

CARMELITE MISSIONS



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Abundant Blessings— New Year of 2009

HAPPY NEW YEAR! One of my most fervent prayers for 2009 will be for less and less natural disasters that bring such sufferings to people all over the world. During the past few years, hurricanes like Katrina, Hannah, and Ike have devastated homes, businesses, and families in Louisiana, Florida, and Texas. Tornadoes have caused so much destruction in the Midwest and South. Earthquakes in China and typhoons in Burma have taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

In this January newsletter, I want to share a letter that I received from a woman who works with our Carmelite Sisters in the Bishop's office in Iloilo, Philippines. Maria Cristina wrote me after a terrible typhoon devastated her village and her home:

"I was so happy when my officemate told me that I have a letter from you, and when I opened it, I was overjoyed that it was a birthday card...Father John, forgive me for not sending you a birthday card on July 26. The reason why I did not write you was because my village was struck by typhoon Frank last June 21. We did not expect that it would cause a flash flood later in July. When the flood waters came here, we tried to get to our house, but the water was so high and the current so strong, we could not.

Me and my Mom, together with some of our neighbors, and especially the children, stayed on the water tank for nine hours because the water was already eight feet high. When the water went down a little, me and my Mom went to my friends for two nights. We can't go to our house yet, because it is full of mud. I was away from my work in the Bishop's office for a week, and I stayed at the Sisters' convent for a month, going whenever I could to our house to help my Mom clean out the mud.

Letter continued on back

Wishing you Special
Peace, Joy, Good Health
and Love



Inside the house of Maria Cristina – notice the brown mark of the mud and water



The village street outside her house



Saint of the Month ❁ Feast Day, January 21st

Saint Agnes of Rome

of St. Agnes on top of the cupola of the church is faced away from the piazza, unwilling to view the ugly fountains below!

Tradition and Legends of Agnes

Tradition has it that here Agnes was taken as a young girl and tried before a judge, and the brothel was the actual spot where they sought to destroy her purity. Unable to do so, she was beheaded by a sword. In time, a chapel was built incorporating the brothel (it can be seen in the crypt of the church), and later on, a church was built and reconstructed a few times, finally by Borromini. Here in the Church of St. Agnes in Agonale, the saint's head is preserved in a silver reliquary, made in 1615 at the request of Pope Paul V.

Soon after her death, Agnes was venerated as a saint, and her story spread all through the Church of her day. In fact, Pope Damasus, who was Pope from 366-384, just 60 years after her death, was able to talk with people who knew her personally, and it is from him that we have the words and story of Agnes. Soon afterwards, Prudentius, a pilgrim to Rome from Spain, wrote about the traditions in Rome and the story of Agnes' life and death. Her popularity was so great that her name was put in the canon of the Mass (now the first Eucharistic Prayer), one of the seven women so mentioned and

the youngest. St. Jerome wrote: "Every people, whatever their tongue, praise the name of Agnes," and he lived less than a hundred years after her martyrdom. We also hear about her from St. Justin Martyr, St. Martin of Tours, Tertullian, and Hilary of Potiers. Such popularity made her story ever current, and she needed no one to embroider the story to enhance her heroism. The traditions and legends certainly have a foundation in fact.

Life of Agnes

Agnes was born on the 28th of January, 293, of good and well-to-do parents. Some say their family name was Clodia Crescentiana. We know that they were wealthy, as she had a nanny to care for her, and when she was killed, they were able to erect a chapel for her burial plot. As a daughter of wealthy parents, she had opportunities to learn much, to wear finer clothing, and to have servants. As her parents were good Catholics, she also learned about the love of God and devotion to the Eucharist. She made her first Communion and was confirmed at her Baptism that was the custom then.

At the age of ten, because of her love of Jesus, she vowed herself to God. To do this, she had to have her father's permission, since according to the law he decided her future. This ceremony was presided over by the Pope, who followed the ceremony of

To the visitor in Rome, a 'must' is the Piazza Navona, the site of the Stadium or 'Circus' of Domitian. The Piazza maintains the shape of an oval race-track. In the center are the famous Bernini fountains representing the four great rivers of the world, and on one side over what used to be a brothel, rises the Church of St. Agnes in Agonale, built by Borromini. Vehicular traffic is forbidden in the Piazza. For the tourist, it is delightful on a summer evening to dine in one of the very nice restaurants, and then stroll watching the Roman children out playing, the budding artists seeking to peddle their wares, and finally the young people sometimes oblivious to all around them.

There is an intriguing story of Bernini's fountains and Borromini's Saint Agnes' Church, both built about the same time, the church being a reconstruction of an earlier church. It seems that the two famous architects and sculptors were rivals. If one looks at the center fountain, there is the figure of a man holding his hands up as if to protect his body from the church that he is sure will topple on him, because it was thought to be off-balance. The statue

covering her head with a veil. All was fine at the time, and there was peace for the Church – but not for long. In March of 304, the Emperor Diocletian put out an edict forbidding the practice of Christianity, and it was just before this persecution ended that Agnes was killed in what is now known as the Piazza Navona of Rome.

To ferret out Christians, the judges would travel about in a ‘mobile’ court that consisted of a seat and table for the clerks and assessors. Because of Rome’s heat, the trials started early in the morning and were announced by a trumpet’s blast. Citizens were required to burn incense before the statue of the Emperor who was their god. Of course, Christians had to refuse and were punished, usually by death.

From what we know, the trumpet sounded early one morning near the Stadium of Domitian, and Agnes, a young girl, ran out to see what was happening. Her parents and nanny were unaware of her leaving their home. She went to the court and proclaimed herself a follower of Jesus. How surprised the judge was to see this

pretty young girl, and his first inclination was to ignore her. But Agnes was not about to be put off. She was about the age of twelve or thirteen when girls were betrothed, and she proclaimed to the judge: *“The one to whom I am betrothed is Jesus Christ whom the angels adore.”*

The judge was anxious to rid himself of this child, and he first threatened her with fire, ordered her to be taken to the nearby brothel, and finally to be executed. In the words of Pope Damasus: *“Agnes was a martyr for faith and chastity on the 21st of January, 305. Christ the Lamb was sacrificed again in Agnes — her name means ‘lamb.’”*

Her parents were broken hearted, even though their faith told them that Agnes was now in heaven, enjoying the reward that they too hoped one day to achieve. As they were wealthy, they took her to a cemetery, just outside the walls of Rome on the Via Nomentana, the old Roman road going south, where they buried her and constructed a small chapel. Her heroism was so great that word of it spread among the Roman Christians, and soon the chapel became

a place of pilgrimage that grew in popularity as miracles occurred. Here was to be the Basilica in her honor where her remains are still preserved today.

Devotion to Saint Agnes

After the death of Diocletian, there was a civil war for the position of Emperor. Constantine finally won out over his opposition, and in the famous battle of the Milvian Bridge, he finally conquered Rome, his banner, with a cross flying in the wind, proudly proclaiming in Latin: *“In this sign you shall conquer.”* He issued the famous Edict of Milan in 313, giving freedom to Christians. His daughter, Constantina, in thanksgiving for being cured of leprosy, erected a large church over the grave of Agnes on the Via Nomentana, less than twenty years after her death. This Basilica is still popular today.

Canonization in the days of Constantine was not the legal process that it is today. Then it was done by the acclaim of the Church, and Agnes was popular in Christian Rome immediately, and soon after her death throughout Italy, and within a few years all over Christendom. So many writers of olden times spoke about her, and many saints had a special devotion to her, including St. Ambrose, St. Martin of Tours, and St. Frances Cabrini of our own times.

There is a final curious note. Almost all the saints have but one feast day, and it is the date of their death that marked their birth to eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. But Saint Agnes has two. January 21st was the date of her martyrdom and the principal feast, but for years there was a second commemoration of the 28th of January, the day of her birth. And in Rome, even today, there are two churches dedicated to her: the one of Borromini in the Piazza Navona, and the other, the Basilica of St. Agnes, on the Via Nomentana.



The Church of St. Agnes in Agonale, at Piazza Navona



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"LOVE TRANSCENDS"

**Your prayers
and your support
are needed NOW
more than ever.**

Abundant Blessings continued...

We are recovering now, but every time it rains we are scared and we do not sleep. That's the reason why I did not write you, as I'm always so tired. You know, Fr. John, I was so thankful to God that we survived in that tragic moment of my life. I enclose some photos of inside and outside our house after the flash flood."

Our Carmelite Mission office is trying to help Maria Cristina and some of the other victims of these natural disasters as they begin again to rebuild their lives and their homes. Because the Philippines are made up of thousands of islands, typhoons are a constant threat, and each year I hear many of their sad stories. Thank you for helping our office in its response to some of these tragedies. Please keep the people who suffer as a result of these disasters, especially the children, in your prayers. May God bless you, your family and your friends, during this New Year of 2009 with joy and safety.

Love and peace,

Fr. John Malley, O. Carm.



Entrance to Maria's house

Remember the Carmelite Missions when you write your will.