

PART I **Priest**
AFTER CHRIST'S HEART
Saint Claude la Colombiere

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

Nothing happens to us that God is not involved in and that the Heart of Christ cannot bring good out of. Even the most trivial events of our life can have meaning and redemptive value when offered to the Lord. Consequently, even the greatest trials of our life can be used by the Lord for some greater purpose in His mysterious work of saving souls.

There is a well-known saying by one of the early Fathers of the church—Terullian (160—220)—that goes: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.” What does this mean? It means that even horrific events like martyrdom can be used by the Lord for the good of souls and for the prospering of his church. Countless times in church history we see that the faithful sacrifice unto death of a person who witnesses to Christ can and is used by the Lord to strengthen and flourish his church on earth. This principle seems to be very much at work in the spreading of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. History has affirmed it and contemporary news reminds us that martyrs for the love of Christ’s Heart are not lacking in our modern world.

Today I would like to take a look at the life of St. Claude la Colombiere, particularly after he left Paray-le-Monial. This will develop next month into an understanding of how the English martyrs set the stage for Claude’s work and the eventual propagation of Sacred Heart devotion. So let’s begin by making some fascinating observations about the life of St. Claude la Colombiere (whose feast day is February 15) and who is considered a “dry” martyr for the Lord. What did the Lord have in store for St. Claude after he met St. Margaret Mary?

As you may recall, St. Claude la Colombiere (1641—1682) was a Jesuit priest who for a short time, about a year and a half, lived in Paray-le-Monial and became the spiritual director of St. Margaret Mary. (Margaret Mary Alacoque, a 16th century, French Visitation Nun, received messages from Jesus concerning His burning love for the world that became the basis for the Church’s spirituality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.) Claude was a very intelligent person, besides being a dedicated and faithful priest. Regarded as an astute spiritual director even in his early thirties, he was sent to the remote town of Paray-le-Monial to be the rector of a small Jesuit community there. Some people thought it was a waste of talent, but God had a plan in mind. Near his residence was the Visitation Monastery where St. Margaret Mary lived. A young nun in her mid-twenties, Margaret was receiving revelations from the Lord who wanted her to spread devotion to his Sacred Heart that was pulsating with love for all. Claude did his job well and affirmed Margaret Mary’s mystical experiences as genuine. In other words, he gave the green light to the Sacred Heart messages right from its beginnings, and since he was regarded as such a holy and enlightened priest, other people paid attention to his judgment call. Remember, I said that he was stationed at Paray a mere 18 months. What happened to him afterwards is equally interesting.

On July 1st, 1676, Claude wrote, “It’s true that I am to leave Paray in September. But I do not yet know where I am to go.” Suddenly, in August, things take a definite turn. “They want to send me to England,” he writes, “to be preacher to the Duchess of York. I do not know what will come of it. May God’s will be done.” So Claude was leaving the little backwater town of Paray and going to the big city of London, to live at the Palace of St. James—where English Kings and Queens had resided since 1536. This assignment gives us an idea of how well-regarded Claude was, especially for his ability to articulate spiritual principles and to discern God’s will in complex matters.

England had, of course, become a Protestant country with laws that extensively restricted and oppressed Catholics. The reigning monarch at the time, King Charles II, although sympathetic to Catholics (and becoming one on his deathbed), was beholding

to a protestant parliament that greatly feared Catholic influence. Charles' brother, James, was married to a Catholic— Mary of Moderna, with the title, Duchess of York. According to the marriage contract, she was allowed to have her own private chapel and chaplain. And this is the position that Claude was assigned to fill. Keep in mind that English men and women were discouraged from attending Catholic services since all English citizens were required to belong to the Church of England. Claude was dedicated to his work but he, nevertheless, put himself at the disposal of ordinary people who sought his counsel and help. We can only imagine that his thoughts often went back to his time with Margaret Mary. (He was still in contact with her and her superior by letter.) In his mind, he must have carried the powerful images that she related to him of Jesus' heart—burning like a furnace with intense love. How could he not in a simple way relate this to his directees, to those who looked to him for spiritual nourishment? So it is natural to think that the first missionary endeavors in spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart were to the English people. This is a significant point to keep in mind as we strive to understand God's mysterious workings.

To fill out the picture of what was happening around Claude, a little detour is called for. So we going to momentarily take a closer look at Mary Beatrice of Moderna and her husband James, a couple who will eventually become the King and Queen of England. Mary was of a noble Italian family and extremely pious. Her natural proclivity was toward religious life, having been educated by the Visitation Nuns nearby. However, right before her fifteenth birthday, without any warning, a royal official from the English court appeared on her doorstep. The beautiful young girl was absolutely shaken when without formality, the official, in the name of his master the Duke of York, asked for her hand in marriage! She retorted with a downright refusal. It was written of her, "Wishing only to be the spouse of Jesus Christ, she had an invincible aversion for marriage and would rather cast herself into the fire." Escaping with her friends into the mountains, she tried to get away from it all. It took no less than a brief from Pope Clement X himself to convince her that this marriage would bring much hope to the beleaguered Catholics in England. The Pope wrote, "The true religion, which has been forced to go underground in this land for fear of persecution, might be restored by you, and her ancient luster renewed." The Pope did not hide his anxiety and the deep pain into which the refusal of this marriage had plunged him. Alas! Mary finally gave in.

Her husband-to-be was James, the Duke of York and brother to King Charles II. A rare example of a Catholic in the English court, he would not succumb to any tactics that would make him compromise his conscience or his religion. When parliament instituted the *Test Act*, a bill by which any one refusing to receive the Anglican communion and to take the oath against transubstantiation became incapable of holding any public office, he resigned his commission as Grand Admiral of the British fleet.

During the approximately two years or so that Claude was in England (October, 1676—January, 1679), one of the greatest conspiracies of the time unfolded. Referred to as the *Popish Plot* or the *Popish Terror*, it was a supposed Catholic conspiracy to kill King Charles II. Principally, it was fabricated by the infamous rogue Titus Oates (1649—1705). The machinations of Oates and his supporters were to cause a national outbreak of hysteria that whipped the predominately Protestant population of England into a panic against Catholics. Oates, carrying a grudge against former Catholic mentors who ejected him from Jesuit-run schools, accused the Catholic authorities in England of approving the assassination of King Charles II. The Jesuits were supposedly commissioned to do the job. [N.B. If Charles died, leaving no children as heirs, his brother James who was a Catholic, would ascend the throne.] Then, it was believed, Catholics would take over the country and massacre the Protestants.

Oates was a first-class con man. Although he had an unsavory reputation, his excellent memory and confident manner made an impression on the King's Council who took his accusations seriously. Given soldiers and funds, he began rounding up Jesuit priests and numerous Catholics of high standing. Protestant sympathizers of Catholics also came in for his condemnation. Completely innocent people were imprisoned and some eventually died on the scaffold. With generous rewards for those who provided him with incriminating information, any suspicious word or act became an occasion for arrest and imprisonment. A young man whom Claude had instructed in the Catholic faith denounced him to the authorities. At 2 a.m. on November 14th, 1678 his apartment at St. James' was broken into. "I was arrested in my room," he wrote, "two hours after midnight." Two days later Claude was transferred to one of the most debased prisons in England—the King's Bench. Known for its excessive crowding and filth, we can imagine the strain on the already poor health of this holy priest. A report of the prison conditions describes it as "seething with vermin, diseased and ulcerous tramps, beggars, cut-throats and prostitutes were crowded together in dank, airless cells whose stench and nastiness were so nauseous that no person enters there without risk to his life and health..." This was the worst possible scenario to have happened to such a sensitive man whose health was already compromised by the English weather and his own austere practices. Weeks went by before Claude was finally released. Even though serious accusations were made against him such as having received converts into the Catholic Church, there was not enough substantial evidence to indict him of high treason. Because he was a French citizen, King Louis XIV demanded his release, and Claude was banished to his homeland. Broken in health, suffering from painful hemorrhaging of the lungs, he returned in a weakened state to live a mere three years more, dying in Paray-le-Monial on February 15, 1682 as predicted by St. Margaret Mary.

St. Claude was described by the Lord to St. Margaret Mary as his "Perfect Friend." May his example inspire us to entrust all our suffering to the Sacred Heart who can use it in his great work of changing our world for the better. Next month we will return to England to investigate its martyrs and see how their witness planted seeds of hope and eventual conversions in what appeared as a desperate situation. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on February 2, 2014. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, March 2, 2014 at 4:00 p.m.

Light-bearers

for the
HEART OF CHRIST



Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

Here in Tyringham, known as the “Hinterland” we are surrounded by woods. I never fail to marvel at the quality of the woods we have at our disposal, as it were, filled with stunning streams, and the gently undulating curves of the Berkshire hills, all so pleasing to the eye and exhilarating to the spirit. Often, our sisters venture into our adjacent woods and enjoy themselves doing so, but once in a while, the worry surfaces that one could possibly get lost in the maze of trees that appear so consistently the same to the unfamiliar trekker. Several years ago, a sister from another monastery, confessed to this happening to her as she decided to go for a refreshing walk into a wooded area near her own monastery. The further she entered into the deep of the woods, the more everything looked the same, and not thinking to bring along a compass, her sense of direction eluded her better judgment. The walk that she had so joyfully anticipated turned unexpectedly, and terrifyingly, into a quest for survival, as the hours passed. As darkness approached, she became afraid of the creatures that would cross her path, making her feel frantic as the last shreds of light faded. She turned this way and that, but it all seemed hopelessly the same to her, with no distinguishing hint to help her out of her dilemma. Thankfully, back at the monastery, others noticed her absence and set about a search for her, driving close to the edge of the woods with spotlights in tow. It was the light from these spotlights that was the saving grace of the day and helped to rescue her from the unpleasantness of spending the night in the blackness of uncertainty. Needless to say, what she experienced has stayed with her and her community for many years.

This story reminds me that there are many times in the evolution of our lives when others ‘carrying lights’ have emerged to save the day for us. Perhaps it was just the outreach of someone who came along at the right time to help us when our car conked out, or held the door for us when our arms were loaded with packages, or provided a needed service and said ‘it’s on the house.’ I like to think of these good samaritans as ‘light-bearers’ because by their good deeds they never cease to brighten our way and our day through their thoughtfulness, kindness, and sweet dispositions. Today, I’d especially like to remember one of those humble ‘light-bearers’ who recently passed on to the good Lord a few weeks ago, Jim Quillard. Jim, as some of you may know, ran a car repair and maintenance shop in Pittsfield and so was well known in the local area. But despite the fact that he was under the hood or under the body of the car, servicing it, the gentle sweetness of his manner always shone out upon his customers. Jim, who frequently attended our Sacred Heart meetings for years (with his dear wife, Teresa) was a quiet joy to have in anyone’s company. So we would like to salute Jim for bringing the Light of Christ into our world in his own unique way, commending his soul to the Sacred Heart’s love and mercy for all eternity.

Apart from Jim, there are other Sacred Heart ‘light-bearers’ that I would like to mention in this brief time together. I will limit myself to mentioning four who have lived their lives in the light of the gentle and humble Heart of Jesus and who have brought that light to others.

The first I would like to mention is a sixteenth century monk of saintly life named Lanspergius. This Carthusian monk who spent his days in prayerful solitude had a great influence on Sacred Heart spirituality in his time. He spoke frequently of the Heart of Christ in his writings and exhorted every Christian to take the Sacred Heart as an object of special love, veneration and imitation. It was said that no one before him had explained so clearly the principles upon which that devotion was grounded. He composed beautiful prayers to the Sacred Heart of which the following is an example: "O most lovable Jesus! When will you remove my sin-stained heart and give me your Heart?.. Ah, my most sweet Jesus, enclose my heart in yours and be its sole Master... O Heart so noble, so good, so sweet!... Draw and absorb in yourself my heart and all my thought so that I may live only for your glory... Change me; take total possession of me. May I live only to please you...May I never wish for anything and may I never will anything but that which you will and what is most pleasing to you... May I love you, O sweet Jesus, my God, with my whole heart, in all and above all."

The second is one of our own Visitation sisters, the Venerable Anne-Madeleine Remuszat, who came to be regarded as a 'second (Saint) Margaret Mary.' Hailing from a prominent family in the city of Marseilles, France, she entered the second monastery of the Visitation in 1705; her early religious life showing remarkable spiritual gifts. She is still remembered for her composition of a litany of prayers to the Sacred Heart, but most of all, for her impact on the city itself when it came under the ravages of a deadly plague in 1720. It was her influence on the populace of the city to pray to the Sacred Heart for deliverance from the scourge of the plague that saved the city from total destruction. To this very day her intercessory powers are still recalled and celebrated in Marseilles, as well as in all of France.

Another 'light-bearer' of the Sacred Heart, and one that is well known for his spiritual association called the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart is Father Mateo Crawley-Boevey, SS.CC. Father Mateo's poor health as a young priest in Peru, was the providential reason for his over-seas trip to Europe and his famous visit to the shrine of Paray-le-Monial in France. Here, in a state of physical exhaustion, he entered the chapel where St. Margaret Mary Alacoque had her revelations from the Sacred Heart. He later wrote of his experience there: "I saw that altar, the most beautiful, the most holy after that of Calvary. There I prayed and suddenly I felt within myself a strange shock. I was struck by a blow of grace, at the same time very strong, yet infinitely gentle. When I arose, I was completely cured. Then kneeling in the sanctuary absorbed in an act of thanksgiving I understood what Our Lord wished of me. That very evening I conceived the plan to reconquer the world, home by home, family by family, for the love of the Heart of Jesus." After this encounter with the Heart of Christ, Fr. Mateo was never the same; for over fifty year he travelled the world, never returning to his native home until he was 80 years old; dying in 1960. Ironically, this torch-bearer for the message of the home enthronement of the Sacred Heart would constantly be on the go, sacrificing the comforts and conveniences of home life for himself. He gave thousands of conferences and drew tremendous crowds of all classes of people wherever he went.

The fourth 'light-bearer' is someone who has entered the spotlight of sacred personages very recently, with the distinction of being newly beatified by Pope Francis on January 25th of this year. Of regal origin, Maria Cristina of Savoy, was titled Queen of the Two Sicilies. This princess was born in 1812 to royal parents during a difficult period of history. She was given a very Christian upbringing but was subjected to the cross of a politically arranged marriage; to someone whom, in fact, she had little in common with. Her husband's character made her life a veritable martyrdom. Whereas she was described as gentle, he was abusive, where she was modest and reserved, he was outgoing and bombastic. He, on his part, regarded his wife's virtues with great disdain. Nevertheless, this young Queen was "always adored because of the care and compassion she showed toward her people and because of how she endured her less than ideal life, with patience and pious devotion," for she came to rely on her faith in times of trial. Marie Cristina's life was of short duration, dying at age twenty-three, from the complications of her first childbirth. It was her only son, who later in life, regarding his mother as a saint, sought to promote her cause for canonization.

Today, as we celebrate the sacred presence of Our Lord in the temple with the symbol of the lighted candle may we remember those whose faith has been a beacon for our world, those who have entered our lives as true 'light-bearers.' May this light give glory to the Sacred Heart and bring us all into its orbit of love and mercy. +

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