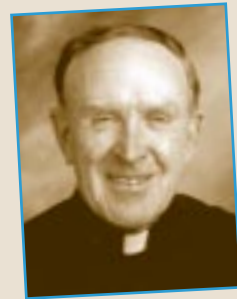




FATHER JOHN MALLEY, O.CARM. DIRECTOR OF CARMELITE MISSIONS

Dear Friend of the Missions,

The season of Lent begins very early in 2005. Ash Wednesday falls on February 9. I would be very grateful if you remember our Carmelite Missions and the people we serve as you observe the traditional practices that are encouraged during Lent; your prayers, your fasting and self-denial, and your good works. During her own lifetime, St. Therese helped so many people in missionary lands by means of these same practices, and as a result she is loved and honored in the Catholic Church today as Patroness of the Missions.



Last month I wrote to you about China. In this newsletter I want to share with you about the work of our Carmelite Family in the second most populated country in Asia and in the world: **INDIA**. This country has close to a billion people, and a large majority follows the Hindu religion. The Christian faith embraces a much smaller percentage, but it does have a very strong impact in certain areas of the country. This is especially true in the State of Kerala in the southwestern part of India, specifically in the dioceses of Cochin and Trivandrum, where most of the members of our Carmelite Family are living and working.

Our friars in Kerala are associated to one of our German Carmelite Provinces. Their formation programs and their ministries among the poor are helped accordingly by funds from Germany. I would ask your prayers and assistance, instead, for six communities of our Carmelite Sisters who do excellent work among the elderly, the homeless and abandoned, and the children.

An Italian Congregation of Carmelites, the Sisters of Our Lady of Carmel, made its first foundation in India in 1978. Their primary apostolate has been with the children, beginning on the nursery level, though they are also responsible presently for three elementary schools. Because of the poverty in the areas where the Sisters are working, much help is needed for even the very basic necessities of life; food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Our Mission office has been trying to respond to their requests for assistance during the past eight years, and with your help we will continue to do so in the future.

In the last few years, these Indian Sisters have opened two new communities that give special attention to those people who have been abandoned and have no one to turn to. Their ministry has become very similar to the beautiful work done by Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her Sisters of Charity. The elderly, the handicapped, the homeless, the sick – all are being assisted with loving care and with words of hope and encouragement.

Your goodness to Carmelite Missions has touched the lives of these Sisters. Like all goodness that is shared, there is a ripple effect, and many of the people whom they serve are happier and healthier as a result. God bless you for your generosity. May this Lent be a good one for you, and may it bring you closer to the Lord as you begin to prepare for Easter.

Love and peace,

Fr. John Malley, O.Carm.

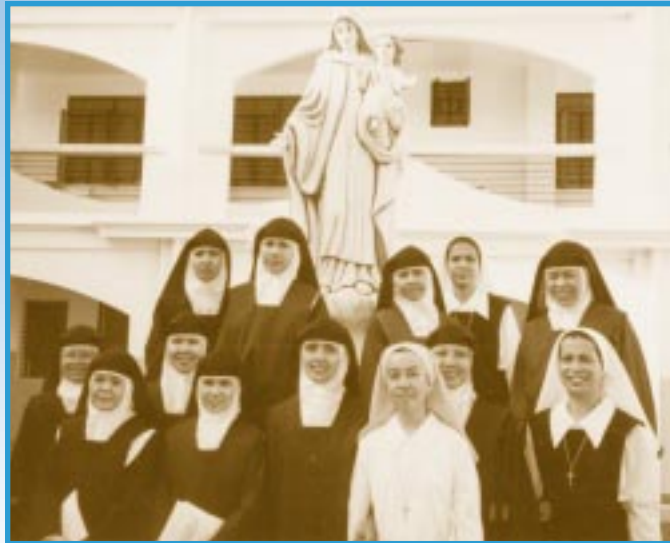
Father John Malley, O.Carm.
Director of Carmelite Missions

REMEMBER THE CARMELITE MISSIONS WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR WILL

SAINT OF THE MONTH

SAINT AGATHA AND SAINT LUCY

FEAST DAYS – FEBRUARY 5 AND DECEMBER 13



Community of New Monastery – Pangasinan, Philippines

To understand the lives and deaths of Saint Agatha and Saint Lucy, it helps to know something of certain cultures and religions whose leaders were considered to be gods. Prior to the Second World War, for example, the Emperor of Japan was thought to be a god by the Japanese people. They were not allowed to question his will. They were not even allowed to gaze on him. He was considered to be of divine origin, and the men behind the throne did nothing to discourage this because it was a powerful force unifying the Japanese people. Only after the war was this concept put aside, and the Emperor was no longer deemed a god.

In the history of the world, emperor worship is nothing new. In fact, because of it many early Christians suffered martyrdom. Early in the Christian era, the Roman Emperors used it as a means to unify the empire and to force obedience from their subjects. While there were temples in Rome for various gods, Minerva, Jupiter and others imported from Greece or other conquered countries, the Emperor was a living god. He alone could wear the royal purple. To him the people were required to offer sacrifices, libation and incense. If they were unwilling to comply, they were 'atheists' and in different times to various degrees, such people were subject to punishment, even death.

About the year 95, we read of the persecution of the early Christians by the Emperor Domitian. Actually, this was the second persecution, the first being the one in Rome under Nero, who blamed the

Christians for the burning of Rome and other disturbances. But Domitian was anxious to be an absolute ruler, and when rumblings from the aristocracy threatened to erode his status, he fostered the ruler-cult, with serious penalties for non-compliance. Needless to say, the Christians could not bow their knees to a man who played god, and they were caught.

There were three alternatives. They could apostatize and reject their faith, and some succumbed to this. They could go along with the edict and later seek to be reconciled to the Church. Or they could refuse and that meant martyrdom. Until Constantine made Christianity the state religion in 313 with the Edict of Milan (which also gave freedom of religion), many Christians suffered death rather than acknowledge the Emperor as god. These are the early Christian martyrs, and because some of them showed extraordinary courage, they were heroes even in their own day. Such a one was St. Agatha, killed about 250 during the reign of the Emperor Decius when she was but a teenager.

The Witness of Saint Agatha

While I was living in Rome from 1983-1995, I had many opportunities to visit Sicily. I was once in the city of Catania during the feast of St. Agatha, and I was amazed to see the devotion of the Sicilian people to a saint who had died so many centuries ago. From the little that we know of Agatha, we are told that she was born in Catania about the year 235. She was from a good and rather wealthy family who were devoted



Courtyard of Monastery – Supported by Carmelite Missions



Novitiate Students in Flores, Indonesia

Christians. Little is said of her birth or childhood. Because of what later happened, she must have been a very beautiful young woman, beautiful enough to attract Quintian, a man of consular dignity.

Emboldened by the persecution of Christians, Quintian cast his eyes on Agatha, feeling that his position of authority would make her powerless to resist his wishes. He had her brought before him and crudely spoke of his evil desires. We are told that Agatha seeing the terrible position she was in, prayed to God in these words: "Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, you see my heart, you know my desire. May you alone possess all that I am. I am your daughter, make me worthy to overcome the devil." Without hesitation, she denied Quintian's request. Hoping to shock her into compliance, he handed her over to Aphrodisia, a madam of a house of ill-fame. For a month, Agatha had to witness evil acts and listen to foul language. Nothing could dissuade her from her desire to belong totally to Christ. Though they tried tricks and wiles to change her resolve, they finally gave up and reported their failure to Quintian.

Death of a Martyr

Quintian was very angry on her return and felt that torture would produce what persuasion by words could not. Agatha was again brought before him. When his promises of fame and powerful connections fell on deaf ears, he had her slapped and buffeted, but to no avail. The next day when she was brought before him,

she answered that Jesus Christ was her life and her salvation, and she again refused his lustful desires. Quintian became greatly enraged. He had seen others broken by torture, and he now would have Agatha suffer until she consented. She was put on a rack that stretched her limbs, and she was beaten with a whip of leather thongs. Instead of the screams that he had heard in the past, he saw her suffer with serenity.

After the torture Agatha was sent back to prison, with the command that no medicine or food be allowed her. That night we are told, as Agatha prayed for constancy until death that she was now sure she would soon suffer, St. Peter appeared to her and encouraged her to persevere. Four days later, Quintian ordered that she be rolled over burning coals in which shards of broken pottery were placed. Barely conscious after this torture, she was carried back to her cell and prayed: "Lord my Creator, you have ever protected me from the cradle. You have taken from me the love of the world and given me the patience to suffer. Receive now my soul." With these words, she gave her soul to God.

Agatha at once became a very popular heroine. Her remains were reverently gathered and buried with honor. Fellow Christians prayed to her, asking her to intercede for them that they might have the same

(continued on next page)



Meeting of South American Novice Masters in Lima, Peru

SAINT OF THE MONTH

SAINT AGATHA AND SAINT LUCY

(continued from previous page)

constancy of faith in the face of persecution. Likewise, they went to her in time of trouble. We read of her relics being taken from her shrine and brought to the erupting Mount Etna nearby, and at the presence of her relics the rush of lava stopped! Churches were dedicated to her early on in the Christian era; her tomb became a shrine for the people of Catania and all of Sicily.

To indicate the greatness of this martyr, the early Church included her in the Canon of the Mass, and we find her name even today in the first Eucharistic Prayer. Agatha became widely honored in Sicily and Italy, and she became the saint to invoke against fire and lightning.

This story of St. Agatha has been passed down to us from ancient times. How much is true? How much has been embroidered? There are no reliable documents to enable us to decide. We are sure that she was martyred, and we are sure that she was given great honor in the early Church. Such facts prompt us to believe that she did suffer heroically and that she stood out among the other martyrs who suffered death rather than deny Christ. If legend has put poetic words into her mouth, it betrays a desire to take more notice of a great saint of Christ.

Saint Lucy

Probably one of the best proofs of the greatness of St. Agatha is the story of St. Lucy. So little of her is known that it would be impossible to write her life. But what we do know indicates that she is a worthy follower of Agatha to whom she often prayed.

Less than fifty years after the death of Agatha, a girl was born in Syracuse, a city rather close to Catania (about fifty miles away), whom her parents named Lucy. Her father died at an early age, leaving her mother Eutychia with some wealth. As Lucy grew, she

deepened her love for God and secretly dedicated herself to Jesus through a vow of virginity. Her mother had different plans for her, however, and she sought to negotiate a marriage with a wealthy pagan man. By various strategies, Lucy was able to postpone the marriage, and finally she got her mother's approval of her vow of virginity.

Eutychia had been suffering from hemorrhages that the doctors could not cure. Lucy prevailed upon her mother to visit the shrine of St. Agatha in Catania, already a popular place of pilgrimage because of the many miracles worked there. Both prayed with deep devotion, and the mother was cured. Later, both shared their wealth with the poor and tried to live closer to God.

Lucy's rejected suitor, however, was enraged, and he denounced her to the local police. It was the time of the Emperor Diocletian, and another persecution against Christians was in force. Lucy was apprehended, and after vowing her unwillingness to sacrifice to the Emperor, she was to be sent to a brothel. When soldiers came to take her, they found that they could not move her from the spot where she was. There in the pretorium, a fire was lit around her. Miraculously the fire burned, but Lucy remained unharmed. Enraged, the judge ordered that she be killed by the sword. It was the year 304, just fifty five years after Agatha had made her heroic stand for Christ.

The fame of Lucy spread, and early in the history of Christianity she too was given great honor. Like Agatha, she was included in the Canon of the Mass, and today with Agatha, Lucy is mentioned in the first Eucharistic Prayer. Oddly enough, she was widely venerated in England, where before the break from Rome, her feast day was like a Holy Day of Obligation, and only absolutely necessary work could be done. Her relics are found in Venice today, but like St. Agatha there is great devotion to her in Sicily and Italy.



Missionary Workers of the Immaculate in Lisieux, France



Cloistered Carmelite Community in La Vega, Dominican Republic