

Triumph of the Heart

PRECIOUS BLOOD

Family of Mary

2012 (III) / No. 61

*“One soldier
thrust his lance into his side,
and immediately blood and water flowed out.”*

Jn 19:34

My Blood Poured Out for You

*When you read this issue of Triumph of the Heart
about the Precious Blood, dear friends and benefactors,
the stories about the Eucharistic miracles with the Precious Blood,
events from the lives of the saints and Our Lady’s tears of blood
should help you to more gratefully love Jesus,
who gave his life in blood for each one of us.*

*“The Blood of Christ is the pledge of God’s faithful love
for humanity. Every human being,
even in conditions of extreme moral wretchedness can say,
fixing his eyes on the wounds of the Crucified One:
God has not abandoned me, he loves me, he has given his life for me.”*

Pope Benedict XVI

*T*hroughout history, blood has always held a central meaning as something that sustains life. Thus in the Old Testament the sprinkling of blood from sacrificed animals became a sign and a seal of the covenant between Yahweh and the Chosen People: *“Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, ‘This*

is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you...” (Ex 24:8). In July 2009, the month dedicated to the Precious Blood, Pope Benedict XVI explained how Jesus made the New and Eternal Covenant in his blood by referring to the establishment of the covenant on Mt. Sinai: *“Jesus refers explicitly to this for-*

mula during the Last Supper when, offering the cup to the disciples, he says, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:28)."

The representative expiatory value of blood is indicated in the Old Testament through the paschal lamb. When Pharaoh would not let the Chosen People leave Egypt, where they had lived for centuries as slaves, Moses announced to him the death of every first born in Egypt. To protect the Israelites, however, Yahweh instructed them through Moses to take a one-year-old, spotless male lamb, slaughter it, eat it and then put some of the blood of the paschal lamb on their door posts. The Chosen People were spared and the way for the exodus was clear.

*I*n the New Testament, John the Baptist pointed out Jesus, the true sacrificial lamb, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (Jn 1:29). Truly, the Lord shed his innocent blood on the wood of the Cross for the redemption of all people of all times. While the bleating of 18,000 lambs filled the temple of Jerusalem during the Passover feast, and blood flowed in streams from their slaughter, the only spotless Lamb of God, at the same time, gave his life to the last drop on Calvary. He thereby definitively defeated the ancient serpent, Satan, and freed us once and for all from the slavery of sin. One drop of this Precious Blood would have been enough for the salvation of the world wrote St. Thomas Aquinas so beautifully in his famous hymn "Adoro te devote", "Devoutly I Adore Thee".

*S*ince the moment Longinus pierced the redeeming heart with his lance and the blood and water from the Lord's side poured forth on him, the Precious Blood as a spring of life for the Church has not stopped flowing throughout the centuries. St. Anthony of Padua described this reality in the image of a nursing mother: "*Jesus Christ nourishes us himself with his blood, like a mother with her milk. For this reason he let his breast be opened with a lance on*

Calvary so that he, like a mother who gives her children milk from her breast to drink, can give us his Precious Blood to drink." And the stream of grace that redeems, purifies, strengthens and sanctifies will never run dry as long as Calvary is made present in Holy Mass.

*S*t. Cyprian, a martyred bishop from northern Africa, called for daily Holy Communion during the severe Christian persecution because, as he asked repeatedly in his letters, "*How shall we fit them for the cup of martyrdom if we will not first admit them to the cup of the Lord?"*

He belongs to the great multitude of witness in blood "*from every nation, race, people, and tongue*" (Rev 7:9), who are described in the apocalypse as surviving the time of great distress and washing their robes white in the Blood of the Lamb. Yet we also belong to those whom Jesus wants to strengthen with his Body and Blood so that we can add our daily drops of blood, the little sacrifices of daily life, to the Lord's chalice.

*T*his precious Russian icon portrays the sublime mystery of God's incarnation in the womb of Mary in its full mystical beauty: The Trinitarian God drew from Mary and from Mary alone to make the Redeemer's body and the Redeemer's blood that he shed for love of us. There exists therefore, as Pope Benedict XVI said at the World Day of the Sick in 2008, "*an indissoluble link between the Mother and the Son generated in her womb by the work of the Holy Spirit, and this link we perceive in a mysterious way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist."*

On the icon it is clear, Our Lady's immaculate womb, full of grace, is like a throne, like an altar on which Jesus stands in a chalice filled with blood—as the Divine High Priest blessing with both hands. When we drink the Precious Blood from this chalice, we become one with him, and from the innermost unity he has with his mother we will also be made one with Our Lady. That is what St. Francis de Sales meant when he wrote:

“If you also want to be related to the Blessed Virgin Mary, then go to Communion because when you receive the Blessed Sacrament, you receive flesh from her flesh and blood from her blood. The precious body of the Savior, present in the Blessed Sacrament, is formed in the womb of the Virgin from her purest blood.”

St. Francis de Sales

A Breath and a Couple Drops

The biography of St. Norbert of Xanten (1082-1134), written in 1155, shows very beautifully that the German founder of a religious order, peacemaker and courageous defender of the Pope has rightly been given the honorary title “Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament” because of his love for the Holy Eucharist and the Precious Blood.

Coming from established, high nobility, the gifted young man lead a carefree, worldly life at the Court of the Archbishop of Cologne, Germany and as an advisor to his cousin, Emperor Henry V, “*without worrying much about God,*” as it is written in the oldest description of his life. Nevertheless, like Saul, Norbert also had his “Damascus Hour” in 1115 when a lightning bolt struck right next to his horse during a ride throwing him to the ground. When he came to and stood up, he was a different person. Without looking back, Norbert radically disposed of all his possessions, distributed his money among the poor and became a priest.

An untiring preacher, he passed on foot through Germany, France and Belgium always striving to proclaim the true Faith and especially to renew the clergy by showing the priests the high dignity of their vocations and awaking in them a deep love for the Eucharistic Lord. The most beautiful example was Norbert himself who placed great value on celebrating Holy Mass every day with deep recollection.

The oldest biography recalls some of the

miracles the saint worked through the Precious Blood. Once, just as Norbert received the Body of Christ and emptied the chalice of the Precious Blood during the Easter celebration on April 11, 1126 in the Cathedral of St. Kilian in Wurzburg, Germany, a blind woman looking for help approached him and asked him to heal her. Norbert turned around from the altar and breathed very lightly on her with the scent of the consecrated wine. That very instant she regained her sight. This miracle drew so much attention that the city offered to found a monastery for Norbert’s young religious order. Indeed, two years later the monastery in Oberzell was founded.

Norbert laid the foundation for his new order just five years after his radical conversion, on Christmas Eve 1120. In a vision, Our Lady showed him a field with a dilapidated chapel close to the French city Laon: “Pratum demonstratum”, “Prémontré” from which the name of the religious order Premonstratensians comes. With 13 companions, Norbert founded the first monastery there and, drawn by the apostolic zeal and strong personality of the founder, men from all walks

of life entered desiring to lead an apostolic life according to the gospels.

*T*he community spread rapidly, and just one year after founding the order Norbert was able to name his second monastery in Belgium, the Floreffe Abbey close to Namur, “Flos Mariae”, “Mary’s Blossoms” in 1121. Here another miracle with the Precious Blood took place which was recorded in the Abbey Chronicle and in an appendix to Norbert’s first biography. In the latter, several Norbertines, as they are often called because of their founder, recount to one of their brothers, the Imperial Count Gottfried of Cappenberg, the following story from the life of their spiritual father.

As he was celebrating Holy Mass in the Floreffe Abbey Church with his usual recollection, he noticed right before Holy Communion a few drops of blood on the paten, the plate on which the hosts are placed. He immediately called over the sacristan, Br. Rudolf, who was serving and asked him, “*Do you see what I see?*” Br. Rudolf answered him, “*Yes, Father, I see drops of blood.*” Norbert was so deeply touched by this

that he could not hold back his tears.

After this miraculous event, where the particles of the host changed into drops of blood, the beautiful liturgical custom of purifying, cleaning with water, not only the chalice but also the paten, which was not common practice beforehand, became standard for Premonstratensians.

*O*rdained Archbishop of Magdeburg in 1126, St. Norbert renewed his diocese, and it became the departure point of his spiritual sons for the mission in the East among the Wends and the Slavs.

After the influential prince of the Church served again and again as an intermediary between the Pope and the Emperor, he died of malaria in Magdeburg in 1134 and was interred in the Church of Our Lady. Nearly 500 years later, in 1626, his remains were transferred during the Reformation to the Premonstratensian Abbey Strahov in Prague. There the shrine with the relics of the Patron of Bohemia and the Netherlands has stood in a side chapel to this day.

I Am with You Always ...

*Godhead here in hiding whom I adore,
masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more!*

From the famous Eucharistic hymn by St. Thomas Aquinas

*W*e realize what a great grace it is to believe in the real presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist only when we have been plagued once with doubt or when we meet people who, due to a lack of knowledge, do not receive Communion.

God, who as a loving father knows what we are lacking and where we are weak, helps us again and again by strengthening our faith through miracles. Perhaps the most famous Eucharistic miracle

is the one from the eighth century in Lanciano, Italy where God gave a sign to a doubting monk by transforming a host into living flesh and wine into blood after the words of the consecration.

Scientific investigations from the 1970’s testify that the uncorrupted relic which has been venerated to this day is, in fact, real blood and heart muscle tissue from a man with blood group AB (see *Triumph of the Heart* #37).

A similarly impressive miracle took place about 500 years later, in 1263, in the little village of Bolsena, Italy, close to Rome. A Bohemian priest, who according to tradition was named Fr. Peter of Prague, suffered from such doubts about the true presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament that he decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome. He wanted to pray at the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul to be freed from his hardship and strengthened in faith. It was such a struggle for him at each Holy Mass to speak the text of consecration and at the same time lack the conviction that Christ really becomes present at these words in his divinity and humanity, with his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine.

Along the way, he reached Bolsena, and when he celebrated Holy Mass in the church of the martyr Christina, God gave him the desired grace, but in a most unexpected fashion. After he spoke the words of consecration with his inner struggle, he broke the host over the chalice in two, as the liturgy prescribes. At that moment, fresh blood began to flow from the host. The upper part of the consecrated host was transformed into bleeding flesh while the lower part, which he was holding in his hands, maintained the form of bread. The blood ran onto the corporal and painted on it the head of the Lord crowned with thorns 25 times over.

He was so bewildered that he was unable to finish celebrating Holy Mass. He wrapped the bloody host in the corporal and brought it into the sacristy with the chalice. As he was doing this, a

few drops of blood fell on the stone floor of the church and they also left the image of Christ's head crowned with thorns. The shaken priest hid the chalice and the corporal with the bloody host in the cabinet.

*A*fter he had recovered from his shock, he made his way, with a few witnesses to what had taken place, to the nearby town of Orvieto. There he wanted to confess his doubt and ask forgiveness from Pope Urban IV who happened to be there at the time. After the Holy Father heard about the supernatural events, he immediately sent the Bishop of Orvieto, Giacomo, and St. Thomas Aquinas to Bolsena with the task of verifying what had happened and bringing the Eucharistic miracle with them back to Orvieto. As soon as Bishop Giacomo and St. Thomas Aquinas reached the now so-called Sun Bridge with the precious gifts, the Holy Father, accompanied by cardinals, prelates, all the clergy of Orvieto and a large number of the faithful, came forward and received the Holy Host and the corporal on his knees. With olive branches in their hands and singing Hosanna, they accompanied the miraculous "relic" in a procession to the Cathedral of St. Mary in Orvieto. Pope Urban IV blessed everybody with the corporal and then locked it in the tabernacle. Construction of the new cathedral began 27 years later, and to this day, fragments of the host and the corporal are kept there for veneration.

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

*T*he miracle not only helped liberate a priest from his doubt, but it was also the decisive sign for Pope Urban IV to publish his bull "Transiturus de hoc mundo ad Patrem" on August 11, 1264, thereby instituting the Feast of Corpus Christi for the whole Church. God's providence had seen to it, namely, that exactly

this pope worked as an archdeacon in Liege, Belgium following his theological studies in Paris, France. There he met St. Juliana who entrusted to him the vision she had had and the wish that God expressed for a liturgical feast honoring the Body and Blood of Christ be established. Pope Urban put St. Thomas Aquinas in charge

of writing the liturgical texts for this solemnity and the corresponding Liturgy of the Hours.

Pope Benedict XVI himself spoke during his Wednesday catechism on November 17, 2010 about how wonderfully divine these circumstances were led: "This morning I would like to introduce a female figure to you. She is little known but the Church is deeply indebted to her, not only because of the holiness of her life but also because, with her great fervor, she contributed to the institution of one of the most important solemn liturgies of the year: Corpus Christi.

"Juliana was born near Liege, Belgium between 1191 and 1192. In addition to a keen intelligence, Juliana showed a special propensity for contemplation from the outset. She had a profound sense of Christ's presence and frequently meditated upon Jesus' words: *'And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'* (Mt 28:20).

"When Juliana was 16 she had her first vision which recurred subsequently several times during her Eucharistic adoration. Her vision presented the moon in its full splendor, crossed diametrically by a dark stripe. The Lord made her understand the meaning of what had appeared to her. The moon symbolized the life of the Church on earth, the opaque line, on the other hand, represented the absence of a liturgical feast for whose institution Juliana was asked to plead effectively: namely, a feast in which believers would be able to adore the Eucharist so as to increase in faith, to advance in the practice of the virtues and to make reparation for offences to the Most Holy Sacrament.

"Juliana, who in the meantime had become

Prioress of the convent, kept this revelation that had filled her heart with joy a secret for about 20 years. She then confided it to two other fervent adorers of the Eucharist, Blessed Eva, who lived as a hermit, and Isabella, who had joined her at the Monastery of Mont-Cornillon. It was in fact Bishop Robert Torote of Liege who, after initial hesitation, accepted the proposal of Juliana and her companions and first introduced the Solemnity of Corpus Christi in his diocese in 1246.

"Jacques Pantaléon of Troyes was also won over to the good cause of the Feast of Corpus Christi during his ministry as Archdeacon in Liege. It was he who, having become Pope with the name of Urban IV in 1264, instituted the Solemnity of Corpus Christi on the Thursday after Pentecost as a feast of precept for the universal Church.

"In the Bull of its institution, Pope Urban even referred discreetly to Juliana's mystical experiences, corroborating their authenticity. He wrote: *'Although the Eucharist is celebrated solemnly every day, we deem it fitting that at least once a year it be celebrated with greater honor and a solemn commemoration. Indeed we grasp the other things we commemorate with our spirit and our mind, but this does not mean that we obtain their real presence. On the contrary, in this sacramental commemoration of Christ, even though in a different form, Jesus Christ is present with us in his own substance. While he was about to ascend into Heaven he said, "And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"'*

Every Year on the second Sunday after Pentecost,
the day when the Feast of Corpus Christi is celebrated in Italy, there is a procession through the streets of the city with the precious reliquary containing the corporal. The first procession was in 1263 at the order of the Pope, and it has been carried out year after year without fail since 1337. Pope John Paul II also came to Orvieto on June 17, 1990,
for the Corpus Christi procession.

In the Forest of Sir Isaac

The Eucharistic Miracle of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac in Belgium in 1405 drew attention from all over Europe. God took advantage of a priest's careless manner with the Holy Eucharist to deepen in him, in the faithful and indeed in us six centuries later the love and respect for his Eucharistic presence through his miraculous intervention. This miracle should also awaken in us the desire to make reparation for every lack of love toward Jesus.

Our Lady of Grace and Consolation

*I*t all started towards the end of the 11th century when a noble squire, Isaac, planted a forest on his property 20 miles south of Brussels, Belgium, in an area now named after him, Bois-Seigneur-Isaac. Sir Isaac was captured by the Saracens during the Crusades in the Holy Land but obtained freedom through the intercession of Our Lady. Upon his return to Bois-Seigneur-Isaac, in gratitude, he built a Gothic chapel in her honor. A statue, "Our Lady of Grace and Consolation",

was venerated there for two centuries.

Then in 1336 the plague struck the neighboring town of Ittre. In their great need, the faithful asked to make a procession with the statue through the streets of their parish. And they were astounded to see that the raging epidemic immediately ceased wherever the Mother of Grace and Consolation was carried. The final and greatest fame for the little chapel, however, came only 70 years later.

Three mysterious visions

*A*round midnight on June 5, 1405, the Tuesday before Pentecost, an unknown voice startled the knight Jean de Bois from his sleep. A man about 30 years old was standing by his bed in a radiant light and clothed in a glorious blue robe lined with ermine fur. After the master of the castle in Bois-Seigneur-Isaac composed himself, he asked the stranger what he wanted. The young man opened his robe and showed Jean de Bois the terrible, bleeding wounds which covered his entire body, and he lamented, "See how gruesome they were with me. I ask you, have pity on me, find a doctor who can heal me and obtain justice for me!" This mysterious wounded man was none other than Jesus himself,

the man of suffering, about whom the prophet Isaiah had prophesied: "It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured ... he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins" (Is 53:4-5).

*Y*et just like the disciples of Emmaus, Sir Jean did not recognize his divine Redeemer and did not suspect in the least that he had had a heavenly vision. He stood there helpless because, although he had heard the words of his visitor, he did not understand what they meant. So he merely expressed his pity with the hopes of soon being rid of the man disturbing his nighttime rest: "Your

deplorable condition has truly wrought my deepest compassion. Only a very hard-hearted, inhumane soul could remain untouched at the sight of your wounds and suffering. Unfortunately, I do not know any doctor who would be able to heal such horrible injuries. Regrettably, I find myself also unable to recompense or atone for those crimes screaming for revenge which have been done to you because I do not possess any judicial authority."

*N*evertheless, the divine Redeemer intended through this apparition to make not only this knight but all of Christianity aware of his wounds and his bitter suffering. Like the good Samaritan, we should be filled with compassion and a sense of justice, and we should relieve and heal the pains, like a doctor of the wounded Savior by expiating our sins and those of others through prayer and penance. Through this, the serious daily offenses would be recompensed and atoned.

The man of suffering showed the knight that he was not satisfied with his answer and encouraged him, *"If you would seriously look, you would easily find such a doctor!"* He meant, of course, Sir Jean himself. *"Tell me, how should I not be covered with wounds when I am beaten each day anew?"* And with these words, he showed the knight an especially large wound close to the area of his heart and said, *"Come and look more closely at this wound which is the most painful for me."*

Looking at the open wound on his heart, from which the Blood of Redemption poured forth, Jean de Bois began to weep loudly. Yet Jesus continued, *"If you have no more effective means of healing to offer me then at least place your hand over my wound to relieve the pain. Do what you can, and I will be thankful for it until you are able to do more for me. Then I will forgive the world!"* With these words, the stranger disappeared.

*T*o avoid being mocked by the others, Sir Jean remained silent about his nighttime experience. How surprised he was when the stranger

returned the next night and rebuked him for his negligence. *"I showed you, though, my wounds and complained about my suffering and pain so that you would have compassion with me and find a doctor who can heal me and relieve me from my torments. But you did nothing for me! Can really nobody be found who is ready to have pity on me and take my cause into their hands? Would they allow my wounds to become infected? Will they force me to become angry with a world which is deaf to my complaints?"*

*T*he dismayed knight still had not recognized the unknown petitioner. However, the next morning he gathered his relatives together and entrusted to them what had happened in the two nighttime visions. Nobody knew what to advise him so Sir Jean asked his courageous brother to stay with him the next night and to defend him if necessary. They carefully bolted the door, but in vain!

The same man of suffering who had shown himself on Tuesday and Wednesday pleaded with the knight from Bois-Seigneur-Isaac on Thursday night even more urgently for the assistance and help of a loving doctor. This time Sir Jean willingly asked the stranger, while his brother was still asleep, *"Where would I have to send this doctor if I were able to find one? I don't know you at all, and I have no idea where you live!"* The Redeemer answered him with heavenly patience, *"Take the key to the chapel and go inside. You will find me there and recognize who I am!"*

In ecstasy, Sir Jean obeyed, went into the chapel of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac and saw Jesus on the Cross above the high altar, his body completely disfigured from terrible wounds, and fresh blood flowed from the open wound in his side. Only now did he recognize his Lord and Master and throw himself down at his feet full of love and compassion like Mary of Magdala once did.

*W*hen Sir Jean returned to his bedroom after the ecstasy, he told his brother how the Redeemer complained that he would have to punish

mankind if it no longer showed interest, love or faith in him. *“After he showed me his wounds anew, he repeated his request for a doctor. Truly, it is Our Lord who is asking! I saw him dying and his Precious Blood streaming forth like a spring from his pierced side,*

which causes him the most pain. This morning, dear brother, we will see him die again on the altar!”

Sir Jean said this like a prophetic allusion to the Holy Mass that would be celebrated there in a few hours.

Eucharistic drops of blood

*A*fter Sir Jean’s third and final vision on Thursday night, Fr. Ost, the pastor of the Haut-Ittre parish to which the hamlet Bois-Seigneur-Isaac belonged, was abruptly awoken on Friday morning, *“Father, wake up and go immediately to Bois-Seigneur-Isaac, and celebrate a votive Mass to the Holy Cross!”* said a voice loud and clear. Fr. Ost did not dare to resist the puzzling command even though on this June 5th an anniversary Mass for a deceased parishioner was scheduled in the church in Haut-Ittre. With his elderly sacristan, he hurried through the woods to Bois-Seigneur-Isaac. At the ringing of the bells, a number of the faithful from around the area also hurried to join Sir Jean and enter the chapel where he had seen the bleeding crucifix above the high altar just a few hours earlier. At the beginning of the votive Mass to the Holy Cross, Fr. Ost opened the corporal length wise on the altar, according to the liturgical practice at the time.

He was unusually serious and recollected; in doing so the faithful immediately noticed. He had to think again and again about the mysterious voice which had called him to go and celebrate that morning.

*D*uring the offertory he unfolded the rest of the white linen cloth and at the moment he lifted up the chalice he was shocked to notice a large piece of a host on it, about an eighth of a whole priest’s host. He must have negligently missed this piece of consecrated host and left it behind in the folded corporal three days earlier when he celebrated Holy Mass in Bois-Seigneur-Isaac. That was the same Tuesday when the man of suffering

had appeared for the first time to Sir Jean late at night and complained about mankind who struck him so many bleeding wounds through indifference. Naturally, Fr. Ost knew nothing about that as he now tried as inconspicuously as possible to remove the piece of host from the corporal with the intention of consuming it silently during Holy Communion with the newly consecrated host. His efforts, however, were in vain; the host was stuck to the linen cloth.

Fr. Ost looked with astonishment as he saw to his indescribable dismay how drops of Blood suddenly began to seep out of the white piece of host and the corporal turned red. The priest’s color drained, he began to shake and nearly fainted. His sacristan, who was observing all this, hurriedly waved Sir Jean to the altar, and when he saw the miracle of the Blood, he immediately understood the connection to the laments of the Redeemer during the three nightly visions. Therefore he whispered to Fr. Ost, *“Reverend, don’t be shocked! This miracle comes from God! Have trust! God will make his will known to us!”*

Encouraged by these words, Fr. Ost was able to continue with Holy Mass. Never before, however, had he celebrated the holy Mysteries with such deep reverence. Again and again his gaze wandered to the piece of the host which continued to bleed. After the Holy Mass, the priest carefully showed the knight of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac and the other faithful who were present the corporal in which Blood flowed continually from the host. The Blood spread gradually and raised the host from the cloth without, however, dissolving it or changing its radiant white color. The bleeding continued for five days and the

news of the event spread like wildfire. Thousands of believers rushed to see. They were all able to witness the miracle with their own eyes, and the priests were even allowed to reverently touch the corporal which had turned red from the Blood.

On the Tuesday following Pentecost, the fresh Blood stopped flowing. Over the next two days it slowly coagulated, and on Thursday, the Feast of Corpus Christi, the corporal with the Precious Blood was completely dry.

The bishop's investigation

*T*he news of what happened in Bois-Seigneur-Isaac and the numerous healings and prayers that were answered in association with it reached the ears of the local Bishop of Cambarai,

the future Pierre Cardinal D'Ailly. He took the corporal with the dried Blood and kept it for two years so that he could do all the investigations and observations personally. He had the linen with the large Blood stain soaked in milk, wine and soap, and afterwards not even the slightest change could

be certified. From then on, the Cardinal venerated the corporal as a precious relic.

On October 18, 1413, after a thorough investigation and an interview with all the witnesses, he published a bull confirming the authenticity of the Blood Miracle and declared the corporal to be a true relic "*worthy to be venerated forever*". This bull, stamped with a papal seal, is still preserved today in the archive of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac.

*The corporal with the Precious Blood,
which is still evident even after 600 years,
has been exposed in gothic reliquary since 1555.*

*The special thing about this monstrance is the place for a host over the
relic. It is used every September on the Sunday
after the Feast of the Nativity of Mary
for the annual procession with the Blessed Sacrament.*

A Conversion Paid for with Blood

After the seminarian Pierino Galeone from southern Italy was healed by Padre Pio in 1947, he was allowed to spend a great deal of time with the saint as his spiritual son. He was an eyewitness to many events, and during the diocesan beatification process in 1986 he testified about many of them. In 2010, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of Padre Pio's ordination and the sixtieth anniversary of his own ordination to the priesthood, Pierino Galeone published his valuable memories in a book titled "Padre Pio, mio padre". Among the many wonderful recollections, he recounts the following conversion which shows with particular beauty what a deep unity Padre Pio lived with his Redeemer, as one crucified with him.

Del Fante, the Freemason

Pierino Galeone writes: We met for the first time in a hotel. He was the one who broke the silence and introduced himself, "I am Alberto Del Fante, a lawyer from Bologna, a former Freemason of the thirty-third degree, and I was converted a short time ago by Padre Pio."

Although I did not ask him anything, he immediately began to give thanks for Padre Pio with complete conviction that he had given the Faith back to him. He rejoiced that he could give his new life to Padre Pio by investing his time and talents for others. Then he continued, "My wife had a tumor and she was close to death. There was no more hope. A friend told her about Padre Pio, a humble Capuchin priest in San Giovanni Rotondo. Many people had been healed by him and had returned home healthy. I was standing at her death bed as she begged me in tears to go to Padre Pio and ask him for her healing. She knew that I was a Freemason and a terrible enemy of the Church. At first, I objected and even mocked the idea. 'Science is powerless; such a poor monk will surely not be able to do anything either,' I thought to

myself. However, as I saw her crying in this deplorable condition, I wanted to fulfill her wish and said, 'All right, I'll go! Not because I believe in him but because I can try my luck there gambling.'

"I left the next day and arrived at San Giovanni Rotondo in the evening. The following morning I stood in line for the confessional after I had participated in the lengthy Holy Mass. When it was my turn, I did not kneel down right away but remained standing in front of Padre Pio and asked him if I could speak with him briefly. Padre Pio yelled at me, 'Young man, don't waste my time! What are you here for? To try your luck gambling? If you want to make a confession then kneel down; otherwise, let me hear the confessions of these poor people who have been waiting.' As Padre Pio repeated my own words it was like being struck by lightning. I was stunned by his evident strictness and knelt down, not out of conviction, but somehow automatically. I was completely unprepared and could not say anything. I was even less able to recall any

of my sins. As soon as I knelt down, however, Padre Pio's tone of voice changed and he became mild and fatherly. By asking me questions, he gradually unveiled all the sins of my former life. And the sins I had committed were numerous! With my head lowered, I listened to his questions and always answered 'Yes'. Astonished and at the same time moved, I remained petrified. Finally, Padre Pio asked me, 'Do you have any other sins that you would like to confess?' I answered, 'No'. I was certain that he had already said all my sins, and since he obviously knew my life in detail, I was sure I did not have anything else to confess.

"Aren't you ashamed?' he started with unanticipated sternness. 'The young lady, whom you had return to America a short time ago, gave birth to a son. This creature is your flesh and blood, and like a raven you abandoned

mother and child.' It was all true. I did not answer. I broke into tears and cried bitterly. I could not take it anymore. As I cried, bent over the kneeler, covering my face with my hands, Padre Pio gently placed his arm around me, drew close to my ear and whispered with a sniffle,

'My son, you cost me my precious blood.'

"At those words I felt as if my heart were cut in two with a fine blade. Bent over, I cried. Several times I lifted my head, my face overrun with tears, and repeated, 'Father, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me!' Padre Pio, who had already put his arm around me, drew me closer still and began to cry with me. A wonderfully sweet peace filled my spirit.

*" The Lord choose me, although I do not deserve it in any way,
to collaborate in the salvation of souls ...*

*There are hundreds and thousands of souls, who come from distant regions
for the sole purpose of being cleansed from their sins."*

"I suddenly felt how this indescribable pain was transformed into an unbelievable joy. 'Padre,' I said, 'I belong to you! Do with me what you will!' He wiped away his tears and whispered to me, 'Support me by helping the others.' Then he added, 'Say hello to your wife for me!' When I arrived at home, my wife had been healed."

At the time, Alberto Del Fante did not understand the full depth of these surprising words which Padre Pio, crying, whispered in his ear during the confession of his conversion. Doubtlessly, it was Jesus who said it through the Ca-

puchin father because only the Divine Redeemer had "shed for the forgiveness of sins" once and for all his Precious Blood, like he says through the mouth of the priest during the consecration at each Holy Mass. It is the Divine Redeemer alone who gives the infinite treasure of grace through the priest during Holy Confession.

Nevertheless, the words may also be figuratively applied to Padre Pio who through his stigmata participated intimately in the Passion of the Lord and did, in fact, shed his blood for the conversion of Alberto Del Fante and for all his 14 million spiritual children.

On September 20, 1918, Padre Pio was praying alone before the crucifix in the choir loft of the monastery Santa Maria delle Grazie in San Giovanni Rotondo when he received the stigmata. *“Imagine the agony that I suffered and that I feel continuously, nearly every day,”* he wrote to his confessor. *“The wound of my heart bleeds constantly, especially from Thursday night until Saturday.”* When Padre Pio implored the Lord to take away the exterior signs but not the suffering, Jesus answered him, *“You will have them for 50 years, and then you will come to me!”* The very painful wounds did in fact remain open and unchanged for a half a century, from 1918 to 1968. They never scabbed over but rather, fresh blood always flowed from them giving off a pleasant odor. Only in the last months did the flow of blood slowly decrease. When Padre Pio died the night of September 23, 1968, his brother monks found his body free of the stigmata and of any scars. At the funeral, one of Padre Pio’s spiritual sons Professor Enrico Medi, a physicist and politician whose own beatification process has been started, said,

“It seems to me that in the whole history of the Church, there has never been a saint from whom the Lord demanded so much blood to fulfill his saving and healing mission as from Padre Pio.”

When a Mother Cries

On February 2, 1995, the Feast of the Presentation, five-year-old Jessica Gregori saw tears of blood running from the eyes of a statue of Mary. It all took place in a grotto in her garden in Civitavecchia, a port city in Italy about 35 miles north of Rome. Full of excitement, she called for her father who also witnessed the tears of blood running down the cheeks of the delicate, 17 inch tall plaster statue of the Queen of Peace. Mr. Gregori was shaken and decided to immediately call their pastor, Don Pablo Martin, the one who had given the family the statue as a gift from Medjugorje the previous September. The next day, around 6:30 p.m., the extraordinary event was repeated.

Along with some friends of the family, Don Pablo was present and witnessed with his own

eyes what Mr. Gregori had reported the day before. In the days to follow, until February 6, the phenomenon reoccurred 11 more times, always in the presence of various eyewitnesses who later gave written testimonies under oath of what they had seen. Don Pablo informed the bishop of the diocese, Bishop Girolamo Grillo, about what had happened.

The Bishop reacted very skeptically. In his diary, which he later published, he noted on this day, *“What a terrible story, this crying statue of Mary! There are always phonies who like to smear holy articles. We are so poor, how far we have come that a pastor also chases after such stupidities. Mother of Good Council, pray for me!”*

Hoax or miracle?

News of the happenings spread quickly, and journalists ran the story in the media. As anywhere else, profound believers as well as curious onlookers came. Some people even wanted to destroy the statue. At first, there were some surprisingly positive reactions. For journalist Michael Brambilla it was like being struck by lightning when the director of Italy's most read newspaper, "Corriere della Sera", Paolo Mieli, confessed to him a few days after the events, *"You haven't understood anything! The story from Civitavecchia is the most important story. I'm an atheist from a Jewish family. I should be entirely indifferent about a little statue of Mary. But if this story is true, if this statue truly cried, it means that a miracle has taken place. That means, however, God exists. And the most important news, the one that everybody wants to know about today, even those who act as if they have no interest in religion whatsoever is exactly that—does God exist? If God does exist, that changes everything; it changes the whole meaning and goal of our lives."*

The first question that everybody asked was, *"Is the red liquid really blood?"* Bishop Grillo instructed Don Pablo to choose a reliable doctor to examine the liquid. The analysis started on February 5 at the Sapienza University hospital. The results left no room for doubt; the red liquid was in fact human blood. On February 24, the Bishop noted in his diary, *"The scientists want to examine the blood of Our Lady a third time because according to the first result it appeared to be the blood of a woman, later, however, that of a man. Since they could not make countless examinations, they decided to stay with 'man's blood' in the results since they only had the result 'woman's blood' once."*

Why did Mary cry a man's blood? How did this blood get on the statue? The Bishop ordered radiological tests to be made; the civil authorities

placed the statue under police observation during the screening with computer tomography at the famous Gemelli Clinic in Rome. The results confirmed that the little statue contained no cavities and that no mechanical devices had been built into it.

Everything seemed to indicate a true miracle. Nevertheless, Bishop Grillo still had strong doubts. Around midnight on February 11, the telephone rang at the chancellery in Civitavecchia. It was the Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano, the most important man in the Vatican after the Holy Father. He encouraged the Bishop, *"don't be too distrustful but rather be more open to the supernatural"*. Bishop Grillo understood immediately that this phone call so late at night must have been the initiative of the Holy Father. The supposition was confirmed by a further call on February 23, in which the Secretary of State *"thanked me in the name of the Holy Father for my openness to the supernatural."* *"Why is the Pope occupied with this question? Is he aware of some secret?"* Bishop Grillo asked himself.

In the meantime, the statue had been placed securely in the chancellery when on March 13 the world-famous exorcist Gabriel Amorth from Rome called the Bishop. *"He also asked me not to be overly skeptical because eight months earlier a mystic from Florence under his spiritual direction had told him that a statue of Our Lady in Civitavecchia would cry tears of blood."* This expiation soul also had clarity about the significance of the tears, declaring sorrowful times awaiting Italy, even civil war, if the disasters were not prevented through conversion, prayer and penance.

Bishop Grillo told his sister about this phone call. Deeply touched by the seriousness of the message, she asked her brother after Holy Mass on the morning of March 15, to take the

statue out of the closet so that they could pray together. He did what she asked; a young religious sister and the Bishop's brother-in-law were also present. When during the "Hail Holy Queen" they prayed the words, "*turn then most gracious advocate your eyes of mercy toward us,*" tears of blood ran again from the eyes of the statue which

the Bishop was holding in his hands. It was the fourteenth and final time. "*My brother turned white as a sheet,*" his sister later testified. Bishop Grillo was truly shocked. A cardiologist had to be called, Dr. Gennaro, who examined the Bishop and thereby also confirmed the miraculous fact of the fresh tears of blood.

Pope John Paul II and Civitavecchia

One thing was sure: it was not a message that only applied to the smallest parish of the diocese, because Pope John Paul II came personally incognito to venerate the little statue from Civitavecchia.

He even had her brought to his papal apartment. However, it was not until after his death that Bishop Grillo, with permission of the Secretary of State, was allowed to make this event public.

Msgr. Stanislaw Dziwisz, the Holy Father's personal secretary, had invited the Bishop to dinner on June 9, 1995, with the Pope's express wish that he bring the little statue with him. "*It was an unforgettable day,*" the Bishop noted in his diary. "*I had the impression that the Holy Father knew everything. We also spoke about the significance of these tears. He quoted Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar, who was of the opinion that Our Lady in this time is especially close to her children in their worries and concerns. Her tears are simply a call to conversion.*"

Pope John Paul II venerated the statue, kissed it, blessed it and crowned it with a golden crown which Bishop Grillo had brought with him.

The Holy Father laid a Rosary over her outstretched hand. At the end of the meeting he said, "*One day you will let the world know what happened this evening. ... We place everything in Cardinal Ratzinger's hands.*" The next day, Cardinal Sodano thanked the Bishop once again in the Pope's name and said to him, "*You may, as far as Our Lady is concerned, continue without hesitation. Peter is with you!*"

On October 2, 2000, Jessica Gregori brought Bishop Grillo a message which she had received from Our Lady. In it, the Blessed Virgin asked the Bishop "*to entrust all the priests of his diocese to her Immaculate Heart*". And she added that he should speak about it with the Holy Father so that he might entrust to her heart "*the priests of the whole Church*". This happened too, when Pope John Paul II prayed the act of consecration on St. Peter's Square on October 8, 2000 with 80 cardinals and 1,500 bishops from all over the world. Bishop Grillo even sent a letter of thanksgiving to the Pope for this initiative.

Pope John Paul II supported Bishop Grillo's declaration that he saw the statue cry tears of blood in his hands on March 15, 1995 at 8:15 a.m. by personally signing it as well.

If Our Lady cries, then we have to console her

*W*hat does God want to say to the world with a little statue of Mary crying tears of blood? When Pope John Paul II found out about Our Lady's tears, he gave the very simple answer, "*If Our Lady cries, then we have to console her.*" And what can console her more than our conversion, our turning back to her son, our love of God and neighbor? It seems as though through conversion, prayer and penance the announced disaster for Rome and Italy was averted, like in Nineveh.

What does it mean, though, that Our Lady cried tears of male blood, in other words the blood of her son? Cardinal Ratzinger, who was well informed about what had happened and about the medical examinations, told Bishop Grillo, "*The theologians will still have a lot to discuss about the constitution of Mary's blood.*"

Perhaps it is not so difficult to understand why Our Lady cried the blood of her son. Do not the words of consolation to the sick which Blessed Pope John Paul II said in his September 8, 1982 audience explain it for us? "*Mary, though conceived and born without the taint of sin, participated in a marvelous way in the sufferings*

of her divine Son, in order to be Coredemptrix of humanity."

The tears of blood which were hers in the beginning, feminine, but then were those of her son, masculine, make an eloquent testimony of the inseparable unity of the coredeeming Mother and her son, the Divine Redeemer. As the mediatrix of all grace, Mary is also the mediatrix of the sacraments, in other words also the Mother of the Holy Eucharist as Pope John Paul II liked to call her. Therefore, she draws our attention again to the deep truth of our faith that the Precious Blood which once streamed forth from the pierced heart of Jesus always becomes effective for us when we let ourselves be purified, healed and sanctified through the sacraments in his Divine Blood.

Don Pablo Martin has reported exactly that. Pilgrims come every day who want to make their confession, and among them there are often people who have not been to confession for decades. Our Lady gives special graces to families experiencing a crisis. Hundreds of wedding rings have been given to her by couples who have reconciled themselves through her intercession.

Translated from: Antonio Socci, "I segreti di Karol Wojtyla";
Msgr. Girolamo Grillo, "La vera storia di un doloroso drama d'amore"