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PATRON SAINT  
OF  
FIRST COMMUNICANTS

THE STORY OF  
BLESSED IMELDA LAMBERTINI

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*For*  
*Rev. William LaVerdiere, S.S.S.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### A CHILD IS BORN



HE blind basket-maker knew someone had stopped outside his door. His ears were very sharp and not a sound that echoed through the busy streets ever escaped him. Sometimes people felt that he really saw, so keen was his hearing, so dependable his memory. Then there were his baskets, shelves of them, deftly woven of colored reeds. It was hard to believe that they came from the hands of a man who could not see.

“It’s the baker,” he called out cheerfully. “Why don’t you come inside, John?”

There was a deep laugh and the baker entered, a great hulk of a man, squeezing his way through the narrow entrance with difficulty.

“Some day I’ll come so quietly that you’ll never guess I’m here, Peter. But not today. Today I couldn’t be quiet if I tried.”

The blind man looked up curiously, while his thin fingers stopped their accustomed task of weaving reeds. “You sound as though you had good news, old friend. What is it?”

The baker put two loaves of bread on a nearby table, then clapped the blind man on the back. “My boy came home last night, Peter! What do you think of that?”

*“Philip came home?”*

“That’s right. You know how we’ve all thought him dead these past five years. Well, he’s not dead, Peter. He’s very much alive. And he’s made a tidy little fortune as a merchant in Algiers. Ah, if you only knew what it means to have him back again!”

The blind man smiled. He understood how his old friend had suffered. Young Philip, a boy of daring and rash spirits, had run away from home five years ago. No word had ever been heard of him since, and those in the city of Bologna who knew the baker were convinced the lad had come to no good.

“I’m very glad for you,” said Peter simply. “I have no family but I can understand how you love Philip. And I’m quite sure. . . .”

“Yes?”

“That Philip is back only because of prayer.”

A blank look struck the baker’s face and he made a devout Sign of the Cross. “May God forgive me that I forgot to thank Him!” he murmured. “Of course, Peter. What else but prayer brought Philip back? Yours and mine. And perhaps there were others who thought of me in my trouble.”

The blind man nodded. “Many others. It isn’t for nothing that you give away bread to the poor, old friend. Be sure of that.”

The baker shifted restlessly, his eyes upon a crucifix over the basket-maker’s head. “I . . . I think I’ll go to church a minute,” he said lamely. “It seems only right that before the Blessed Sacrament I should make some kind of thanksgiving.”

Peter laughed at the sudden concern in his friend’s voice. “Are you afraid God will take your boy away again because you forgot to thank Him? Ah, John, yours is a common failing. We pray when we want something. We pray very hard indeed. But when our wish is granted, what do we do? Very little usually. And no one knows this better than I, who have so often failed my Maker. But come along. If you’re going to church, I’ll go with you. It’s almost noon and I generally pay a visit at this time.”

So the two men set out together down the narrow street—the one tall and strong, full of high spirits,

the other stooped and grey, but with a face strongly marked with the peace of Christ. Their destination was the Dominican church a few blocks away, where the holy founder of the Dominican Order had been buried for over a hundred years.

“I can’t stay very long,” the baker whispered as they mounted the stone steps and approached the open door. “There’s no one to watch my shop. But I want you to come tonight for supper, Peter. We’re arranging a little celebration for Philip. You will be there, won’t you?”

Peter smiled. “I’ll be there. It’s been many a day since I saw your boy.”

Time passed. Far up the aisle, near the main altar, Peter arose from his knees and put away his rosary. He sensed that he was now alone in the church, and for a moment he considered whether he should not stay a little longer. Was it courteous to leave the King of Heaven without a single adorer? But presently a rustle of silk told him that some pious woman was about to take his place. Even now she was walking slowly up the aisle.

Peter gripped his cane in firm fingers and made his way to the door. The warm noon sunlight struck his face as he stepped outside, and he smiled at the pleasant feeling of warmth. June! It was a beautiful month. Always it was kind to the poor who must

lodge in miserable quarters. It did not seek them out with the cruel fingers of frost.

With only slight hesitation, the blind man came down the church steps into the sunny street. As he turned resolutely to the right, away from his own shop, his mind was busy with a beautiful thought. It concerned the mercy of God the Father, Who allows sorrow to strike His children only for their own good. Sorrow, reflected Peter, is a powerful means to make souls remember that earth is not their true home. Sorrow, bravely borne, is nothing more than a key to the wonders of heaven.

“In heaven, my good friend John will be happier than he is at his son’s return,” thought Peter. “Even I, a blind man, will be able to see beautiful things.”

Slowly the basket-maker walked through the June sunshine, his cane beating out a gentle rhythm on the cobblestones. Sometimes a familiar voice greeted him, and he stopped for a brief chat with an old friend. But he heeded no invitation to rest himself, to stop for food and drink. He was interested in only one thing. He wanted to reach the palace of the Captain General of Bologna. Egano Lambertini might be a wealthy man, powerful in government circles, but he was not proud. He always had time for the poor. And it was the same with his wife, Donna Castora. The two were Christians in the real sense.

“Perhaps I’m wrong,” thought Peter, as he tapped his way slowly along the street, “but I have a feeling that Donna Castora has much to do with Philip’s return. It was only a few months ago that she came to my shop and bought a few baskets. I told her then of John’s sorrow and she promised to pray for his boy. Now it seems only right that someone should go to her and say that her prayer is answered.”

As the blind man turned into the spacious avenue leading toward the Lambertini castle, the air was suddenly filled with the pealing of bells. It was a joyous sound, and Peter looked up curiously. The bells were not church bells. They were those of the castle. He could almost see them swinging in the grey stone towers.

“What’s happened?” cried an excited voice from a shop door.

The question was immediately taken up by others—merchants, children, beggars, wives who had been busy in their kitchens. Of a sudden the street was a beehive of excitement as people rushed out to gaze at the grey castle on the hill where flocks of startled pigeons were circling through the air.

“It’s good news of some sort!” someone cried. “Maybe Donna Castora has had a son!”

“A son for the Captain General!” put in another voice. “God be praised!”

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THEY SURGED UP THE BROAD AVENUE.





As though a signal had been given, a flood of men and women began to surge up the broad avenue. Prominent in the motley procession were beggars, dozens of them, roused from their usual corners by the clamor of the bells. If it were true that Egano Lambertini now had a son, he would be more generous than ever with his alms. Perhaps a jug of wine to each man who wished the child well? Or a loaf of fine white bread?

“Out of the way, blind man!” someone shouted. “I want to reach the castle first.”

To escape being trampled, Peter hastily moved into the recess of a deserted doorway. To some the blind basket-maker might present a pitiable sight, shabby and frail and forgotten, but Peter was far from feeling sad. Egano Lambertini, the Captain General of Bologna, Ambassador to the Republic of Venice, had been given a son and heir!

“He deserves good fortune,” the blind man thought. “He and his wife have always been kind to everyone.”

For half an hour Peter stood in the doorway, waiting for his sharp ears to tell him that the crowd had thinned and that now he might make his own way safely to the castle. When the moment finally arrived, he moved slowly into the street. The bells were still pealing joyfully and his heart sang with

them. He had started this trip in order to speak briefly to Donna Castora, to thank her for her prayers on behalf of the baker's missing boy. Such news, he felt, would make the good woman happy. But now his little errand was hardly necessary. Donna Castora was having her own moment of triumph. The news of Philip's return must be told at some other time.

"I'll go to the castle anyway," thought Peter. "Not that I am needed. No one would miss me if I stayed away. But it will be good to have some little part in the merrymaking."

The basket-maker had just turned into the road that ran by the back of the castle when he heard a group of people approaching. They were in high spirits and apparently carried away with them a goodly supply of food and drink from the celebration.

"I say it's a shame!" cried one man, taking no notice of Peter. "Who started the story that the Captain General had a son?"

"Who cares?" sang out a companion. "I say a girl is as good as a boy when she brings us presents like these!"

"You lie, friend! Daughters only cause a man trouble. Believe me, I ought to know. Haven't I six of them?"

Puzzled, the blind man stepped back to let the

noisy group pass. So it was a baby girl who had come to grace the Lambertini household instead of a boy! Then why were the bells pealing so loud and long? This was a custom usually reserved for the first-born son of a noble family.

"I'll go and see," Peter told himself. But as he hurried along the road, his trusty cane finding the smoothest part, he could not agree with the speaker who had just passed. Whether boy or girl, Donna Castora's child possessed a soul that the saving waters of Baptism soon would render spotless and beautiful. This soul could never die. It would live forever.

"Father in heaven, bless this little newcomer!" said Peter fervently. "Help her to be Your faithful servant."

Soon he had reached the rear courtyard, filled now to overflowing with the poor of Bologna. Here long tables had been hastily set up, and servants were busy bringing forth food and drink. At one side a few musicians, in festive attire of red and gold, tuned their strings.

"This way, friend," said a servant woman's kindly voice. "Hurry, or you'll not find a place."

Peter nodded and let himself be taken by the arm. As he sat down at one of the tables, a great shout of applause went up from the happy crowd.

“Long live the Captain General!” cried the assembly. “Long live his wife and child!”

The basket-maker turned his sightless eyes toward the front of the courtyard. It was evident that Egano Lambertini had arrived to greet his guests and bid them have their fill. Probably he would soon announce the day of Baptism, when another celebration would be in order for Bologna’s poor. Happily Peter settled himself to listen, to learn by what name the little one would be called, to pledge his prayers for her health and happiness.