



Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro

The Most Holy Face of Jesus

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In every Catholic Church throughout the world there are the Stations of the Way of the Cross. The Sixth Station, “Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus” displays the image of the heroic act by mysterious woman named Veronica. “...Holy woman named Veronica, seeing Jesus so afflicted, and His face bathed in sweat and blood, presented Him with a towel, with which He wiped His adorable face, leaving on it the impression of His holy Countenance.”¹ She attempted to comfort Jesus on His way to execution. Her veil, with the Face of Christ imprinted on it, is more than a relic; it is a reward, an eternal expression of gratitude. Sister Katherine, MICM in her article on the Veil of Veronica wrote: “...It is the seal of approval on the first act of reparation and it calls to each of us for imitation. Veronica’s compassion and courage are rich wells of spiritual encouragement from which everyone may draw.”² According to Anne Catherine Emmerich, “... Veronica kept this veil until her death and hung it at the head of her bed; it was given to the Blessed Virgin, who left it to the Apostles, and they afterwards passed it on to the Church.”³ Even though conflicting authorities argue over Veronica’s place of death, it is agreed by all that the Holy Veil itself has remained in Rome.

Veneration to the Holy Face

It was May 13, 610 when Veil of Veronica was exposed to public veneration. In year of 707 Pope John VI erected an altar in the Vatican Basilica for the Holy Veil and placed it in a grand tabernacle. The chapel was named Saint Mary of the Sacred Face. When Relic was exposed once a year, it was guarded by Roman nobleman and fully armed guardians. Pope Innocent III instituted an annual procession on the first Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany in which Relic was carried from the Vatican Basilica to the Church of Holy Ghost. This custom was replaced with another; when Pope Boniface VIII re-established the “Holy Year” he permitted an indulgence to all who venerated the Sacred Face in the Vatican Basilica on every Friday and solemn feast.

Due to wars and revolutions, the “Sacred Face” was removed from Basilica to Castle of Saint Angelo for safety. In 1450, Pope Nicolas V had three small silver bells cast, whose harmonious tones were to announce to the faithful the exposition of the Sacred Relic.

On the fourth year of the pontificate of blessed Pope Pius IX, a miracle of the Veil occurred. The Holy Father had to flee and was exiled at Gaeta because of revolution. To obtain an end to the evils devastating the Church, he permitted the Sacred Veil to be exposed from Christmas to Epiphany. On the third day of exposition, when prayers were begun, the Veil of Veronica became transfigured as it were, and the Sacred Features of Our Savior appeared life-like and surrounded by a halo. The Holy Face was of a deathly pallor, the eyes sunken, yet animated with an expression of profound sadness.

¹ Saint Alphonsus Liguori, „The Way of the Cross”, p. 10. Catholic Book Publishing Corp., New York, 2006.

² Sr. Katherine Maria, MICM, „The Veil of Veronica”, “From the House Tops”, Volume XLV, No. 1, p. 1.

³ Anne Catherine Emmerich, „The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ”, London, Burns & Oates, 1892, p. 242.

Devotion to the Holy Face

The Holy Face is mentioned in the Bible 941 times. If the idea of devotion of the Face of our Lord already prevailed in the Old Testament, how can we fail to see our Lord's express design of making His Sacred Face the object of devotion throughout the Catholic Church? "In displaying Veronica's Veil and innumerable copies of it, Christ seems to designate it as a sign of salvation, a means of reparation, a symbol of mercy reserved especially to aid souls to reconcile with the Divine Majesty, so outraged by blasphemy and crimes of every sort."⁴ Consider the Holy Face of Our Lord in His Passion: bruised, bloody, stained, and covered with dust and spittle. These indignities suffered by Our Lord represent the sins against the first three Commandments. Blasphemy, the disrespect of God and sacred things, atheism, and the profanation of the Holy Name and the Holy Day of Sunday are the greatest sins against God and are reflected in the Holy Face of Jesus Christ.

Many saints in past centuries have appealed to the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ in prayer. Among of them were: St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Gertrude the Great, and St. Mechtilde, St. Therese of the Child of Jesus and of the Holy Face. One of the most beautiful hymns in honor of the Sacred Face of Jesus was composed in 12th century by St. Bernard. It was: "O Caput Cruentatum" – "O Sacred Head".

O Sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

Saint Gertrude is one from the foremost promoters of devotion to the Holy Face. She was Benedictine nun and was known for her mystical Revelations. She spoke with Our Lord very often about His Sacred Passion. In Revelations she explains how Our Lord impressed upon her the great benefits that a soul will derive from meditating on the Sufferings of the Passion. In one vision she saw two executioners striking Jesus Christ on the Face, which was so disfigured that the sight of it filled St. Gertrude with bitter grief. It seemed to her as though Jesus turned His Face from side to side, only to be struck the more cruelly by the other executioner. Our Lord said to her, that if anyone meditates upon His sufferings with tenderness and compassion, his heart will be to Jesus as a soothing balm for His wounds.

As we see, devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus is not new in the Church. It goes back to the coming of Our Lord into this world. The first adores of the Sacred Countenance were our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and shepherds, and later Apostles and disciples. In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read: "... And after six days Jesus taketh unto Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into high mountain apart: And He was transfigured before them. And His Face did shine as the sun..." (17, 1-2).⁵ The glories of Tabor, the dolors of the Passion, reflected on the Divine Face, have been at all times the ravishing object and the subject of contemplation of noble hearts and of elect souls.

On October 1st, 1885 an Archconfraternity dedicated to devotion to the Holy Face was erected, to make reparation, which Blessed Pius IX referred as a work destined to save society. This came about through the revelations of the Holy Face to a Carmelite French nun, Sister Marie of Saint Peter.

⁴ Sr. Katherine Maria, MICM, „The Veil of Veronica”, "From the House Tops", Volume XLV, No. 1, p. 12.

⁵ The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate, Baronius Press, London, MMVIII, p. 23.

Sister Marie of Saint Peter

Sister Marie was born on October 4, 1816 in the city of Rennes, France. From early days of her life she had inclination to become a religious. In her autobiography she wrote: "...One day as grace strongly urged me to follow my vocation, and not knowing how to go about it, I felt extremely pained, and in my dilemma I went to church. Kneeling before Mary's altar, I opened my heart, telling her of my great desire to become nun, and my troubles in regard to attending this end."⁶ After conversations with her confessor and meditations, she accepted his advice and become a Carmelite nun. Her life in the convent was not easy: she experienced humiliation, times of trial, lack of understanding by Priors and nuns. But she never complained. The award which she received from Our Lord was great. Before she died in 1848 with the reputation of sanctity she was favored by Heaven with many revelations concerning the reparation of blasphemies uttered against the Holy Name of Jesus, and veneration of the Holy Face had been pointed out to her as a most efficacious means of making such reparation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ transported her in spirit to the spot where He was met by Veronica, on His way to Calvary, and made known to His spouse how great was the service of this heroic woman had rendered Him when, with her veil, she wiped His Adorable Face, all covered with spittle, dust, sweat and blood. Sr. Marie wrote: "... Then this Divine Savior told me that in our present age the wicked, by their blasphemies, renew all those outrages that disfigured His Holy Face on that occasion ... Our Lord then instructed me saying that I must imitate the courage of St. Veronica, who bravely broke through the mob of His enemies to reach Him, and that He now presented her to me as my protectress and as my model ... Following this, Our Lord told me that by practicing reparation for blasphemy, we render Him the same service as did the pious Veronica and that just as He looked with kindly eyes upon this holy woman during His passion, so would He regard with affection all those who make reparation."⁷

In the revelation dated March 14, 1847 Our Lord informed Sr. Marie that communists secretly work to advance diabolical plots and anti-Christian principles in order to inflame all society. To stop them by obtaining God's mercy, Our Lord ordered Sister Marie to ask the Archbishop, in the Name of our Savior, to inaugurate Holy Face Devotion. In her autobiography Sister Marie wrote: "... Our Lord told me that the Society known as the Communists had so far made only one outbreak, but that they were working secretly to advance their schemes. Then He added: Oh, if you only knew their secret and diabolical plots and their anti-Christian principles! They are waiting for a favorable day in order to inflame the whole country. To obtain mercy, ask therefore that this Work of Reparation be established by addressing yourself to him who through the bounden duty of his office can establish it."⁸

Another time Our Lord told Sister Marie that by His Holy Face miracles should be worked. This prophecy was clearly manifested after her death by a disciple of the Holy Face, Venerable Louis Dupont.

Louis Dupont who often visited Carmel where Sister had died, continued the mission of Sister Marie propagating her desire for reparation through this devotion. Because of his great love for the Holy Face, the Prioress of that Carmel gave to him one of the images of the Holy Face touched to the Veil on the day of the "Miracle of the Vatican" in 1849. Venerable Louis hung it in a place of honor in his drawing room. In a spirit of reparation he kept a light burning before it day and night. He used every

⁶ Sister Mary of St. Peter: „ The Golden Arrow”. TAN Books, Charlotte, NC, 2012, p. 13.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 153.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 198.

opportunity to promote reparation to Jesus Christ through devotion to the Holy Face. Often his friends would end a visit by kneeling down with him and praying before the Image. Conversions and numerous cures began to be attributed to these prayers and to the application of oil taken from the lamps burning before the image. Louis soon became known as “the holy Man of Tours”. The crowds of pilgrims began visiting his house, which became a center of almost uninterrupted prayer. These crowds continued over the next twenty years. Louis Dupont’s devotion to Sister Marie’s messages was soon rewarded when approval was finally given for their publication in 1876. Shortly after that he died, his mission being completed. It is from here that devotion to the Holy Face began to spread like wildfire and Pope Leo XII erected an association of devotees throughout the world, known as the Archconfraternity of the Holy Face.

A Face to contemplate

In his encyclical letter: “Novo Millenio Ineunte” (At the Beginning of the New Millennium) Saint Pope John Paul II placed the new millennium under the radiant sign of the Face of Christ; he emphasized the importance of contemplation of the Face of Christ by stating: “...And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium? Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face.”⁹

Pope Benedict XVI has characterized devotion to the Holy Face as having three separate components:

1. The first element is discipleship and orientation of one’s life towards an encounter with Jesus, to see Jesus in the face of those in need.
2. The second element is relating to the Passion of Jesus Christ, and the suffering expressed by the images of the wounded Face of Jesus, relating this to the Eucharistic experience.
3. The third element, the Eucharist, is woven between the other two. The eschatological element then builds on awakening to Christ by contemplating His Face in the Eucharist.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has followed in the footsteps of Benedict XVI and John Paul II by speaking often of the importance of the Face of God, which has become a theme of his homilies. As St. Francis, he is seeking out the Face of Christ in the poor, the sick and the weak and by being the Face of Christ to the poor, the sick and the weak.

Now I would like to ask a question: where are we 168 years after the Revelations received by Sister Marie of Saint Peter? Did we fulfill Our Lord’s requests? Where is Europe these days? Is it still Christian? What about U.S.A?

At the end let us return to Sixth Station of the Way of the Cross and the words of Saint Alphonsus Liguori: “My Beloved Jesus, Your Face was beautiful before, but in this journey it has lost all its beauty, and wounds and blood have disfigured it. My soul also was once beautiful, when it receive Your grace in Baptism; beauty disfigured it since by my sins; You alone, my Redeemer, can restore it to its former beauty. Do this by Your Passion; O Jesus. I repent of having offended You. Never permit me to offend You again. Grant that I may love You always; and then do with me what You will.”¹⁰

O Jesus, Whose Adorable Face is the treasure of graces and blessings - have mercy on us.

⁹ John Paul II: „Novo Millenio Ineunte”, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/, p. 9

¹⁰ Saint Alphonsus Liguori, „The Way of the Cross”, p. 10

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