the mercy of God and that He will direct everything for me according to His holy will which urges me always towards India.

Mary of Jesus Crucified made her Profession on 21 November 1871 after a retreat of 21 days given by Father Lazare. On her Profession day, Bishop Marie Ephrem gave a glowing homily:

> "...My dear child, you have heard the voice of the Beloved from your earliest childhood and you have come from the mountains of Lebanon. Oh, how this Divine Saviour has overwhelmed you with His mercies!"

It was a festival of ecstatic transports for Mary.

Shortly after, a great reversal of attitude on the part of the Bishop took place. Our Lord had told Mary of Jesus Crucified, the day after her Profession:

"Tell everything to your confessor and to the Bishop if need be. Say nothing to anyone else."

"If Our Lord does not wish it, I forbid you to tell me anything," said the Bishop. But the Mother Prioress and the Mistress of novices took offence that she was confiding only in Father Lazare, her confessor, and persuaded the Bishop that she was under the influence of Satan.

Unfortunately, the sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition and the Tertiaries of Bishop Michael Antony, who were

already working in India, were amalgamated with the Carmelite Tertiaries in Mangalore and even given authority over the superior, Mother Agnes, by Bishop Marie Ephrem. Irregularities crept in. Mother Agnes objected but Bishop Marie Ephrem ignored her. As per the advice of Father Lazare, she wrote a letter of resignation. The Bishop accepted it and appointed Mother Marie des Anges as superior. Shortly afterwards, Mother Agnes returned to france.

Mother Veronica never lost faith in Mary of Jesus Crucified whatever be the reports she heard. She wrote to Father Lazare on 1 February 1872,

> ... and that one, most dear of all, my precious new spouse of Jesus Crucified. I am not astonished at anything painful that might happen to her, or at anything that might be said of her. That should be so, and it shall be so always, otherwise she would not have a real resemblance to Jesus. But the more they say, the more I shall be interiorly assured that Jesus is with her and in her.

Again on 1 June the same year in a letter to Father Lazare, she expressed her faith in the Arab sister, still more ardently:

> ...Your reverence knows and feels how much Sister of Jesus Crucified is my child. I have confidence that she will die in my arms, because I am so certain that, in spite of my unworthiness, Jesus wishes that I be united with this soul, beloved of His Heart, who Himself guards and keeps her, that I never have a doubt regarding her. Besides, my conviction is so strong that I believe that if I doubted the

> work of God in this soul, I would also doubt the existence of God Himself. This is a strong saying, but it is to express to you the feelings of my heart. In all, I submit and will always submit to what the Holy Church, our Mother will decide.

Father Lazare, their confessor, also aroused the Bishop's ire. He was divested of his office as Vicar General and transferred to Mahe on 28 February 1872 and later to France.

Mary of Jesus Crucified was left alone with no help of a confessor and was surrounded by a hostile circle. The little seer had a prophetic word to tell the Bishop, "Monsignor, you are planning to send back Father Lazare. Well, within six months you will die in anguish, and you will remain in purgatory until the first Mass that will be said in the Carmel of Bethlehem."

Sometime in March 1872, Mother Veronica had written to Sister Agnes:

> ... The dear Mother Prioress of Pau is not told anything. They do not allow this dear child to write either to her or to me. I assure you that causes us great pain. ... The two superiors of Great Carmel ... are altogether under illusion regarding her and they imagine that this saintly child is deceived and possessed by an evil spirit, but all that does not astonish us. She had foretold that it would be so – it is then, only one more proof of her sanctity.

The devil had taken possession of Jesus Crucified again. She went through what was called the second season in hell.

She was constantly tempted to leave the cloister and to go back to the world and was compelled to commit infractions of the rule by a power greater than her. Bishop Marie Ephrem sent her back to France on 5 November 1872. It was a heart-breaking meeting between Mother Veronica and her spiritual daughter, Mary of Jesus Crucified, on her return to Pau. The expression of pain and the heavy tears that fell from her eyes said it all, as the *little one* pressed the old mother to her heart.

When Bishop La Croix of Pau heard of these developments in Mangalore, he forbade any religious from his diocese to be sent to the Carmelite mission in India.

Six months had scarcely passed, before Bishop Marie Ephrem died in Mangalore, almost suddenly and alone. It was Maundy Thursday 10 April 1873.

The Little Carmel was undergoing hard times. Poverty plagued the sisters. The union of hearts, the gaiety in poverty and cordial affection were all on the decline. Deprived of all material resources, Mother Veronica had to depend solely on Madame Gil Moreno de Mora, who had been a generous benefactress and a faithful friend to her from the very first moment they met. It was she who had provided several accessories for their chapel, built the hermitage of the Sacred Heart and the compound wall and bought up the adjoining field. Since the purpose of preparing and sending Tertiaries to India, could not be fulfilled anymore, Mother Veronica was advised by Bishop La Croix and Father Inchauspe, the Superior, to close down the Little Carmel.

"Everything will be swept off," the dear holy child, Mary of Jesus Crucified had predicted. The desolation Mother Veronica went through was beyond words. Only a special grace from God sustained her as she sent away the novices back to their homes or placed them in other convents. It was 10 October 1873. The Little Carmel had existed for 5 years, 5 months and 5 days.

Mother Veronica traced her steps back to the Carmel of Pau. She would once more be in those hallowed precincts, which she called the gates of paradise, and share the vicissitudes of the *little one's* life till the end.

In 1878 the Jesuits took over the diocese of Mangalore under Bishop Pagani S.J. Some Tertiaries, who were sent to the convent in Quilon, preferred to work under the Carmelite fathers there and eventually severed connection with the Apostolic Carmel. Sister Elias from Cannanore had earlier been transferred to Quilon. From there she went to Trivandrum and founded the Holy Angels' Convent, in 1880, which became the mother house of the new congregation, called the Congregation of Carmelite Religious (CCR).

However, the Apostolic Carmel Congregation at Mangalore, Calicut and Cannanore kept flourishing with local candidates.

CHAPTER 5

THE MYSTICS' REUNION

The Prioress of the Carmel of Pau and the whole community could never show Mother Veronica enough affection and sympathy to heal her heart-break. And Mary of Jesus Crucified could never tire of giving her every sign of devotion.

God's inexplicable ways! It was Mother Veronica who had guided and protected her when she was a postulant and now it was Mary of Jesus Crucified who directed the old mother along the way of perfection. She became a channel of special grace to Mother Veronica, making known to her God's holy will, when in ecstasy.

The single eye! The simple gaze! The total surrender! A holocaust without rapine! This was the agenda that both of them followed at Pau.

The little nothing sent for her the very day after she arrived. She was in rapture and said:

"The Lord wishes that you be called Sister Marie Therese of Jesus and no more Veronica of the Passion. Be always very little, for there is always place for the very little ones."

From that day on Mother Veronica was called by this name. Her health had been totally ruined. Rheumatism had entered her bones; shooting pains in the knee made observance of the rule difficult; she received only the white veil privately. She had crossed her fiftieth year. Mother Veronica was accustomed to having a cup of tea made in the

English way at the afternoon collation. It revived her when she felt ill. Of late she noticed that Mary of the Crucified was avoiding her.

"Come here, child," she said, "tell me why you keep away from me."

"Our Lord said to me that you should not have tea anymore. I avoided you because I didn't want to tell it to you."

"But why didn't you tell it to me immediately? I would have given even my eyes if Jesus had asked for them."

"But you are ill, mother. And I feared it would pain you if you were deprived of tea."

"Jesus will give me the grace to take anything else and I promise that I will never have it again."

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had knowledge of what Mother Veronica said and did and even thought. One day the latter told her novice mistress, Sister of the Infant Jesus, of her desire to give some fine material she had brought from Bayonne, to her sister Mary Ann, who was now Mother Ignacie in Greece. She was the foundress of an Ursuline Order and was taking care of poor orphans. This material was originally meant for Mangalore.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified told her in ecstasy that she should not think of disposing of anything she had brought, for all belonged to God and not to her and that she should remain in complete indifference and poverty. How could she have known this! Mother Veronica wondered.

"I was also with you and I heard everything," Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified said, still in ecstasy. A kiss on the forehead and her customary salutation 'Peace' ended the interview.

From the time Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified arrived in Pau, she had been talking about a foundation at Bethlehem. The obstacles to be surmounted were varied and numerous, but Sister Mary was certain that God willed it. She wanted a sign from God that this project was indeed His will. She poked a leaf of a pink geranium in the mud in an earthen pot. If it took root she would take it as a positive sign. Soon it gave out a little shoot. She gave it to the care of Mother Veronica. It grew tall and beautiful and was covered with flowers, a glorious sight indeed! One day the *little one* carried the heavy wooden box in which the pot was placed and left it on the platform of the altar in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the Oratory. "The children", as she called the little angels, helped her, she said.

Mother Veronica's second novitiate was coming to an end. She was not able to keep to the rule even for a single day. But she was admitted to profession by omitting the words, "which is without mitigation", in the formula of the vows. She had asked St. Teresa of Avila for a sign if she wanted her as her daughter–she must be able to kneel down when she made her profession. St. Teresa answered her prayer. On 21 November 1874 Mother Veronica made her Solemn Profession in Chapter in the hands of Mother Marie of the Immaculate Conception. After the ceremony she walked up to the choir and knelt near the little communion grille. She

had a vision of Mother Elias in the company of Sister of Holy Heart of Mary, Sister Euphrasia and Sister Stephanie. Mother Elias embraced her saying, "Happy suffering which produces so much joy."

The preparatory retreat had been replete with all kinds of interior sufferings, but on the evening of her profession she was filled with graces and great joy. She was able to remain on her knees for a long time before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

Mother Veronica's youngest sister, Catherine, wrote to her that her mother, Mrs. Marina Haultain was very ill in England. As Catherine's husband was also very ill at the same time, they did not live in the same house. It was a Protestant sister of Mercy who looked after her dying mother. At 5.00 p.m on 12 December, 1874, Mother Veronica was telling the mistress of novices about her mother's illness. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified happened to hear this. "Your mother is dead," she said. "But her faith has saved her." As the bell rang for prayer all hurried to the choir.

Mother Veronica recommended her mother to God's mercy. She felt an interior assurance that she was in purgatory. Mary Ann and she had prayed and asked others' prayers for her. Masses, novenas and public prayers were offered at "Gesu" by a large crowd assembled during the Lenten sermons: "For the conversion from Protestantism of a mother whose daughter has been asking for it for the last twenty years." And now she had died a Protestant! In great sorrow she asked Our Lord for some assurance of her salvation.

On 21 December Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified asked to see Mother Veronica. The Prioress and some sisters were enjoying the ravishing spectacle of the *little one* in ecstasy. It was more than an ecstasy; it was the Angel. Mother Veronica knelt by her side. "Your mother had just come here," said the *little one.* "She had been very close to the doors of hell, because she always wanted to do her own will. But she was saved by the prayers of her children. The *little nothing* has prayed for her. She asked me to tell you not to do your own will, to be grateful for all that God has done for you. You are not grateful enough for being here. She asks your pardon for not having left anything to you (in her will). If she had known she would have left everything to you and would have come on her knees to kiss the dust on the threshold of the door." Mother Veronica wanted to know if her sister, Mary Ann was where God wanted her to be. "Yes, both of you are where God wants you. You are more favoured than your sister. But God is with her too. Your mother prays that the other sister follows (Catherine) you."

Was her father saved was the next thing Mother Veronica wanted to know. *The little one* only replied by raising her eyes and singing "heaven" in an enchanting manner. Tears of joy flowed from Mother Veronica's eyes as she gazed at this ecstatic, angelic figure and its celestial beauty without being surfeited. She was indeed, "a miracle of God's grace" as Bishop La Croix called her!

CHAPTER 6

A CARMEL OF PREDILECTION

It was a leap into the unknown. It was Mary of Jesus Crucified's idea to have a Carmel in Bethlehem. There were a great number of obstacles to overcome. "God wills this work. It will be done. You will see that all difficulties will cease when God's time comes," she announced. It was indeed so. When God's hour struck, the necessary authorization from the Holy See arrived and all other difficulties melted away.

On 20 August 1875 the caravan of ten sisters including Mary of Jesus Crucified and Mother Veronica set out. Fathers Bordachar and Estrate and the foundress Mlle. Bertha Dartigaux accompanied them. Their first stop was at Lourdes where they attended Mass. They then stopped at Montpellier for three days. Great was their joy on seeing Father Lazare. It was the first time they met after the sad events in India. At Marseilles they paid a visit to the sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Good Mother Emilie, the Mother General, welcomed them with great joy and affection. When passing by Alexandria, the *little one* took some sisters to the place where the Holy Virgin had hidden her and nursed her back to life. For fifteen days they were lodged at the Hospice of the Franciscan fathers. Father Guido, Director of the Hospice saw to all their needs. On 10 September they set out on the rough ascent to Jerusalem. Mother Veronica was deeply touched by the holy places they visited, specially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the first and the holiest Church

in the world. She could never forget the moment when she saw it for the first time. "Everyone hurried to set foot on the ground and prostrate in the dust... to kiss the thrice holy ground," she recounted later. All the beautiful experiences of her religious life were eclipsed before the profound mysteries enclosed within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Way of the Cross was another enriching experience. What touched her to the depths of her soul was the word "Hic" in the profound prayer at every Station. At Calvary she could not contain her emotions. Her soul could not separate itself from this Sepulchre and it would remain there all her life, she was certain. The Cenacle, Gethsemane, the Carmel of Pater Noster, the site of the Ascension on Mount Olives – the four days of these spiritual experiences passed in no time. On 24 September they were installed in a temporary house by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The two priests and Mlle Dartigaux departed for France. "Everyone left and we remained in our solitude," recalled Mother Veronica.

The purchase of the land for the Carmel of Bethlehem was executed in a miraculous way. The *little one* pointed out the place where it was to be situated. They had no plan to build the house nor could they find an architect and fully depended on the prophetic utterances of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Solely under obedience, Mother Veronica agreed to draw up a plan as per the instructions Sister Mary gave her in ecstasy. The cardboard model of the plan, drawn to scale, made by Mother Veronica was submitted to the Bethaaram Father Mathew, who found it satisfactory. It was in the shape

of a tower. Mary of Jesus supervised the work with zeal and self-sacrifice, not hesitating to "plunge into lime and sand." The laying of the foundation stone was on 24 March 1876 by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified did not attend the ceremony as she was in ecstasy. The stigmata too had reappeared.

On 21 November 1877 this Carmel on the hill of David was blessed by the Patriarch and the solemn entry of the sisters into the new convent took place. "How happy we were! To find ourselves in a real monastery once again. The solitude and silence of our dear cells seemed to be a real luxury, after having lived, as it were, in public for more than a year in a temporary house," exclaimed Mother Veronica.

It was during the first Mass here that Mary of Jesus Crucified saw in a vision, the soul of Bishop Marie Ephrem being released from purgatory. After the meal served for all, the Patriarch established the enclosure. Father Chirou was appointed as the new chaplain. On that day the *little one* was in ecstasy. Mother Veronica saw her eating something white like an almond. She was allowed to take a little from her lips and share it with the Sub Prioress, Mother Teresa of Jesus. Mary of Jesus Crucified called it the "fruit from paradise." "I ate this food with devotion and happiness, for surely it was nothing from this world. It had a sweet taste and seemed to crunch like an almond, but not like the almonds of the world," Mother Veronica exclaimed. She was the only one to receive this favour from Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified in Bethlehem. This is not surprising, considering that the spiritual ties

between Mother Veronica and this saintly child of hers had grown ever stronger and deeper over the years.

Mother Veronica was particularly inspired to practise humility, which she said was quite contrary to her character... and, so to say, to her whole being. Father Guido the extra-ordinary confessor of the community, allowed her to practise this vow for short periods at a time, which helped her to acquire this virtue. She says:

> "For a long time, I had tried to combat pride in me even from the beginning of my conversion, but I think I made very little progress... Our Lord seemed to have taken charge of sending them (humiliations) to me 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."*

The land around the convent was full of steep rocks, with ups and downs. One day as Mother Veronica was gathering flowers for the Chapel, she had a fall and dislocated her right hand at the wrist. A priest who practised medicine did not set it properly. After several months an Arab woman tried to reset it. She pulled her arm roughly, put her foot against her chest, and tried to fix the bone in place. She could only torture her and make her suffer excruciating pain. She always remained crippled with her fingers turned stiff.

One day Sister Mary of Jesus in ecstasy told Mother Veronica that Jesus wished her to follow the community life and that she, who was old, should give good example to the

*Autobiography P. 169, 170.

young ones. From that day on, she was able to return to the refectory where only her bread was cut for her. It was all the more remarkable that she received later the grace to be able to observe the Rule completely without mitigation, for six years, in spite of her age and infirmities.

As long as Mary of Jesus Crucified lived, the most cordial and affectionate relationship existed between the Carmel of Bethlehem and the Carmel of Pau. In spite of the "terrible daily routine" and vexations of community life, charity reigned supreme. If the superior made the sisters suffer, Mary of Jesus Crucified reproached her severely and loudly.

Something troubled Mother Veronica:

> ... From the time I knew this child, I loved her in God and not by nature. I saw that she had received gifts and extraordinary graces that it was all the more necessary that she remained in humility and nothingness, and I saw throughout her life that when God gave her the most marvellous graces, it was then that creatures or the demons had permission to torment and humiliate her. And, on the contrary, when creatures exalted her, God plunged her into desolation and ineffable annihilation.*

The absolute power that the foundress, Mlle Dartigaux had given to this illiterate white-veiled sister regarding every matter of the community, was also of great concern to Mother Veronica:

> She was not yet confirmed in grace and she had to be all the more little and humble when God had given her such

*Autobiography P. 173.

signal graces. God knows that I loved this dear child. When she was persecuted and ill-treated, I supported her and protected her with all my strength, but when I saw her exalted I feared for her and I never lent a hand in exalting her, at least in her presence. On the contrary, I thwarted her. However, she has always loved me and I am convinced that she knew in what manner I stood by her and had her perfection very much at heart.*

She had never, until the end, ceased calling Mother Veronica, Mother, when they spoke in confidence. And to the old mother, the little one was always the cherished child of her heart.

A year later, Mother Veronica's younger sister, Catherine from England, came on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She was at this time "a bigoted ritualist," and also had "too much pride," according to Mother Veronica. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified spoke to her for a long time. But there was no change in Catherine. When the former was in ecstasy, Mother Veronica asked her, what would open the eyes of her sister. The reply was, "When humility is lacking, God cannot force the soul, but you make the acts of humility, and she will have the light."

The reversal of roles became more pronounced as the days went by. The extraordinary devotion Mary of Jesus Crucified had to the Holy Spirit was the means of her inspirations and predictions. The little eagle had far outstripped the mother eagle in her flight towards the summit of sanctity.

*Autobiography P. 173.

CHAPTER 7

SCALING THE HEIGHTS

It was 5 January 1878. Mother Veronica was stricken with grief. For Mary had crossed her 32nd birthday and, as she predicted, this would be her last year before she left for her homeland, heaven. Father Chirou teased her about the prediction of her death: "Well, you see, you are not yet dead. You are keeping well!"

"Let it be Father, you will see that the three years are not yet over," was her rejoinder.

The more she was exalted, the more she suffered desolation, interior trials which were so atrocious that often she could bear them no longer. The poor child was quite disfigured. She wore on her face such an expression of suffering, of anguish that it was painful to look at her. It seemed, as if, Jesus Himself rejected her. She even kept away from receiving communion because of the intense suffering. Then she went away to "shake herself off" as she said. She did the hardest work, the work of four people, or went to be with the workers whom she had to supervise as she could talk to them in Arabic. Some months before her death, according to the order from Our Lord, she desired to wear the cord of Saint Francis and be a member of his Third Order. Mother Veronica was alone with her while she received the cord from Father Guido and she helped her to tie it round her waist.

It was at this time that a wave of repentance swept over the Carmel of Mangalore. The superiors and some sisters

wrote letters asking her pardon for misunderstanding her. "All that has taken place was willed by Jesus. May His name be praised! It is God who permitted everything." This was her virtuous response. For her every thing was a grace.

She went to the place where they had bought the land for a Carmel at Nazareth. And she pointed out the spot where the Risen Lord appeared to the disciples going to Emmaus. In July she suffered attacks of suffocation. Her chest and feet were swollen. On the 26th, the feast of St. Ann and of the Prioress, she was absent from the community. The door of her room was closed; when she heard Mother Veronica's voice she opened it. She was in great suffering and did not want to see anyone. She was tempted against N.N. Something had gone wrong and she did not want to spoil the joy of the community, so she hid in her cell. Someone had said something against Mother Veronica. And Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified defended and excused her. Mother Veronica tried to console her and remained with her until Mother Ann came to say the rosary with her.

The last time when they were allowed to speak outside of recreation, was 29 July. The dear and holy child came to look for Mother Veronica in her cell and wanted to speak to her first. She made her sit on the mattress while she sat on the floor at her feet and talked for quite some time. It was indeed the last time. Rising to go, she said, "Mother, pray for me and ask for humility for me." "Yes, my *little one,* you also ask the same for me," said Mother Veronica. On Thursday 22 August, the octave of the Assumption, she suffered great interior

anguish. "Go my *little one* to attend Mass; I will do without it today as I received communion this morning." Mother Veronica told her. "No, I cannot; I must distract myself. I can't go for Mass," she objected. Towards 10 O'clock she went to carry a bucket of drinking water for the workers and fell flat on a box of geranium, while climbing a steep path. Her left hand folded itself under her and she suffered a compound fracture. An Arab bone-setter made it worse and only added to her suffering.

Mother Veronica could very well sympathise with Mary's terrible torture. She recalled the suffering caused by the dislocation of her wrist which the bone-setter had made worse by not setting it properly. Oh! The excruciating pain...

"If only I could sleep for an hour," the *little one* exclaimed. On Saturday evening she called Mother Veronica to feel her broken arm. "It smells so bad," she said. The arm had turned fully black as gangrene set in. Mother Veronica pointed towards heaven. The dying child understood the sign. Doctor Carpani examined her. Her whole arm up to the shoulder and neck was affected with gangrene. He went to Father Guido and said "*khalas*" which meant all was finished. Father Guido hastened to her side. "Well, my *little one,* the two of us will settle our affairs for the departure." He heard her Confession and administered the Last Sacraments. It was just as she had predicted. Father Guido would be the one to help her during her last hours. Doctor Carpani, with a red hot iron made a deep groove around the shoulder. The flesh sizzled but she could not feel anything. The scorching wind across the Sahara

made her cry out, "thirst...thirst." Nothing could quench this burning thirst. And yet, she cried out, "As the deer longs for the living waters, my soul thirsts for you, my God." Her entrails seemed to be on fire. She wished to be placed on the cool flag stones on the floor. After receiving the Viaticum, she wanted only two sisters to remain with her– Sister Marie Therese and the Infirmarian. "No, Sister Marie Therese must go and rest a little," said the Prioress. The former said softly in the dying sister's ears, "My dear child, you will not leave unless your old mother, who brought you to Carmel, is with you."

"No, I promise you, go and rest. I shall wait for you," she said.

Overwhelmed with grief, Mother Veronica went away and slept a little. The hasty sound of the clapper at 5.00 am made her rush to the Infirmary. She was one of the first to arrive. Sister Mary's eyes were on the door. She was sinking. Sister Elias held the chair at the back and Mother Veronica held it in front, kneeling down, to help her get some fresh air at the door. They then helped her on to her bed. For a few moments her eyes were fixed upwards to the right as if in rapture. Father Chirou and Don Belloni were there. She threw up the little soup mixed with wine, given earlier. Father Chirou gave the last absolution. "My God, mercy," he said. "Yes, mercy," she repeated. Those were her last words as she fell dying in Mother Veronica's arms. The latter closed one eye and Mother Prioress the other. Every detail was exactly as she had predicted earlier. It was towards 5.30 in the morning on 26 August 1878.

Doctor Carpani performed the operation to remove her heart to be sent back to Pau as she had wished. The scar of the wound was clearly visible but not the letters IJS.

When the body was placed in the coffin the two arms fell outside in the form of a cross.

They could not be brought in. Mother Veronica whispered to the Prioress:

"Mother, tell her under obedience, to bring the arms back."

"Child, under obedience bring your arms back," said the Prioress. The arms of the dead body became supple and were folded and crossed on her chest.

After her body was interred, Mother Veronica could stand it no longer. She was crushed and overcome with grief, fatigue and the oppressive heat. She dragged herself to her cell and lay down on the tiled floor, semi-conscious, unable to move. "My God," she exclaimed later. "What a void I felt in my heart... This child of grace! I had led her to Carmel! She is dead and I am still in my exile. How I long to get away also, to follow her. I cannot live longer on this earth."

They were like two eagles that had flown together towards the heights of Carmel. Mother Veronica had watched the *little one,* Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, soaring into the heights, borne aloft by the powerful strength and the supernatural insights of the Holy Spirit. She was indeed a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit and now she was lost in the higher realms beyond the reaches of visibility, absorbed into the bosom of God.

CHAPTER 8

THE MYSTIC TOUCH

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had crossed the threshold to heaven and joined the throng of the white-robed army, washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

One day after Holy Communion Mother Veronica heard an interior voice: "Prepare yourself for suffering."

A few days passed; the same voice, the same words; still later, the actual experience:

> ...It was as sudden as a flash of lightning. It seemed that God had abandoned me, had left me entirely to myself. I was overwhelmed, annihilated under the weight of my sin and the anger of God! Pure suffering had taken up my whole being and I could see only my sins...*

Nothing could allay her suffering. Just five years of peace and tranquillity had followed the traumatic experience of the closure of the Little Carmel. Her life before that had been suffused in suffering: bereavement, illness, poverty, disappointment, anxiety and frustration. She had drunk the cup of suffering to the dregs. It had been the night of the senses. But the presence of God was there as her anchor. And He alone sufficed. But now she could not sense His presence. She seemed to be plummeting through an abyss of darkness.

The additional vows of always doing the perfect thing and of humility, which she had taken some time back, only added

*Autobiography P. 216.

to her torture. She was also plagued with an attack of scrupulosity that made her believe she was culpable of all the false charges levelled against her. The so-called Reform of Jansenistic innovations introduced by Father Estrate in 1880, and the Pre-Vatican rigours of stern discipline and punishment, resulted in making life unbearable.

Till at last she opened her heart to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. He explained to her that it was the Dark Night of the soul that she was passing through, a stage, all those who have reached a high state of sanctity, will be obliged to go through. It was a mystic touch in the soul of those who had soared high and was the last stage of suffering in the ascent of Mount Carmel. He said:

> "Suffering, and in particular, false judgments are the greatest graces that God can give to a soul. They make the soul resemble Jesus in His passion, in which He deigned to endure all sorts of torments and calumnies. One who builds an edifice has no need to polish the rough stones with which he builds the foundation: all kinds of stones are good enough for that. But a stone destined for the cornice – how many blows of the hammer and strokes of the chisel does it not require to shape it and give it the necessary polish, so as to make it fit to be placed in this honourable position! It is the same with your soul. God fashions and polishes it by suffering... Suffering is a gift of God, par excellence, which He gives to those whom He loves the most... Bear

everything in patience... Take care that no feelings of resentment remain in your heart, whatever may happen to you; and when He has accomplished His will in you, these trials will cease...."*

Mother Veronica was very much consoled and strengthened. Later, the Patriarch gave her permission to go back to Pau so that she could follow the primitive Rule as St. Teresa of Avila had decreed in her Reform. The terrible night of purification that lasted nearly nine years was over. "The little birds will sing in the depths of your heart," Sister Mary of Jesus had predicted.

And this was perfectly accomplished in the coming years.

On leaving Bethlehem, she felt that she had a mission to fulfil in France. That was to support and defend, if need be, the cause of the holy Sister of Jesus Crucified. She had left her tomb in Bethlehem, but was going to find her heart at Pau where Father Estrate and Mlle. Dartigaux had taken it and left in a vault in a wall. She would do all in her power so that the *little one* might not be consigned to oblivion. There would be at least one person, her first old mother, very devoted to her, to see that she was given the honour due to her. Mother Veronica loved to deck the vault with flowers.

*Autobiography P. 223.

CHAPTER 9

THE PLENITUDE OF LOVE

On her way back to Pau in 1887, along with her companions, she halted at Marseilles, where she was received with great warmth by the sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. When she stopped at Montpellier, she was overjoyed to meet Father Lazare and opened her heart to him. Everywhere, even on board the ship, the sisters were treated as "angels come down from heaven." It was the Lord's boundless benevolence to make up for the trials and tribulations of the past. She was welcomed with open arms at Pau.

A few months later, she received the sad news that her sister, Sister Mary Ann (Mother Ignacie) passed away on 19 August 1887. She was the foundress of the Ursuline sisters of Tinos. Mother Veronica could hardly contain her sorrow, for they had been like two buds on the same stalk, inseparable right from their childhood, sharing the same fascination for the Eucharist, entering the Catholic Church and the religious life, together. Ever after, they met at times to share the deepest secrets of their hearts. And now they are separated forever. But Mother Veronica could not indulge her grief as she had a mission to fulfil.

Since her return she busied herself with literary work. She wrote several books, beginning with her *Autobiography,* written in obedience to Father Lazare, her spiritual director; *Carmel in India*, an account of the origin of the Apostolic

Carmel, was published in 1895 and *The Marvellous Life of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified*, in three volumes in 1903. She also wrote a book, *A Grain of Dust* and a biography of *Mary Ann* as per the request of the Ursuline sisters of Tinos.

At this time, correspondence with Mother Elias and with Mother Marie des Anges in India was a great joy to her. In 1890 Mgr. Pagani S.J. Bishop of Mangalore, visited her and gave her a clear picture of the good work being done by her sisters there.

The year 1888 had been significant in the life of Mother Veronica. The first biography of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was written by Lady Herbert, though it was published only ten years later. Mother Veronica had an important role to play in this by way of encouraging the writer and providing some material. In 1892 Mother Marie des Anges' visit to Pau was a matter of great rejoicing to both of them.

The letters patent of affiliation and aggregation were given by the Carmelite General to the Apostolic Carmel which was recognized as a member of the Carmel of St. Teresa. By this time normal relations had been established between the sisters in India and Mother Veronica. In 1901 the Trivandrum branch in India received a special letter of affiliation to the Carmelite Order at Mother Veronica's request.

The remaining years at Pau were a time of great peace and tranquillity for Mother Veronica. She plumped the depths of her nothingness and found repose and contentment there and was happy to recall the great mercies of God in her life.

As Mary of Jesus Crucified had predicted, Mother Veronica had no special illness except the infirmities of old age. In the autumn of 1906, it became apparent to all that she had become much weaker. So she was given Extreme Unction. Filled with her customary enthusiasm, she referred to her death as to an approaching feast and repeated to each sister, "Do you know I have received the graces of the Last Sacraments?" In November she fell ill with congestion of the lungs. From the eve of her death she could not speak due to suffocation. Her tongue had turned over and become heavy. But she had no pain as such. When the last Holy Communion was brought she was weak and drowsy. "Jesus is here, do you want to receive Him?" asked Sister Marie of Jesus. A clear "Yes" reassured those around her that she was sufficiently conscious to receive Communion.

It was 9.45 p.m on 16 November 1906. The community was at Matins. Mother Veronica gave up her last breath to God, as the *Te Deum* was being intoned in the choir. It was the day of commemoration of the saints of Carmel.

Her whole life had been a long song of thanksgiving in every kind of situation, joyful or sorrowful and now she has joined Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified and the glorious band of Carmelite saints, singing the great *Te Deum* before the throne of God.

EPILOGUE

Mother Veronica's life had come full circle. Her devotion to the Passion of Christ had borne fruit in an active participation in the fruits of the Resurrection. The more she suffered, the more she loved, for to love was to suffer. The *little one's* refrain was "Love is not loved"– the anguished cry wrung from the hearts that had fallen in love with the Incarnate Love. And so it was with Mother Veronica. She conquered suffering by love and culled joy from the pangs of pain and savoured its sweetness.

Today, she lives truly in the hearts of her daughters of the Apostolic Carmel and the Congregation of Carmelite Religious who are longing for the day when they will rise up and call her 'Blessed'.

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