

THE CHILDREN OF FATIMA

AND OUR LADY'S MESSAGE
TO THE WORLD

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IT WAS a cool spring morning in the year 1916 in which the three children, natives of the Portuguese village of Fatima, saw nothing unusual. As was their custom, they had arisen before dawn, eaten breakfast, then driven their parents' sheep to pasture. There had been the usual chatter along the road, the usual plans for games once the sheep were dispersed. And now it was raining, the chill drizzle that was to be expected in early spring.

"We mustn't get too wet," said six-year-old Jacinta. "Lucia, maybe we should go to the cave today."

"Of course we should!" cried her eight-year-old brother Francisco. "It would be easy to watch the sheep from there."

Their cousin, aged nine, surveyed the dreary landscape with a critical eye. This pasture where they had brought the sheep belonged to her parents. It

was only a small field with a few straggling rows of olive trees at one end, but there was also a little rise of ground nearby, surmounted by a windmill. In the side of this hill was the cave—assuredly the best shelter the place offered.

“All right,” she said finally. “You carry the lunch boxes, Francisco, and see that they don’t get wet. I guess the sheep will be all right by themselves for a while.”

A bit breathless, the three finally reached the cave. It was dark inside, and rather cramped, but the young shepherds gave no thought to this. They were used to the place, for they frequently played here even on sunny days. Besides, the cave was dry and commanded a good view of the pasture. It would be easy to notice if the sheep began to stray.

For a while the children amused themselves with talk. Was it going to rain all day? Or would the sun come out so that they could play the Echo Game outside on the hill?

“I do hope the sun comes out,” said Jacinta, shivering a little. “It’s going to be dull if we have to stay in this place all day.”

Francisco agreed, although he was not too interested in the Echo Game. Of course it was fun to stand on the hilltop and shout different words into the still country air, then hear them come back from the distance. But it was even better to hunt through the pasture for stones, drag them into place and then build a house.

“If it clears up, I’ll build a really *big* house,” he told the two girls. “It’ll be the finest house you ever saw!”

Lucia laughed. Francisco was a year younger than she. Since he was a boy, he was a little inclined to think himself skilled at house-building. Yet he knew, and Jacinta knew, that it was really Lucia who was the leader. And why not? Wasn't she the oldest? And the only one of the three children who had made her First Communion?

"We can decide what we'll do later," she said. "Right now let's see what we have for lunch."

An hour later the children had finished the bread, fruit and cheese which their mothers had packed for them. Then, seeing that the rain was almost over, Francisco suggested that they go outside to play. But Lucia would not listen. It was noon, wasn't it? And they had finished their lunch? Very well. Now they must say the Rosary, as was the custom of country-folk for miles around.

Francisco sighed. He had never been very fond of the Rosary—or of going to church. Deep in his heart was the feeling that such things were meant for women and girls. Yet there was no use arguing with Lucia, and so he fumbled in a pocket and brought out a small wooden rosary.

"Hurry up, then," he said, "and as soon as we finish, I'm going to build the stone house. Just wait until you see how big and beautiful it is!"

For a few minutes all was peaceful in the cave as the three children told their beads. But a passerby would have been very much surprised at the manner in which the little shepherds honored the Mother of God. To save time, they said only the first two words of the *Our Father* on the large beads and

the first two words of the *Hail Mary* on the small ones, for long ago they had discovered that in this way an entire Rosary could be recited in the twinkling of an eye!

Presently their prayers were finished, and Francisco looked hopefully at Lucia. "Now we can go and play?"

"No. It's still raining."

"But just a little!"

Jacinta gave a quick glance outside the cave. "It's only a fine mist, Lucia."

"That doesn't matter."

"But the house! I want to start looking for stones!"

"You stay with me, Francisco. You, too, Jacinta. We can have a game in here."

Reluctantly the two children sat down again on the dirt floor of the cave. Lucia was the oldest, and long ago they had been told that they must obey her whenever they spent the day away from home. But as they sat, amusing one another with stories, a sudden gust of wind caused them to look up. Before they could worry as to whether or not a fresh storm was brewing, an amazing sight greeted them. Above the straggling olive trees at the far end of the field was a beautiful white light. It shone like the purest snow, the clearest crystal! But it was not still. It was moving—across the tops of the trees, across the open expanse of pasture, toward the cave!

The three children stared in awed silence as the strange glow approached, and they saw that in its very center stood a young man. He wore flowing white garments such as the three had noticed in pic-

tures of angels and saints in the parish church. But this was no picture. It was real!

“Fear not,” said the stranger. “I am the Angel of Peace.” Then, kneeling, he touched his forehead to the ground. “Pray with me,” he said.

Scarcely knowing what they did, the little shepherds fell upon their knees and imitated the actions of the strange young man. When he spoke, they repeated his words:

My God, I believe in Thee! I adore Thee!
I hope in Thee, and I love Thee! I ask pardon of Thee for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love Thee.

Three times the Angel said this prayer, then arose. “Pray thus,” he said to them. “The Hearts of Jesus and Mary will hear your petitions.”

The next moment he was gone, leaving the children more awestruck than they had ever been in their lives. Indeed, when they returned to their homes that night, they could not bring themselves to speak of the day’s great event to anyone. Somehow the Angel’s visit was too holy and beautiful for words.

It was not until mid-summer that the Angel came again. “What are you doing?” he asked. “Pray! Pray a great deal,” he told the children this time. “The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have merciful designs on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices continually to the Most High.”

Lucia hesitated, wondering whether or not it was

proper to speak to an angel. Then a wave of courage swept through her. "How are we to make sacrifices?" she asked.

The heavenly visitor answered, "Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and as a petition for the conversion of sinners. Bring peace to your country in this way."

Jacinta and Francisco were silent. How could children convert sinners? Or end the terrible war that had been going on in Europe for two years?

The shining spirit seemed to read their thoughts. "I am the Guardian Angel of Portugal," he said. "Above all, accept and bear with submission the suffering which the Lord will send you."

With this he was gone, and suddenly the children found themselves with strangely heavy hearts. Why did the Angel have to leave them? Why couldn't he tell them more about how to convert sinners and when the war was going to end?

"Maybe he'll come again," suggested Francisco hopefully.

"And give us another message," added Jacinta.

Lucia nodded. "I think he will come," she said slowly, "but first we must pray and make sacrifices as he told us."

The Angel did come again in the fall of that same year, while the children were out in the fields with their sheep. But this time he bore a golden chalice in one hand and a Host in the other. Amazed, the children noted that drops of blood were falling from the Host into the chalice and that presently the Angel

left both suspended in mid-air and prostrated himself on the ground. Then came the beautiful voice they had learned to love:

Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of Thee the conversion of poor sinners.

The Angel repeated these words three times. The children joined in this sublime prayer to the Holy Trinity as best they could, but their amazement knew no bounds when presently the Angel arose from the ground, took the Host in his hand, and beckoned to Lucia. He was going to give her Holy Communion as the priest did at Mass!

As they saw their cousin approach to receive the Host, the hearts of Francisco and Jacinta filled with longing. How wonderful if they could have this great privilege, too! But of course this was impossible. They were not like Lucia, who had finished the course of studies for First Communicants. Why, they knew only a very little of the catechism!

Suddenly the Angel looked at them over Lucia's bowed head. Taking the chalice from mid-air, he indicated that they should approach and kneel before him also.



THE HEARTS OF FRANCISCO AND JACINTA
FILLED WITH LONGING.

The little shepherds stared. Surely the Angel didn't mean. . . .

He spoke: "Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God." Then he reverently gave the contents of the chalice to Jacinta and Francisco to drink.

Once again the Angel prostrated himself and, with the children, repeated three times the prayer, "Most Holy Trinity. . . ." Then he disappeared.

PATRON SAINT
OF
FIRST COMMUNICANTS

THE STORY OF
BLESSED IMELDA LAMBERTINI

By
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Illustrated by
Gedge Harmon

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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!”

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.

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

The Story of "The Dumb Ox"

By

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Illustrated by

Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P.



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CHAPTER ONE

I GO TO SCHOOL

MY NAME is Thomas, and I was born in a castle in Italy in the year 1225. My father was a rich man, the Count of Aquin, and I was his third son. Poor Father! He was a good soul and he made great plans for me. When I was six years old, he sent me to school at the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino. He told my teachers I was to be a priest.

“My two oldest boys will be soldiers like myself,” he said. “I think Thomas should go into the service of the Church.”

I went off to school with my future clearly mapped out for me. I was to be a monk. More than that. My father said that when I was older I was to be Abbot of Monte Cassino, a position held for some years by his own brother. My mother, whose name was Theodora, agreed with him.

“I’m so proud of you, Thomas!” she often said. “Someday you’ll be in charge of that wonderful Abbey. Everyone will look up to you as long as you live!”

What could I say? I loved my parents and had been brought up to obey them. When I finally saw my uncle, the Abbot of Monte Cassino (he was a white-haired old man in a black robe, with a gold cross around his neck and a handsome ring on his finger), I began to wonder. What kind of an Abbot would I make? My hair was not white. I didn’t know how to

read. And I had a feeling that I could never spend my whole life in one place, even in such a beautiful place as the Abbey. There were other difficulties, too. Suppose the monks did not want me for their leader when I was grown up? Suppose some other boy would make a better Abbot?

“Don’t worry about such things,” my father said. “If I wish my son Thomas to be head of the Abbey, he’ll be head of it. Never fear. Am I not Count Landulph of Aquin? Am I not a nephew of the great Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa?”

“Yes, Father,” I answered meekly. But I had a strange feeling as I said these words. I, Thomas of Aquin, would never be a Benedictine Abbot. Although I was only a six-year-old boy, I felt quite sure that some other kind of life would be mine.

I liked going to school at Monte Cassino, however. The rugged mountain where Saint Benedict and his monks had settled seven hundred years before was really beautiful. The other boys and I often watched the monks laboring in the fields. We went into the work rooms, too, and saw cloth being woven from wool, old manuscripts being copied in the library. Always there was a lot of activity going on at Monte Cassino, for long ago, when Saint Benedict had first founded his colonies of monks, he had insisted upon two things. The monks should work with their hands many hours every day. They should also spend themselves in praising God by the chanting of Psalms and other prayers. Nothing was to be preferred to this latter work.

So it was that Monte Cassino resembled a very busy but a very holy town. The monks grew every-



I was to be a monk, too.

thing that was necessary to feed themselves as well as the boys who studied in their school. Then, at certain hours, they went to their chapel to sing the praises of God. Sometimes, as I listened to these holy men chanting the ancient Psalms, I wondered if it might not be good to spend my life at Monte Cassino.

Everything was so orderly and peaceful.

But as soon as such thoughts came, a strange little voice inside me would start to laugh.

“You’re not going to stay here, Thomas. Someone else will be Abbot.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s God’s Will.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know. And don’t keep asking me questions.”

I wondered who was right, my father or the little voice. It seemed as though I would stay forever at the Abbey. But when five years had passed, a great thing happened. I was sent home to Rocca Secca, to the great castle where I had been born. I was eleven years old now, and it was good to see my family once more—Father, Mother, my sisters and brothers. Mother cried a little when she saw me first, but soon she was all smiles.

“Oh, Thomas! How I’ve missed you! And how big you’ve grown! Look, Landulph, he’s really very tall for eleven!”

My father made funny noises in his throat, but his eyes were kind as he looked me up and down.

“Not bad, not bad at all,” he murmured. “The monks seem to have treated you very well.”

“Yes, Father. The Abbey is a wonderful place.”

“And what have you learned, son?”

“To read and write in Latin. And a little of many other things, Father. When am I going back?”

A peculiar look came over Father’s face. “You’re not going back, Thomas. Instead you’re going to go to school in Naples. At the University.”

Naples! The University! I could hardly believe my ears. What had made Father change his mind? Something must be wrong. Perhaps my teachers at Monte Cassino hadn’t been pleased with the way I did my lessons.

“Thomas,” said Mother very gently, “the monks tell us you’re a good student and should have every advantage. They think that in Naples . . .”

“They think you’ve learned everything they can teach you,” my father interrupted. “Ah, lad, we’re proud of you! Going to the University at eleven! When you get your degree you’ll be the most learned Abbot Monte Cassino ever had!”

So my little voice had been wrong! I was going back to Monte Cassino someday to rule the monks, to live far away from the noise and bustle of towns and cities. But first there was to be a course of studies at the University.

“Son, you look tired,” said Mother presently. “We mustn’t have that. Why not go to your room for a while?”

I nodded. I was tired. And puzzled, too. It seemed too much to believe that my school days at the Abbey were over. But I could see Father smiling to himself as I left the room. He, at least, was at ease about my future. He looked just the way he did when his soldiers came back from winning an important battle.

My sisters, Marietta and Theodora, were just as

excited as anyone else over the news that I was going away to the University.

“It must be wonderful to be a boy and go places!” sighed Marietta. “Thomas, do you suppose we could go with you to Naples?”

“I’d love living in a big city,” put in Theodora wistfully. “Mother, could we go with Thomas?”

“Nonsense!” said Mother. “Girls like you have no reason to live in Naples. You’d just get foolish ideas there.”

Theodora laughed. “Maybe we could find ourselves husbands,” she suggested. “Probably there are many nice young men in Naples who haven’t picked out a wife yet.”

“Thomas will meet lots of them at the University,” said Marietta. “Oh, it would be just wonderful if we could go!”

Mother shook her head. “Naples is a wicked city. Perhaps even Thomas shouldn’t be going there, when he’s so young. But as for you two . . .”

The girls stopped their teasing. It was all a joke anyway, for they were too young to be thinking of marriage. But their excitement about my leaving home continued to increase. The whole summer I was at Rocca Secca they could talk of nothing else.

“You’ll study hard and make yourself famous, won’t you?” Marietta asked one night. “Father and Mother are so proud of you, Thomas. It would break their hearts if you were lazy.”

“Father has always said you would grow up to be Abbot of Monte Cassino,” Theodora added. “You mustn’t disappoint him.”

I thought of the little voice that continued to tell

me my life would never be spent at the Abbey, but there was no use in saying anything to the girls.

“Of course I’ll work hard,” I promised. “Never fear. And you be good and see that Father and Mother aren’t disappointed in you!”

Marietta and Theodora laughed. “We can’t be anything but good in this poky old castle,” they said. “You ought to know that, Thomas.”

My brothers, Landulph and Raynald (who were much bigger than I and very good at horseback riding and fighting with swords), treated me like one of themselves during the last few weeks I spent at home.

“So our little Thomas is going away to the big city,” said Raynald one day. “That’s what happens to a boy when he’s good at books. Thomas, you’re a lucky little beggar to get such a chance!”

“Father never sent us to the University,” put in Landulph, pretending to be jealous. “A fine time we might have had there, too.”

I could not help smiling. No one hated books and study as much as these two older brothers of mine. Father had trained them to be soldiers. They would have been bored to death at the University. They knew it. And so did I.

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

THE STORY OF THE GIRL
WHO SAW SAINTS IN THE SKY

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

Illustrated by
Helen Louise Beccard

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

CHAPTER 1

SAINTS IN THE SKY

THERE WAS once a good man named Jacopo, who made a living at a strange business. He was a dyer, that is, he took cloths of plain colors and turned them into all the shades of the rainbow. When rich people saw Jacopo's purple silk, his scarlets and blues and yellows, they usually decided on some new clothes right away and bought yards and yards of the wonderful material. In such a way Jacopo became quite wealthy and built a nice house for his wife and family.

Now, Jacopo's house was a big place. In it lived Jacopo's numerous children, his wife, his servants and the men and boys who helped around the shop and sold goods to customers. Very seldom was there a quiet moment in Jacopo's house. Something was always going on, either a banquet, a business deal, a wedding or a visit from the neighbors. There was always food cooking in the kitchen, too, for it took a lot to feed all the people who lived with Jacopo or who came to visit him. It was a busy place, Jacopo's house. His children loved it, and when any of the sons got married they always brought their brides

home to live. In fact, as years went by, Jacopo's house became more and more crowded, so that one wondered how it could ever hold any more people.

One day in the year 1347 Jacopo and his wife Lapa, who lived in the Italian city of Siena and already had twenty-three children, were blessed by God with twin baby girls.

"Goodness!" cried the neighbors. "Where will they put any more children?"

"There was never a house like Jacopo's house," said the relations. "They will find room somehow."

And Jacopo and Lapa did, although as it turned out only one of the new little girls lived. They named her Catherine.

"I hope she grows up to be beautiful!" sighed Jacopo's wife. "Then she can marry a rich man and we can enlarge the shop."

Jacopo nodded. "Her hair is the color of red gold," he said dreamily. As he looked at his little daughter in her cradle, he began to think of making up a new color for some new silks which had just come in from the East.

Catherine grew up in her father's big house, amid all the noise and clatter of so many people. It was easy to see she would never be beautiful. Only her golden hair set her apart from other little girls in the town. It was really lovely, so long and soft and curly.

"Will you stand still?" cried her mother one morning, as she tried to comb the pretty locks. "Why are you so fidgety?"

“Because I hate having my hair fixed,” said the little girl. “I want to go out and play in the yard.”

“Well, you can’t play in the yard,” said her mother. “I have a package I want taken to your sister Bonaventura. And I want you to look nice when you go to her house. So stand still and let me fix you.”

Catherine’s brown eyes shone. Bonaventura, her favorite sister, was married and lived not far away. It was always such fun to go and see her because Bonaventura understood that little girls liked presents. And good things to eat.

“Can I go alone, Mother?” she cried. “It would be so nice to go visiting by myself just for once!”

“Nonsense!” cried her mother, who was suddenly remembering that twelve people were coming to dinner. “Your brother Stefano will go with you. And remember—go straight to Bonaventura’s. No stopping to play on the way, or to visit in church. You are too young to be out by yourselves for long.”

“But I am six years old,” Catherine started to say, then changed her mind. Company for dinner always upset her mother, who was inclined to be cross on such days.

Soon Catherine and Stefano, who was a bit older, were on their way to their married sister’s house. The sun was shining brightly. The streets were crowded with people. Ox carts jolted up and down. A group of wandering musicians had stopped to play and sing near the great fountain in the square. “Oh, let’s listen to them!” cried Stefano, running ahead. “They have a

dancing bear and a monkey!” But Catherine remembered her mother’s words and shook her head.

“No, we must go straight to Bonaventura’s,” she said, and took Stefano’s hand firmly in hers.

They stayed at Bonaventura’s house for an hour only, and then started home with a package for their mother. This time they did not come through the crowded streets of the town but took a short cut through an open field. There were many flowers growing along the way, and Catherine and Stefano picked a few as they walked along. Back of the Dominican church, which stood over towards the town, they were even more plentiful.

“Let’s go and get some daisies,” said Stefano. “There are loads of them over near the church.”

“Mother said to come right back . . .” said Catherine, and then suddenly her heart skipped a beat.

Above the Dominican church, right in the middle of the blue sky, right above the fields of white daisies, were people. They were standing in the sky as though it were the most natural thing to do, and some were kneeling before a great white throne. A King was seated on the throne, and He seemed pleased with the people about Him. He even seemed pleased with Catherine, for He turned in her direction and smiled at her.

“Oh!” cried the little girl, falling to her knees. “How beautiful it all is!”

Stefano stared. “What’s the matter?” he cried.



“NO, WE MUST GO STRAIGHT TO BONAVENTURA’S.”

“What are you kneeling down for?”

But Catherine did not hear. Her eyes were fixed on the sky, on the wonderful people in shining robes, on the King. She knew, without being told, that the King was really Our Lord, and when He raised His Hand to bless her, she could hardly believe it.

Stefano looked at the blue sky over the church, but there was nothing there except a white cloud, a very ordinary cloud. Certainly that was nothing to make Catherine’s face so happy, to cause her to kneel down in the field as though she were praying.

“What is the matter with you?” he asked. “Mother will be cross if we are late with this parcel.”

And then, since Catherine still did not answer, he began to be angry.

“Will—you—come—on?” he said.

Awakened from her vision, Catherine turned to Stefano, and her eyes were shining.

“Oh, if you could see what I see, you would not bother me! Look, Stefano, at the wonderful people in the air! They are saints, I am sure. And that is Our Lord, sitting on the throne and smiling at us.”

Stefano looked to where Catherine pointed. “Silly!” he laughed. “There are no people in the air. How could there be? And Our Lord is in the church, not over it. You know that.”

Catherine’s smile faded. Even as Stefano was speaking she saw that the wonderful vision had gone. There were no longer any saints in the sky. And Our Lord was gone, too.



HER EYES WERE FIXED ON THE SKY, ON THE
WONDERFUL PEOPLE IN SHINING ROBES.

“Well, are you coming?”

Catherine nodded. “I’m coming,” she said, but her heart was sad. The saints and Our Lord had been so beautiful. Now the sky seemed empty without them.

“You shouldn’t make up stories and tell them as though they were true,” Stefano said presently. “It isn’t right.”

“But I didn’t make up a story!” replied Catherine quickly. “There were saints in the sky, Stefano. And I could have been looking at them yet, if you hadn’t bothered me.”

The little boy shrugged his shoulders. What could you do with girls? They talked and talked and always wanted to be in the right. They would never admit they could make a mistake.

There was a great deal of confusion in Jacopo’s house as the two children neared the gate. Strange bearded men, whom they knew to be cloth merchants from the East, were standing in the courtyard. Piled high in the workrooms were great bales of silk and wool. Vats of dye simmered on the fire and young men stood over them, stirring them with large wooden ladles. It was a busy day for Jacopo, the dyer.

“There’s my cat!” cried Stefano. “Let’s make a daisy chain for her neck with these flowers!”

But Catherine shook her head. She was thinking about the strange people in the sky over the Dominican church, the strange people who must be saints. She was sure one of them had been Saint John, the cousin of Our Lord, and two others, Saint



STRANGE BEARDED MEN,
CLOTH MERCHANTS FROM THE EAST,
WERE STANDING IN THE COURTYARD.

Peter and Saint Paul. There were pictures of these great men all through the town. But why had they been in the sky? And why had she, a little girl, seen them?

“I never saw a saint before,” she thought. “They seemed awfully nice.”

And then an idea came into Catherine’s head, as she stood watching Stefano playing with his cat. Why couldn’t she be a saint, too? Why couldn’t she be holy and love Our Lord as Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint John had loved Him? Why couldn’t she be up in the sky over the Dominican church, and very close to Our Lord on His throne?

“I guess I couldn’t be a saint at home,” she said. “There is too much noise and there are too many people. But if I could go away . . . if I could have a nice quiet place where Our Lord could tell me how to be good . . .”

“Catherine!” called a woman’s voice suddenly. “Come here at once!”

Recognizing her mother’s voice, Catherine went into the house. Her golden curls were tangled from the wind and would have to be combed again. Her hands were dirty from picking flowers. But what did anything matter? She had seen a vision. She had seen a most wonderful vision in the sky. And soon she would be a saint, too, a saint with wonderful shiny robes like Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint John.

THE
LITTLE FLOWER

THE STORY OF SAINT THERESE
OF THE CHILD JESUS

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

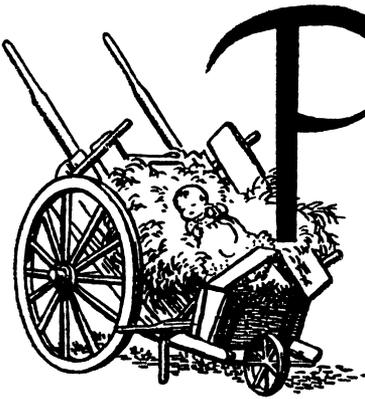
Illustrated by
Gedge Harmon



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CHAPTER 1

THE BABY OF THE MARTIN FAMILY



PAPA was a watchmaker and had a rather long name—Louis Joseph Aloysius Stanislaus Martin. Mama’s was much shorter—Zelie Marie Guerin. They were married on July 13, 1858, in the church of Notre Dame in Alencon, France. Papa was about thirty-five years old at the time, Mama twenty-six. A few people were afraid that the marriage was a mistake. You see, they were remembering those days long ago when Papa thought he had a vocation to be a monk. They also remembered that Mama once tried to enter the religious life, too—as a Sister of Saint Vincent de Paul.

“Louis Martin and Zelie Guerin are far too holy to live in the world,” these people told one another. “Each would be better off in some monastery.”

But this was not so. God did not want Papa or Mama to live in the cloister. He wanted them to live in the world. He wanted them to have many children and to teach these little ones the beauties of the Catholic faith. So it was that they married each other, that thirteenth day of July in the year 1858, and settled down to a quiet life in Alencon.

The first child God sent my parents was a girl. She was called Marie Louise in Baptism, although from the start Papa just called her Marie—which is the French form for Mary.

“We’ll give each of our little ones the first name of Marie,” he said. “Even the boys. In this way they’ll all be consecrated to the Blessed Virgin.”

It was a fine thought, and one with which Mama readily agreed. She had a very high opinion of Papa, and not a day passed that she did not thank God for giving her such a fine husband. How kind he was! And how hard he worked at his watchmaking so that she might have a comfortable home! Truly, there was no better man in Alencon, in all France, than Louis Joseph Aloysius Stanislaus Martin!

As time passed, my parents prayed very hard that God would send them a little boy. They were anxious to have a son to give to the priesthood. But the next three babies were all girls: Marie Pauline, Marie Leonie, Marie Helen. It did seem as though the many prayers for a son, “a little missionary,” would never be answered. Then one fine day Marie Joseph Louis came to gladden the hearts of all.

“Here’s our priest!” said Papa delightedly.

Alas! The new baby lived only five months. Then God called him to Heaven. The same thing happened with Marie Joseph John Baptist—the sixth child to come into our home. This little brother lived to be eight months old. Then he died, too.

Poor Papa! Poor Mama! They were deeply afflicted at the loss of their two little sons. But they loved God in a really honest way, which means that they loved His Will and trusted it more than their own. Therefore, they did not grieve long. Besides, faith told them that they had given new saints to love God in Heaven.

“The boys will pray for us,” Papa said. “Just think! They went to God without one sin on their souls!”

Presently another girl was born in our house—Marie Celine. The next year came one more—Marie Melanie Therese. This little one lived only a short time. Then death came again as God called to Himself the fourth child in our family: five-year-old Marie Helen.

The neighbors were shocked at all the sorrow which came to our house. “Four children dead out of eight!” they said, sadly shaking their heads. “Really, it would be better if these little ones had never been born. Then their parents would have been spared a good deal of pain.”

“No, no!” Mama would protest. “My children are not lost to me. Life is short. We shall meet again in Heaven.”

“And we still have Marie, Pauline, Leonie and Celine to cheer us up,” Papa would put in, comfortingly. “My business is prospering, too. Why should we complain?”

Everyone marveled at the wonderful way in which Papa and Mama accepted these fresh trials. Death had called four times in twelve years, yet the Martin house was still a cheerful place. So was the shop where Papa worked at his trade of watchmaker and jeweler. It was a pleasure to visit either one.

Time passed, and presently it was the year 1873. Marie and Pauline, students at the Visitation convent in Le Mans, were home in Alencon for their Christmas vacation. Late on the night of January 2, Papa went upstairs to the little room where they were sleeping.

“Wake up, children!” he cried excitedly. “I have some news for you!”

The girls sat up with a start, blinking at the light from Papa’s lamp. What had happened? Why was their father standing in the doorway with such a big smile on his face?

“What is it, Papa?” asked Marie anxiously. “Mama’s not sick again?”

A dozen questions were on Pauline’s tongue, but Papa gave her no chance to ask them.

“No, Marie. Mama’s all right. And you have a new sister now—a beautiful little girl!”

Yes—it was January 2, 1873, and God had sent me to earth at last—to the wonderful Christian home of Louis Martin, watchmaker of Alencon!



“PAPA, WHAT’S THE BABY’S NAME?”

Of course Marie and Pauline found it hard to go to sleep after Papa's visit. They asked each other many questions about me. For instance, was I a healthy baby? Would I stay with them or go to Heaven like the other little sisters and brothers? What would Papa and Mama call me? When would I be baptized? Who would be my godmother?

"Marie, I think you'll be chosen," said Pauline suddenly. "After all, you're the oldest—thirteen next month. I'm only eleven."

Marie smiled. To be godmother of the new little sister! That would be wonderful!

"Oh, I hope so," she said softly. "I've never been a godmother in my whole life."

So it came to pass that on January 4, when I was two days old, a little procession set out from our house and made its way through the snowy streets to the church of Notre Dame. Our maid, Louise, carried me in her arms, well wrapped in blankets. Then came Papa, with Marie and Pauline each hanging on an arm. There were also some neighbors and friends.

"Papa, tell us again what the baby is going to be called," said Marie. "I'm so excited about being her godmother that I'm not just sure."

Papa laughed heartily. "Her name is a nice one, child. Marie Frances Therese." Then the happy light died out of his eyes as he gave a quick glance at the wintry sky.

"Dear God, please leave this child with us!" he whispered. "In the Name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ!"

There was good reason for Papa to be anxious about me. In the days following my Baptism, I fell ill and it seemed likely that God soon would take me to Himself in Heaven.

“The only way that this child can be saved is to give her to a good nurse,” said the doctor. “One who lives in the country. Perhaps with proper food and plenty of fresh air and sunshine, the baby will get strength enough to live.”

Poor Mama! She did not want to be parted from me, yet she agreed to do whatever the doctor thought best. There was a farm woman she knew, Rose Taillé, who might take care of me for a few months. She had been very successful in nursing other sick children. Perhaps she could help me, too.

Rose Taillé wasn’t sure about this. The day Mama brought her into Alençon to have a look at me, the good-natured woman gave a great sigh. She had never seen such a poor little scrap of humanity. Why, I was nothing but skin and bones! And so pale!

“I’ll do my best,” she told Mama. “But I can promise you nothing, Madame. Ah, what a sickly little mite we have here! Only prayers will save her, I’m thinking.”

Mama nodded. There would be plenty of prayers—to Saint Joseph, to the Blessed Virgin, to all the Saints. Oh, how she would pray for me! And Papa, too.

So Rose took me out into the country, pausing frequently on the journey to see if I was still alive. She was a little worried about this new responsibility. She

had four children of her own to care for, and it was necessary to help her husband with the farm work, too. Perhaps she shouldn't have taken me with her. If I died, people might blame her.

But I did not die. God heard the fervent prayers which Papa and Mama offered for my recovery, and at Rose's house I became a totally different child. This was not because the good woman had any luxuries to give me. On the contrary, she had very little time to spend on my care. Because there was no proper carriage, she would put me in a wheelbarrow filled with hay and take me out to where she and her husband were working. Sometimes I was left alone under a tree. At others, Rose put the wheelbarrow in the sun.

"The little one is too pale," she said. "Maybe the sunshine will help her to grow strong."

I did grow strong and brown. In a few months there was no longer any danger that I would die. Rose was very proud, and one May day she took me home to show Mama how I had grown. Why, I weighed fourteen pounds!

"Therese is going to be all right, Madame," she said thankfully. "And I think I can leave her with you, now that she's nearly five months old."

Mama was so happy. "Rose, how can I thank you?" she cried. "You saved my little girl's life!"

Rose smiled shyly as she put me into Mama's arms. "I have to go to the market now," she said. "It's the day for selling butter, and I'm late."

Of course I could not understand what Rose was saying, but it did not take long for me to realize that she had left me in a stranger's arms. At once I started to cry. Nothing could make me stop. As time passed Mama became frightened. She tried to comfort me, to sing little songs, to rock me to sleep. I wasn't interested. I wanted Rose, no one else. Finally Mama called the maid.

"Louise, what am I going to do? Therese will make herself sick with all this crying!"

Louise peered down at me. I was screaming at the top of my lungs, and my face was a deep and angry red.

"Do you really want my opinion, Madame?"

"In Heaven's name, yes! None of my other children ever acted like this."

Louise smiled. "It's simple, Madame. The child wants Rose. She won't stop crying unless we take her to her."

"But Rose is selling butter at the market!"

"She could still look after the baby, Madame. And she'd be pleased if we told her how the little one misses her."

Poor Mama! She didn't want to let go of me but there was nothing else to do. "All right," she said sadly. "Take Therese down to the market, Louise. But if she still keeps on crying, what shall we do then?"

There was no need for Mama to worry about this. As soon as Louise and I arrived at the market, where

women from the farms outside Alencon were selling their butter, I began to smile. Then I laughed and laughed, for my eyes had caught sight of Rose. I stretched out my arms happily. This was what I had wanted all the time—*my mother!*

I stayed at the market until noon, happy and contented as Rose and her friends sold their butter. A few people asked questions about me as I lay quietly in my good friend's arms.

"Rose, I didn't know you had such a little girl as this one," they remarked. "And she has fair hair. I thought all your children were dark."

Rose laughed. "Oh, the child isn't mine," she said.

"Then whose is she?"

"She belongs to the Martin family, Lord bless her! And good as gold she is, too — at least when I'm looking after her!"