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My Eye Now Sees You (Good News Media), St. Alphonsa: Her Life of Love (St. Paul's) and The Acorn That Was - Quickened by Grace (Providence Women's College, Kozhikode).



THE RELENTLESS QUEST

MOTHER MARY VERONICA OF THE PASSION





1823 - 1906

Foundress of the Apostolic Carmel (A.C.)
&
Congregation of Carmelite Religious (C.C.R)

THE RELENTLESS QUEST

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

The Apostolic Carmel Generalate
Bangalore
2013

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FOREWORD

"Obedience is my life" sums up the 83 years of the life of Mother Veronica of the Passion, the foundress of the Apostolic Carmel Congregation. For those who know her already, this abridged version of her life will bring back the memories of her life taking the strange course of events, which are illustrated in Sister Carol's book "The Strange Destiny". Those who are getting to know her for the first time, will surely be interested to know details of her life, which Sister Carmilla could not include in the present abridged version. May the readers, be inspired and motivated to walk the path of 'singleness of purpose' in one's life, to reach the destiny God has marked for them.

"The Relentless Quest" of Mother Veronica, which is the title of the second chapter, gives the gist of the abridged version of her life, in this book. The boat of her life directed by the wind and the sail sees many harbours. Beckoning to God's call, it finally reaches the Carmel of Pau. The journey of the Apostolic Carmel, in response to God's call to Mother Veronica, "I want you in Carmel," had started at the Carmel of Pau where she went to imbibe the Spirit of Carmel. Her earthly sojourn ended there. But the Apostolic Carmel continues to carry on her mission.

Sister Carmilla combines dialogue with descriptive prose to put across the life and Mission of Sister Veronica of the Passion. The conversations keep alive the interest and bring out the passion of emotion in different aspects of life.

The description gives the connection and completes the life and Mission of the Valiant Woman who is led to follow the strange path. The course of events makes her give up her engagement to a young naval officer to be espoused to the Son of God. From being the daughter of a Protestant Army chaplain, she becomes a Catholic along with her sister, Mary Ann, with the full awareness of the pain and division caused in the family. She is led to give up the congregation where she was trusted and loved, to found another, in response to the voice, "I want you in Carmel." The search for the cradle for the new Congregation with rejection everywhere ends up back at the place where she started, to find a dilapidated building. There was peace in her heart which was a blessing.

In poverty and the trials of finding the new recruits and training them, the only joy Mother Veronica had was to send two batches to the destined Mission in India. But the turn of events in India, which led to the cutting off of connection with its roots in Bayonne and the foundress, made those in authority to order the closure of the novitiate and even prevent her from going to India.

While the foundress retired to the cloistered Carmel at Pau, the infant Congregation of the Apostolic Carmel continued to grow, take root and expand under the leadership of Mother Marie des Anges, the first novice of the foundress. The journey of Mother Veronica continued in Bethlehem, the new foundation of Carmel. After the death of Mary of Jesus, whose friend and confidant Mother Veronica was, she traversed back to Pau, to spend the last ten years of her life in the cloistered Carmel and water the "work of her hands" the Apostolic Carmel with her prayers and sacrifices.

In the last chapter titled, "Rise of the Phoenix," the author traces the event of Vatican II, which gave a clarion call to the Congregations to go back to their roots and foundational charisms.

Let me conclude in the words of Sister Carmilla, "Today like a Phoenix she has risen from the ashes of obscurity ...to a high degree of appreciation of her life of sanctity and suffering that she went through to give birth to the Congregation."

May the painstaking efforts taken by the author prove to be a source of inspiration, to the readers to "search for" and tread the path marked out for them, specially her daughters, the members of the Apostolic Carmel.

Sister Agatha Mary A.C.
Superior General

PREFACE

"Write a simplified version of Mother Veronica's life". This request was from Sister Agatha Mary, my Superior General. A simplified version of so magnificent, remarkable and great a personality! I found it beyond my capacity. The excellent history of Mother Veronica, "A Strange Destiny" by Sister M. Carol A.C and "Like Clay in His Hands" and "Leap Into Love" by Sister M. Valeria A.C. were already there as testimonies par excellence of Mother Veronica's life and sanctity.

Obedience makes impossible things possible. So my modest efforts have found expression in this small and simple book, 'The Relentless Quest' that attempts to sketch her life, her work and her relevance to us. Studying anew her life and spirituality has been a rich experience for me.

The source material has been gleaned from her own "Autobiography", "Her Life in Letters" (edited by Sister M. Carol A.C.), and the books mentioned above by Sister Carol and Sister Valeria.

In the chequered life of Mother Veronica, one strand stands out predominantly — her relentless quest for God's Will. She loved God passionately. This love filled her with a consuming passion to search for His Will and carry it out as perfectly as she could, whatever be the price she had to pay for it. Hence her reiterated conviction, "Obedience in my life."

This pursuit lasted all her life. Through all her vicissitudes, the end - result did not matter so much, provided she strove to do what obedience required of her. Even after the traumatic

experience of having to close down the Little Carmel she had this to say:

- ...as I was aware that, in everything, I had no other intention than to follow holy Obedience, and since I could, despite all my mistakes and sins, give this proof of having always obeyed in whatever concerned this foundation, from the smallest thing to the greatest, I was soon consoled.

It was this virtue that made Father Marie Ephrem, her close collaborator and guide, to find in her the fittest instrument for the work of founding the Third Order. He says:

- I see with satisfaction that you are always guided by Holy Obedience. How little the success you may have had at La Roche, it will always be a gain to you and the work that you are able to say to yourself, "I have obeyed".

The dialogue in various instances has largely been recorded verbatim. In a few cases it has been constructed with a view to appropriateness to the given situation. These instances are indented in order to highlight their importance, as it is through them that the mindset and temperament of the protagonist are best revealed. This technique also creates a sense of the intimacy and immediacy in this realistic representation of Mother Veronica's life. May this very simple version of a great personality find its way into the hearts of all its readers, to ignite, inspire and impel them towards a greater love of Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour.

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am keenly aware that the mandate from the Superior General, Sister Agatha Mary, to write a simple version of Mother Veronica's life was a great grace. I thank God for it. For this opportunity and for going through my script and writing the foreword I render my heartfelt thanks to my Superior General. To M. Liceria A.C. who, at every step guided and corrected me, I owe special thanks. Sister M. Carol A.C. very kindly read through the typescript and offered suggestions and corrections. My thanks to her. To Ms. Geralyn Pinto I owe a big debt of gratitude for going through the manuscript and offering her suggestions and corrections and a frank appraisal of how it gets across to lay people. Mrs. Bindu Amat and Mrs. Susan Tommy obliged me by going through the first draft and offering their opinions.

Sister Roseema A.C. has been very helpful at the computer. Sister Beatrice Pereira, too, has also been of immeasurable help giving me suggestions and corrections to make the work more readily readable.

Sister M. Carmilla A.C.

1. THE RICH FAMILY LEGACY

- What a splendid sight it was, Sophie... the two of you... as if made for each other!
- Oh! Thank you Mary Ann. It's his character I admire most, you know. So good, noble and reliable.
- Now that the engagement is over, I hope you won't take long to get married.
- It'll take him a year or two to be relieved from the Navy. I'll have to wait...How I wish Papa were here! I miss him so much, Mary Ann.
- So do I. What an ideal father he was to us! And such a loving husband to Mama!
- What a scholar, too! And a linguist with a knowledge of nine languages!
- The trouble he took to translate the Bible into Greek! Aren't you glad he made us learn Greek, so that we could read the New Testament in the original?
- Yes, of course!
- What's more, Mary Ann, we could never see anything wrong in him. No impatience or lack of charity or any ill temper. If he were a Catholic, he would have been a saint.
- The way he used to pray! Remember, how we, as children, used to peep through the key hole to see him on his knees praying loud with such fervour.

- Oh! How we scampered away lest we should be discovered!
- Mary Ann, if only he'd lived longer I am sure he would have been in favour of the Oxford Movement that is growing strong in England... Anglicans coming closer to the Catholic Church. Don't you think so?
- I'm sure of it, Sophie. He was so honest and straightforward. His mind would have opened to the truth. No prejudice, no bigotry.
- Remember how we persuaded him to erect a gilt crucifix on the Altar when he built that Church in Athens?
- Yes, just as the Catholics have.
- The trouble he took to bring us up with Christian values!
- Oh! Sophie, the thrashing Papa gave you for taking a spoonful of milk from the table laid out for tea! It was I who reported you. I'm sorry, Sophie.
- Not at all, Mary Ann. Papa had just instructed us that stealing was a sin. It did me good. I learnt a lesson never to take anything that belonged to others or to tell a lie.
- Oh! The happy times we had! It will never be the same again.
- The passion for music of the whole family—all of us singing the four voices and our Catholic music master accompanying us on the piano!
- I particularly loved those Catholic hymns, Mary Ann.

The two sisters, Sophie and Mary Ann, often had very intimate conversations, knit together as they were, in a close bond of love.



Henry Daniel Leeves was an Anglican clergyman, Chaplain to the British Embassy at Constantinople. His father was also a clergyman of the Church of England, and Rector for 50 years at Wrington, in Somersetshire. Sophie was born at Constantinople. At that time Henry Leeves was translating the Bible into Greek as he was commissioned to do so by the British Foreign Bible Society. The family went off to Corfu, an island off the west coast of Greece. Henry, the eldest son, was taught by a tutor. The daughters, too, had regular hours of study. Mrs. Marina Leeves, their mother, never sent them to school.

Says Sophie:

- She even forgot they belonged to God more than to herself.

Travelling constituted an important part of the children's education. Sophie was to state later that she had made 25 voyages to and fro on the Mediterranean, besides travelling twice via the Straits of Gibraltar to England and back. In addition, of course, there was the voyage to India. She had crossed the Alps six or seven times and had been to all the major cities of Europe and the Near East - London, Paris, Rome, Athens, Geneva, Naples, Malta and Bethlehem. The children were all highly accomplished except for Emily, the third girl, who was born deaf and dumb. Mrs. Leeves and Sophie took great trouble to learn the sign language and then proceeded to teach her. When Henry turned sixteen, Papa took him to England to study at the University of Oxford. That was in 1837.

The family eventually settled down at Syros, South East of Greece. Mr. Leeves bought some land and built a beautiful

house at Athens and, later, another in the countryside of Castaniotissa. It was at Athens that Sophie spent the happiest years of her younger days. Visiting the ruins of ancient heathen temples, and then learning to read, in the original, the classical Greek writers - Homer, Xenophon, Herodotus, she soon became highly scholarly. What she liked best, though, was the Areopagus where Saint Paul preached to the men of Athens about the "Unknown God," whom they ignorantly worshipped. She delighted to read the discourse in the very Greek that St. Paul had used.

The summer villa at Castaniotissa was another paradise - a house built on the "knee of a hill." Life was beautiful, like the scenery around. With Mama's encouragement, Sophie and Mary Ann got up a little school for the children of the peasants around and taught them to read and write. In the evenings, they went riding with Papa or Henry, visiting the neighbours in the next village or scrambling up the hills.

Into this little paradise on earth there came the cross which broke up the united, happy family. The visit of Mr. Leeves to the Holy Land with only Mary Ann as companion was fraught with tragedy. He took ill at Mount Carmel, where a Carmelite priest cared for him, but the Protestant missionaries at Bayreuth, took him away to their own house. On 8 May 1845 he died peacefully leaving behind a rich, spiritual, intellectual and cultural family heritage. He was all in all to each member of the family. Now he was gone. He was only 45 years old. Friends brought Mary Ann back home. The family never again lived in Athens.

2. THE RELENTLESS QUEST

It was some time after Papa's death that Sophie got engaged to a young naval officer. Henry now wished to study the Italian art of breeding silk worms to introduce it into his estate at Castaniotissa. So the whole family went to Naples during winter.

"See Naples and die" ran the popular adage. No beauty can be compared to that of Naples. They lived for some time at Portici where Sophie and her sister frequented the Catholic churches. She and Mary Ann confided to each other their deepest sentiments:

- My heart seems empty and languishing after I know not what. There is something in these churches that I miss in our Protestant Churches, Mary Ann.
- I, too, feel the same, Sophie. Some sort of divine power seems to draw me to these churches.

The climate did not agree with Sophie. Strong convulsions overtook her and she was sent to her fiancé's family in England, while Mama and the other three girls went on a trip to Rome. Sophie met her fiancé once more in his house and got to know him better and admire his goodness all the more. In spring, Mama and her sisters returned to England. While in Rome, the girls had heard of a Puseyist minister of Margaret Church who heard confessions. Sophie was delighted with this news, for she had felt a heavy weight in the depth of her heart. She longed to get rid of it. Her soul mate, Mary Ann would understand her.

- I don't know what is lacking in me, Mary Ann. I'm searching for God. I want to get rid of this burden within me.
- Perhaps going to confession will help, Sophie. Let's try to contact Mr. Richards of Margaret Church.
- Yes, that's a good idea.

They made arrangements for a meeting with him, Sophie felt quite changed after she confessed her sins to Mr. Richards. So did her sisters. But Mama was indignant.

She reproached them:

- Confessing your sins to a young man like the Papists do, and then going about in the attire of peasant women with poked bonnets and long skirts!

Sophie reminded her:

- Mama, you taught us to love the poor and help them.
- And so?
- Loving them means to live at least a little like them.
- What do you mean?

Mary Ann added:

- We don't have any desire to wear these nice dresses, Mama.

Mama would not relent.

- Besides, you are giving away your jewelry to Margaret Chapel! I forbid you to do that! Do you hear?

However, the three sisters continued going to the Margaret Chapel as also visiting the sick and poor entrusted to them. Love for the poor and needy was a family trait. In years gone

by Papa would give each of them some pocket money every week. They also had to go without sugar. With the money they had thus saved they would bear the cost of the clothing of the little children around. Each girl had her own little protégé whom she was happy to dress up and care for. This instinct to love the poor had been nurtured in Sophie from her earliest years.

Something strange was happening to Sophie. Until now, she had been looking forward to her marriage. But, of late, it seemed that Jesus had taken possession of her heart. No other desire, no other affection could be accommodated in her heart but that for Jesus.

Mary Ann, from whom she had no secrets, noticed this change.

- A penny for your thoughts, Sophie! What's happening to you? You are no more yourself.
- Yes, Mary Ann, it is as if I have become another person.
- Another person? What do you mean?
- I must break off the engagement with my fiancé, Mary Ann.
- Well, I never!
- Jesus is calling me, Mary Ann. I can feel it in my heart ever so strongly.
- But how on earth did you get this idea? Who put it in your mind?
- Who else but God? I can't explain... a longing to belong to Him and to want Him alone.

- Surely you can serve Him in the married life, too.
- Not quite, Mary Ann. Two passions cannot survive together.
- What are you going to do, Sophie? Tell him so?
- I will ask advice, get permission from Mr. Richards to allow me to do so. So I can feel free to belong to God.
- How Sophie?
- Join the Puseyite sisterhood, perhaps, as a Sister of Mercy.

Sophie made repeated requests to Mr. Richards to allow her to write to her fiancé to release her so that she could belong to God. Mr. Richard was aghast. Such a strange request and that for a reason beyond his understanding! At last he gave his consent. Days, in turn, of alternate anxiety, restlessness and hope followed. When the answer came, Mr. Richards could not believe his ears.

Neither could Mary Ann.

- Oh! Sophie, it must have cost him a great deal.
- Of course, it did, Mary Ann. He was sad but his uprightness and nobility of character...Oh! He could not but say yes.
- He had great regard for your integrity, I'm sure, Sophie.
- Yes, of course! He was certain that the only reason for breaking up... was my desire for God.

Mary Ann was silent for a while.

- How will Mama take it?
- She will be vexed, I'm sure. What else can I do?

Sure enough, Mama was vexed, angry and could not accept the turn of events. Little Emily was getting worse. The old English climate did not suit her so they all set off for Malta. Mary Ann, too, began struggling with the idea of becoming a Puseyite sister. She persuaded Mama to let her stay back in London to tutor Dr. Pusey's little daughter.

Emily died soon after their arrival at Malta. Sophie came still closer to the tenets of the Catholic Church. Various kinds of penances and hours of prayer at the beautiful Cathedral at Malta were a part of her daily routine. Cholera broke out all over Malta and Sophie, too, caught it, but survived. Her family doctor tried to make her renew her engagement by frightening her about her responsibility regarding the matter. This made her ill and weak. One day she knelt before a small crucifix and made a vow of chastity. With this, her lost health returned. She was soon herself.

One evening Sophie and Catherine had just returned after going for a walk. Their Catholic maid hastened to tell them:

- Mrs. Leeves has just been to the oratory you have under the staircase, Miss Sophie.

Sophie ran to the hiding place only to see the beautiful, large crucifix missing. The stump was there on the floor. She rushed to her mother:

- Mama, how could you break that crucifix?
- Yes, I broke it and dropped the bits in the sea.
- How could you do that Mama? Are you an iconoclast?
- I won't have idolaters in my house. Do you hear?

Sophie and Catherine sobbed their hearts out.

It was Holy Saturday. They went to the cemetery where Emily was buried to adorn her tomb with flowers. On their way they stepped in at Dr. Vialley's, their family doctor. The discussion soon centered on the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Dr. Vialley maintained that the bread was only a "representation" of His body and wine of His blood. Sophie had a Greek New Testament with her and strongly maintained that in Greek the verb "is" never means "signifies" or "represents" but simply "is" and so we must believe that the bread becomes His Body. The doctor stuck to his stance and Sophie to hers till she fell into a swoon for a few minutes. When she came to, all the church bells of Valetta were chiming the bells of the "Gloria in excelsis" of Holy Saturday. Sophie was thrilled and exclaimed:

— That's the first Resurrection, the first proclamation of Easter joy!

Sophie and Catherine hastened to the cemetery. Although her rigorous Lenten fast had occasioned the fainting fit, Sophie alone knew that God had intervened to cut short the useless, heretical statements of Dr. Vialley.

At this time Catherine went back to England to get married to one Mr. Lauphler. Mary Ann was sent for to return to Greece. The two sisters were now overjoyed. They could once again have heart-to-heart talks. They had much to share about Kitty, as they called their exceedingly pretty, younger sister, Catherine.

— Oh! How she desired for the religious life, to do penance and fast even as a child! Her belief in the Immaculate Conception was so strong...How she would reason with Papa on such matters!

- He called her his little advocate.
- Remember, Mary Ann, how we missed her one day during the family prayers! She was in her room with bruises on her legs and face... She had been trying to take the discipline with thorny, rose stalks.
- Oh dear! How she used to walk along the gravel around the garden without shoes and stockings!
- What a fine nun she would have been! Now she has lost the first fervour, Sophie.
- Not quite, perhaps, she wants her husband to take Holy Orders.

The conversation soon turned to their favourite topic - the sentiments they felt while praying in the Church of the Jesu at Valetta.

- I wonder, Mary Ann, what exactly it is, that is overpoweringly drawing us to that Church.
- Surely, it is not the services or the music or the beauty of the architecture!
- Certainly not, Mary Ann. Could it be... Could it be... that the Catholics are right after all...?
- You mean... about what they call the Real Presence?
- Exactly, that the bread and wine really ARE changed into the body and blood of Jesus at the Mass. That's what the Greek Bible tells us.
- Oh! I wish someone could enlighten us, Sophie.

The young naval officer to whom Sophie was affianced arrived at Malta. Sophie met him once more. Simply and frankly she said:

- My happiness does not depend on anyone or anything in this world. I want to belong only to God and become a religious.

Sophie noticed that he was watching her fingering the ring. She removed it gently and quietly and handed it back to him.

- I want to become a religious. Let me say farewell to you.
- Sophie, I accept your decision. I won't come between you and your God. Farewell.

Sophie felt completely free. Along with Mary Ann she resumed their visits to the poor. One Sunday evening—it was the octave of Christmas 1849—Mary Ann and Sophie went to Mrs. Demech's house to introduce Henry to her. Mrs. Demech was a Catholic, President of a society which met periodically to help the poor. She gave them a surprise:

- Do you know, young ladies, I'm waiting for a Jesuit priest who is coming to say good-bye to me before leaving for Rome. Would you have the curiosity to see a Jesuit?

They were overjoyed:

- Oh! Yes, and we can still remain to talk to him a little for Mama will return only after her Church service, at about 8 O'clock.

Father Guiliani arrived a bit late. And he began to talk about the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist. Suddenly Sophie felt a sort of upheaval in her whole being. Leaning her head on her arms on the table she began to sob irresistibly. Mrs. Demech and Mary Ann hastened to her aid.

It was Father Guiliani who said:

- Leave the child alone. It is the grace of God that has just touched her heart.

Both Sophie and Mary Ann confessed that they were not any more sure whether they were in the true Church. They wanted to seek the truth together. Since Father Guiliani was leaving the next day, he promised to make arrangements with Father Seagrave, the Rector of the Jesuits, to instruct them. Since that memorable day, they had no peace of heart until they could grasp the truth.

3. THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

- Mary Ann, don't turn your head to look behind you. People will think we are going to commit some crime.
- I'm afraid that Henry may be behind us to spy on us and see where we are going.

It was like being in the agony of death. There was fear in their hearts as Sophie and Mary Ann made their way to Father Seagrave. To club these meetings with their visits to the poor and keep them secret from Mama... it was a terrible ordeal. Father Seagrave instructed them, consoled and encouraged them. Their minds were convinced, all doubts cleared. But their hearts were broken. It was chaos to leave the known, and plunge into the unknown.

Sophie was to say later:

- My God! What anguish! It is necessary to have passed through it to understand it. So I have very often said that when a soul has passed through the tortures of conversion, God can indeed make it endure all other kinds of anguish.

They now knew they had to take the irrevocable step of being baptized. However, Sophie wanted to consult a Protestant pastor. So they went to see Bishop Tomlinson, a family friend, and told him they were intending to enter the Catholic Church not finding the truth in the Anglican. He tried to change their minds. What was their surprise to receive the next morning a long letter from Mrs. Tomlinson rebuking

them vigorously for the step they were about to take! Sophie was indignant:

- See, Mary Ann, the Bishop has divulged all my confidences to his wife.
- Oh! These married Bishops! Thank God we don't have to go to them again.

The Feast of the Purification, 2 February 1850, was the day fixed for their Baptism. It was necessary to make a general confession beforehand and to receive absolution after Baptism. They went to the Church of the Jesu on the previous day where Father Seagrave heard their confessions. At one point, Sophie felt faint. She just could not go on. Fr. Seagrave understood and prayed for her. While he was praying, Sophie felt courage and strength increasing in her. It was dark before she could return home. She was obliged to invent a story to her mother. It was without falsehood but not the full truth. They had some visitors that evening—music, singing and exchange of pleasantries—all these had to be gone through. It was time to retire after the evening prayer. Sophie and Mary Ann could not tear themselves away from the drawing room. They remained with Mama and Henry as long as they could. The desolation that would be theirs the next day... The abyss of grief that would separate them from all their dear ones... When they lost Papa the family circle was broken up but their mutual ties were forged closer. Now their hearts would be torn apart—divided loyalties, diverse beliefs, different obligations, difficult adjustments. The night was unbearable. They cried together more than half the night. The painful certainty... family happiness would never be the same.

Early next morning they stepped out of the house to the Church of the Jesu. At the side chapel they received conditional Baptism at the hands of Father Seagrave followed by the absolution given to Protestant converts. Sophie felt as if a weight was being lifted from her soul. She was now a child of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. Then began the Holy Mass at which they received their First Communion. It was impossible to describe this.

In later years Sophie often recalled this experience:

- Oh my God! I had so many things to say to Him that I think I said nothing. I remained engulfed in silence but I felt that I possessed my God. I had everything. The whole world was nothing to me anymore.

The gift of Faith was an inestimable grace for which they could never be thankful enough. It was the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field for which they would give up everything—family ties and future prospects.

Sophie would always remember that joyous day...

- A whole eternity would not suffice to render Him thanks for that inestimable, unspeakable gift He bestowed on me that blessed day, 2 February 1850. It was indeed the Gift of Faith! And I trust to carry it intact before the throne of God for all eternity! After wavering and fluctuating and doubting and trembling, now I was firmly anchored on the rock of Peter.

It was about 9 o'clock. They set out for home with hearts beating fast:

- What will Mama say, Sophie? My heart is breaking when I think of the pain it will cause them both. How I wish Papa was with us!

- We have Jesus with us, dear. Courage, He will give us the strength to stand it.

Mama looked a bit surprised seeing them in their Sunday best:

- Where have you been, children?

Sophie decided the earlier she revealed the truth the better. Kneeling beside her she said:

- Mama, we shall grieve you but it is better you should know all.

Mama looked hard at her and asked:

- What have you been doing?
- We have just come from the Catholic Church where we have been baptized.

Sophie leaned forward to give her a kiss. But Mama pushed her aside saying:

- So now you have become Papists.

She got up, walked up and down.

- So you are going to pray to that wretched Virgin.

This epithet shocked Sophie. She at once prayed:

- Oh most sweet Mother Mary, forgive Mama. It is her grief that made her call you by that name.

Mrs. Leeves went to her room, began sobbing aloud. Mary Ann broke down and burst out crying. Sophie held her tight.

- Courage, Mary Ann, isn't Jesus with us! It's all for His sake.
- Sophie, when are we having breakfast? Where are you? Come, give us breakfast.

That was Henry, their brother, coming down the stairs. Sophie ran to meet him. As he began to eat she went round to stroke his head. Henry heard Mama sobbing:

- What happened to Mama? Why is she upset? Where are the others?
- Mama is crying because Mary Ann and I have just been received into the Catholic Church.

Henry stopped eating, turned round to look at her full in the face.

- Well, at least we now know what you are. You were Catholics before in secret. Now you are so openly.
- Yes, we are now Catholics.

He did not seem angry, so Sophie told him all that happened. Mama put on a bonnet and veil and went out to the cemetery to pray at Emily's grave. Poor dear! She did not know that Emily had been baptized before she died by their Catholic Maltese maid.

The family was now ostracized by the Maltese Protestant society. Mrs. Leeves could not take the grown-up girls out with her. She took a house, therefore, at Piræus, the port of Athens. The Catholic Church was close by. She allowed her daughters to go there but never relented waging a war of words at home. Henry was struck by the change he noticed in Sophie after her Baptism. He wanted to meet Father Seagrave and listen to his sermons. But Mama forbade it. It was like the seed that fell on the highway, thought Sophie.

Henry went off to his village at Castaniotissa. There he fell ill and needed his mother's care. Mary Ann, too, was frequently down with fever. Mama was helpless.

— I can't leave you two girls alone. I am thinking of asking the Sisters of St. Joseph at Syros, to keep you for some months.

— But, Mama, that's a Convent,

Sophie exclaimed.

— So what! They will take good care of you.

Sophie and Mary Ann were speechless. The most unexpected turn of events! Mrs. Leeves took all the trouble to arrange for their stay. She stood watching as her daughters embarked on board the steamer that would take them there.

4. OBEDIENCE WAS HER LIFE

The sisters were quite at home in the Catholic atmosphere of the convent. Sophie had long cherished the dream of becoming a nun in a convent with cloistered life and works of mercy. She began to devote herself to prayer. The fruit was an insatiable desire to do penance, to suffer for Jesus, even to die with ardour to see God. She asked God again and again.

— Where would you like me to be a nun?

— I want you here,
the interior voice whispered.

Here, she wondered, for she was not particularly drawn to this Order. Gradually she became convinced this was God's Will for her.

But Mama was adamant. She declared:

— Not even on my death bed will I give my consent. I do not wish to see you in that costume.

Sophie and Mary Ann were both of age. So they could decide for themselves. Sophie received the holy habit on 14 September 1851 on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and took the name of Mary Veronica of the Passion after St. Veronica Giuliani. For some months she was, as if, intoxicated with favours and celestial delights - she heard the music of the angels. She was especially devoted to the passion of Our Lord. Filled with joy and consolation she was in heaven rather than on earth.

She often said:

— Prayer was my delight.

On the feast of St. Peter she felt as if she were drunk with faith.

— I seem to see and touch all that the Church teaches and not only to believe.

She wrote to her Superior General:

— Now I possess and know Him who is my all, and I am so happy because in making my vows, I have also given Him all I have to give and that with all my heart.

Sophie was put to teach Greek, French and music. Mary Ann was an aspirant but did not persevere and wanted to return to her mother. Sophie, too, became ill with inflammation of the lungs. Mrs. Leeves forgot her anger, sent Henry to fetch them both home.

— I have never seen you look so pretty,
she remarked, looking at Sophie clothed in her religious habit. Sophie returned to the convent after she had recovered and made her profession on the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the second Sunday in October 1852. Mary Ann soon entered the Convent of the Ursulines de Casa.

Henry married Harriet in England and returned to his estate in 1854. A year after a great blow fell on the Leeves family. One night, four peasants entered their house and, cutting the sinews of Henry's leg, dragged him along the house, collecting all the valuables and led him to the bedroom where Harriet was being held by her hair by another brigand. Recognizing the brigand as the Greek priest's son, whom Sophie had been tutoring, while they were at Castaniotissa, Harriet exclaimed:

— O Henry! It's the priest's son.

Now that they were recognized, the brigands shot them both. Harriet died instantly but Henry must have lingered on

for an hour or two, for he dragged himself to the cradle of his son and died with his arm on the child's cradle. The brigands were later caught and executed on the very spot. The Greek priest himself gave up his son into the hands of justice.

A steamer sent by the English minister, Sir Thomas Wyse, fetched the baby and his nurse. Mrs. Leeves, shocked and grief-stricken, rallied with hope to nurse the baby. Except for the child she would have died of grief. Sophie and Mary Ann were sent for. Unfortunately, the baby died a few months later. The valiant woman did not lose her bearings. It was her staunch faith in God which had always been a bulwark of strength that steadied her. She picked up the fragments of her shattered life, pieced them together and braved herself to face the future.

After five years at Syros Sister Veronica was sent to a new Convent at Athens. It was here that her nursing talents came to the fore. She was always in demand to attend to the sick and dying. She relished this work as it meant preparing the sick for their last journey. In 1860 came her appointment as Superior of a new foundation in Piraeus. Mrs. Leeves would now, on her own, visit her even bringing baskets of flowers and arrange them in vases for the May devotions. She was ready to go out with her to the most frequented places, whereas earlier she had been ashamed to be seen with her daughter who wore a religious dress.

In June 1860, the Superior General wanted Sister Veronica to go immediately to Rome. She was overjoyed to meet Pope Pius the IX. The English prelate, Monsignor Talbot introduced

her as an English convert. The second time she met the Pope, she was thrilled to hear him say:

— Be good and holy.

After six months in Rome she was sent to Tremorel, a village in Brittany as a Government Primary Teacher of a mixed school. She was extremely happy here to teach the simple, poor and innocent children, both boys and girls. But one year in Brittany made her very sick. She began spitting blood. Besides her teaching, she had to look after the sick of the parish and prepare medicines at their small pharmacy.

After a year at Tremorel Sister Veronica received an order from the Superior General:

— Go and found a new house of the Congregation at Calicut on the coast of Malabar in India.

Passing by Marseilles she proceeded to Rome to receive instructions from the Superior General. Before leaving France she spent a few days at Monogyny where on 6 August 1861, Mary Ann, now Sister Mary Ignacie, was to make her Profession. Sister Veronica then returned to Rome in September. Scarcely had she arrived than her Superior General fell on a staircase and broke her leg. Sister Veronica looked after her day and night but before the Superior General was perfectly cured she had to leave for India.

5. THE CITY OF PREDILECTION

Calicut, known as the city of spices, was a confluence of diverse cultures. Its seaport made it convenient for trade and entry into Malabar, the land of spices. The Arabs, Chinese and Moors had trade relations with Calicut from ancient days.

In 1498, a Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama landed at Kappad, sixteen kilometers away from the city and re-wrote the history of India. The British, the French, the Dutch and the Muslims left vestiges of their trade pacts or skirmishes with the Zamorins, the native rulers. The benevolence of the Zamorins had made the city a haven for traders.

With Vasco da Gama came a missionary of the Trinitarian Order, Pedro de Covilham. With him the Catholic Church in Calicut was established. The city was blessed by the blood of this missionary who was martyred on July 31, 1498. In 1603 Jacomo Fenichi S.J., popularly known as the Apostle of Calicut, became the Parish Priest of the Mother of God Church which had been built by the Zamorin of the time.

Mother Veronica possibly knew nothing of the long tradition of the Catholic Church of Calicut which had a history of more than 500 years. However, she knew that St. Francis Xavier S.J., the Apostle of the Indies, had walked the streets of Calicut on 2 March 1549. That was enough to fire her zeal. She, therefore, stepped ashore on the burning sands of Mont Dilly on her way to Mangalore. She prostrated and kissed the sand as a sign of a total oblation of herself for the work she was to begin.

During the preparatory retreat given by Father Marie Ephrem she received great graces and had mystical experiences. Jesus appeared to her and offered her a ring as a sign of a mystical espousal. She also had to undergo several diabolical attacks to obtain the conversion of those involved in the infamous Goan schism.

Father Marie Ephrem was to be the parish priest of the Church of Mother of God and Chaplain of the Convent of St. Joseph's European school, with Mother Veronica as its Headmistress and Superior of the Convent. It was housed in a two-storied building purchased by Bishop Michael Antony. Father Marie Ephrem was an ardent missionary, a scholar and linguist and a great success with every class of people in this cosmopolitan city. He had mastered Malayalam so well that he could speak and even write in this new language. He also tutored Mother Veronica who learnt to read and write in Malayalam. Little did she know that the same missionary zeal had impelled some of her worthy predecessors to acquire mastery over this language.

After the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653 the Pope sent Carmelite missionaries to Kerala. That was in 1657. In 1712, Earnest Haxoneaden S.J., known as Arnos Padre, who was renowned for his works in Malayalam, served as Vicar of the Mother of God Church, Calicut. He was a German missionary. Arnos Padre became famous for his works in Malayalam and Sanskrit, particularly the popular hymn on the passion of Christ sung in Syrian Catholic households on Holy Thursday night. It was called the Puthan Pana. Besides, he has written about ten books in Malayalam. In 1834, Basel Missionaries from Germany started their missionary work at Calicut. Among them was Dr. Herman Gundert, scholar and linguist

who compiled a Malayalam grammar and dictionary in 1872. He worked primarily at Tellichery and was the grandfather of the novelist and Nobel Laureate, Herman Hesse. Knowledge of the local language, as Mother Veronica realized, gave easy access to the heart of the people she served.

She wrote to her Mother General:

- If you knew how sweet that language is! I like it very much and experienced great pleasure in studying it.

Very soon Mother Veronica had almost all the children of the town in her school - Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and Parsis. There were small boys of seven to eight years, too.

She wrote to her General:

- The school is progressing marvellously.

In later years she was to confess:

- I feel I have never been happier and more content. I loved all those dear Christians, big and small, as my children. They treated me as their mother. It was touching to see with what respect, with what deference they came to ask me for advice and obeyed like children.

In scarcely a year the Easter communions rose rapidly and so did the monthly attendance at Mass and Communion of young girls. God was blessing their efforts.

She kept repeating:

- I find it (Calicut) a paradise. I shall willingly live and die here.

The cross, however, was not absent in this little paradise. Calumnies, persecutions, misunderstandings were not

wanting. Her letters show a great spirit of endurance and spiritual insight.

She writes to Father Sindique, the Superior of the Missions:

- It is now that I am sure that He is thinking of his poor servant with a love of predilection, since He wills only the adverse in almost everything that befalls me and I feel that I am worthless in the estimate of others. So much the better... Our Lord has named me Veronica. He has to chisel the rough block. Must I restrain His hand? Pray rather that He deigns to strengthen my weakness and renew my courage in order that I may become in truth, and not merely in name, Veronica of the Passion. This is my desire, the goal of my life.

Mother Veronica had no inkling that this little town of Calicut was pre-destined to play an important role in the special work God had set for her. It was to be truly a city of predilection. For it was here that she would receive the call to Carmel. Again, it was here that the idea to found an order of active Carmelites was proposed and steps taken to realize it.

6. STRANGE STIRRINGS

While her spiritual life deepened, something strange began happening to Mother Veronica. She began to hear a sweet, gentle voice arising from the depths of her heart whispering:

— I want you in Carmel.

It happened again and again. She had already been received into the Third Order of Carmel by Father Marie Ephrem at Mangalore. Now she was confused. The voice, however, became insistent. Go to Carmel? Leave the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition which she loved dearly and where she knew she was loved? At last she confided in Father Marie Ephrem. God's ways are inscrutable. At the same time Father Marie Ephrem was reflecting upon the idea of establishing a Third Order of Carmel Regular which could work in the Carmelite mission. The Bishops of Verapoly and Quilon were also thinking along the same lines for their Carmelite vicariates. The Superior General of the Carmelites, too, was in favour of such a move.

— Consult Monsignor Howard, advised Father Marie Ephrem.

Monsignor Howard, an English Prelate, would be soon coming to Calicut in connection with the Goan schism. Mother Veronica did not let her mind reason. She would listen to the voice of God and do His will. Her desire to obey God's designs was immediately put to the test.

An order from her Mother General said:

— Go to Rangoon to take charge of a Convent there.

After a tearful farewell from her dear people at the waterside, she left for Rangoon alone. The monsoons had just set in. It was a difficult task that awaited her: no proper chapel; the parish was far away; there was not enough cash; worst of all, no reply to her letters from the Superior General. There were several difficulties she had to face. There were a few consolations too.

One Sunday when the children had gone for a walk they found a poor man, a coolie from the interior of the country, thrown on the roadside by the "Poonghies" (the priests of the idols). He was dying. The sisters had him taken to the convent and looked after him. The man declared to the sisters:

— I want to be like you. When my Poonghies threw me to the jackals you were good and charitable to me. I want to go where you are going after death.

After he was baptized he said:

— You should talk to me of God. I was a great sinner but now I am pure. I am going to heaven.

He died a peaceful death.

A year and a half at Rangoon... Mother Veronica had a serious fall, a badly injured foot and shattered health. This prompted Mrs. Leeves to want her daughter to return to England to be treated by the best of doctors.

After her recovery, the Superior General called her to Rome. Here, she met Monsignor Howard and Father Marie Ephrem. Her Carmelite vocation was to be discerned and decided by the saintly Jesuit, Father de Villefort. He took six months and finally decided in favour of Carmel. A fortnight later he was called by God to his eternal reward. Monsignor

Talbot, the Pope's chamberlain, was also a great support to Mother Veronica.

Father Marie Ephrem wanted a foundation of the Carmelites of the Second Order, besides the Tertiaries Regular, to be established in the missions of India. Mother Elias, Prioress of the Carmel of Pau, welcomed the idea.

Mother Emilie Valiar, the Superior General, now wished Mother Veronica to accompany her to Marseilles where the mother house of the congregation was situated. They reached there during the Holy Week of the year 1867 on Easter Saturday. Their novitiate was at La Capelette. The Novice Mistress, Mother Honorine, was ill in bed. Father Olive, the Superior of the house, had this to say to Mother Veronica:

— Well, sister, we want to entrust to you the care of the novitiate and make you mistress of the novices.

Mother Veronica turned to the Superior General to remind her of the obstacles. Her cause in Rome regarding her entry into Carmel prevented her from accepting the office. But neither the General nor Father Olive would consider her objections.

Father Olive responded:

— This would be no obstacle. On the contrary, we would be very happy if a little of the spirit of Carmel could be inculcated into the novitiate, that is to say, the spirit of prayer and mortification. You will then obey and accept the charge, won't you?

And so, Sister Veronica could do nothing but bow her head and accept the charge. It was Wednesday of the

following week; a small-made Arab postulant approached her:

— Mother, I must do the washing today. Will you please give me some of the novices to help me because I am often ill on Thursdays? I would like to finish it today.

They gave each other a penetrating look. The mystic in the one recognized the mystic in the other. In a flash of interior light Mother Veronica saw that this little postulant participated in the Passion of Our Lord.

— Yes, my child, go and begin. I shall send some sisters to help you.

After Mary left the room,

Mother Honorine from her sick bed wanted to know.

— Have you seen Mary the Arab?

— Who is Mary the Arab?

— The same you just sent to the wash house. The day the General arrived she came to me saying: Mother, a tall sister has arrived with our General. You will see she will be the novice mistress.

Mother Honorine, who knew Mother Veronica was bound for Carmel, had replied to Mary the Arab that this was not likely.

Mother Honorine continued:

— Every Friday she is ill.

She made a sign to depict the stigmata. Mother Veronica understood that the wounds of Christ were imprinted on the hands, feet, side and forehead of the child. The pain became more intense towards evening. Mother Veronica was the

only one privileged to watch the wounds opening, the blood gushing forth, the wounds closing without leaving a mark on the smooth skin. The innocent, ignorant child thought it was a dirty malady.

Mother Veronica exclaimed to herself:

- Never in my life shall I forget what I felt in that moment. I touched with my hands, I saw with my eyes, so astonishing a marvel. The omnipotence of God only could, in a few moments, wound and heal without leaving the least trace on the skin.

Mary had come out of her ecstasy. She exclaimed:

- Don't come so close or you will catch the malady yourself. Oh! How filthy. Let me wash myself.
- Be quiet my child. It is not possible that I shall catch your malady and then, in any case, it would be well to do the will of God.

Mary's obedience and humility were proof enough that this was a supernatural phenomenon. The dear child did not realize the significance of what was happening to her.

One day Mary said to Mother Veronica:

- I shall die in your arms.

Mother Veronica replied:

- Oh, that is not possible, my child.

After Holy Communion one morning, Mother Veronica heard the sweet, soft voice of Jesus:

- I wish you to take this child with you to Carmel.

She wondered. Mary the Arab was here with the sisters of the Apparition and Mother Veronica was to go to Carmel.... After some days she heard the voice once again. She could only say:

- Lord, if you wish it, do everything yourself. For you know it is not for me to act in this matter.

The time for Profession was at hand. The Chapter met to vote for those who would be chosen to make their vows. Mary the Arab was not selected.

- The finger of God is there. Lord, what you do is well done,

Mother Veronica exclaimed to herself.

The day was Friday. The stigmata were very visible, but almost closed.

- My child you have not been chosen... I am free now to propose to you something I couldn't before.

Mother Veronica told her of her intention to go to Carmel.

- Would you like to come with me?

Mary received the news with great calm and indifference:

- Mother, where you go I shall go, and where you are I shall also be and where you die I shall also die.

It was almost a reflection of Ruth's words in the Bible.

- Well, dear child, I am going to write to mother Prioress if she is willing to receive you at the Carmel of Pau.

Mary knew nothing of what Carmel meant. But she was animated at the very word.

Mother Veronica said to her:

- Ask Our Lord that you will be able to do your work like others on Thursdays and Fridays.
- Yes, Mother, I will.

The following morning Mary appeared in Mother Veronica's room to inform her:

- Mother, last night the Holy Virgin came and told me I would not have this illness any more until next year during Lent for a few weeks.
- Very good, we shall see,

said Mother Veronica.

The promise was perfectly accomplished. Mary the Arab suffered on Fridays but with no outward sign. Mother Veronica wrote to Mother Elias about Mary that she was obedient even to a miracle. She was most welcome at Pau, replied Mother Elias.

It was the eve of the Feast of the Holy Trinity, 14 June 1867, a Friday. Mary was suffering because of her bleeding feet and hands but nothing appeared outwardly. The next day, at 3 o'clock, while the Carmelites were chanting the first Vespers of the Holy Trinity, the giant, massive doors of Great Carmel opened. Mother Elias embraced Mother Veronica and Mary warmly. They were in Carmel at last.

It was an earthly paradise and a time of great graces.

Mother Veronica wrote later:

- Prayer is my delight. The intellectual presence of Our Lord is beside me. He speaks to me and directs me in everything as if I saw him.

The first days after entering the Order of St. Joseph of the Apparition had been similar:

- God heaped me with delight. The Holy Office was my happiness. It was a second spiritual childhood. I was in another element - in the garden of Carmel. It seemed to me I was in Paradise.

She was astounded at the two vocations markedly different. She had been happy doing the works of charity as a Sister of St. Joseph. And now - the life of Carmel - with its silence, solitude, fast, abstinence and vigils - had replaced it completely. After her retreat she made her profession of the Third Order Regular. As she lay prostrate during the ceremony, which betokened the total renunciation of the world, Mary of Jesus Crucified, as the little Arab was now called, saw a great cross hovering over her.

Henceforth the Holy Cross was to be Mother Veronica's portion and cup.

She was now asked by Father Dominic, the Superior General of the Carmelites, to draw up the Constitutions of the new Third Order Regular:

- You have the grace of state to apply yourself to it.

After she had finished with the Constitutions, Mother Elias told her to leave at once to look for a site for the new foundation. It was 15 December 1867. Mother Veronica begged:

- Please, Mother, it is the dead of winter. Can I go after Christmas?
- No, you have to leave at once; else it would be failure in obedience.

Donning a black skirt, a big mantle and an old hat and veil, she set out in the shivering cold.

She said to herself:

- My attraction, my vocation is all for the dear cloister of Carmel. This is only for a time. For I have Mother Elias' promise that when I have done the work that obedience and my superiors of the Order demand of me, I will be again received into the Carmel of Pau.

It was to fill the emptiness that had existed in their Holy Order that she was given this assignment. This was shown to her during her retreat in the form of a globe which was not complete enough. It lacked a big slice. She was told that this was the Third Order Regular which did not yet exist in Carmel.

Her first destination was Annecy. But it was not possible said the Bishop because there were enough and more convents in Annecy.

Try La Roche, he said.

It was Christmas day. Shivering in the cold, all alone, she trudged on. In a deserted Church at a village at La Roche, she spent some time immersed in prayer. It was night fall.

- I found myself as if I were in a desert, quite barren, with a big cross set up in front of me, to which I clung as my only support.

The cross was to be her strength, her inspiration and her portion till the end of her life. At La Roche she got the news that Mrs. Leeves would be visiting her. She could not bring her mother to the small rented apartment where she was staying, so she begged Madame La Polinge, a kind benefactress, to

accommodate her. Mama was highly displeased with her daughter's poverty and destitution.

- Sophie, come back with me. I'll take care of you.
- No Mama, I can't do that. I must obey God's will.
- God's will! How do you know that this is God's will?
- Through my Superiors, Mama.
- Oh dear! You are the same stubborn girl that you were.
- A chip of the old block, Mama.

Mama was not amused. She turned to go. Mother Veronica watched the receding figure. Her mother's heart surely was breaking. A scene came back vividly to her mind. After the last embrace, when Papa was leaving with Mary Ann for the Holy Land, he had said:

- Sophie, I entrust your mother to you. Take care of her and be her consolation.

Consolation indeed! Sophie knew what great desolation was crushing her heart. Alone and forlorn! Sophie's heart smote within her but she knew this was God's will for her and her Mama. She was at peace.

In the midst of the rocky terrain of Savoy how could she expect a suitable place for a house or for candidates to arrive? Without the Superior General, Father Dominic's letter, she could neither go forward nor return to Pau. She had written several times to him. She longed to be back in Pau:

- I left our dear Carmel of Pau with deep regret....leaving there my heart, for it is there that I have found my goal, there I am in my element. In fine, there is my paradise on earth. Ever since I left it, I feel like a poor vagabond, an exile, and I feel as if all my bones are dislocated.

But she admits that:

- No great work of God was ever carried out without the Cross and without sufferings.

She offers herself voluntarily for all that He asks of her hoping that this work will be for His greater glory and that of their Holy Order. As for herself, she says:

- He places me on the Cross always. It is my place until the end of my poor life.

Father Dominic's letters, written in his own hand and signed were delayed because he had been ill. They finally arrived. He told her to leave La Roche and pass through the Carmels at Lyons, Montpellier, Carcassonne, Aden and Bordeaux. Unfortunately his letter did not have the seal of the Order.

- Surely, an adventuress!
- A run-away nun!
- A fraud!

This was every one's verdict. Even the Carmelite Prior at Bordeaux treated her coldly. She was about to leave Bordeaux, when Father Athanasius, a worthy Carmelite, arrived to tell her he would get some vocations for the Third Order.

Mother Veronica returned to Pau, with a broken heart with nothing to show after a five-month journey. Utter poverty, loneliness, discouragement, physical disability, appearing like a vagabond before Bishops and dignitaries and wandering on the road all alone had all but shattered her spirits.

- Go to Bayonne, meet Monsignor La Croix, the Bishop, who stays quite close to the Carmelite Convent. There

is a house where the Carmelites were staying before moving out to their new residence. Perhaps that will be available.

This had been Mother Elias' advice.

A few days of rest in the apartments of the touriers, at Pau where she could conduct the transactions more easily... Mother Veronica wept her heart out not being allowed to enter the enclosure. She must obey, and obey she did. Straight to the Carmelites of Bayonne she went. Yes, they could let out their temporary house for 500 Francs a year in a month's time when the present tenants would leave. Strange are God's ways. On entering the courtyard she felt it was there that she had to start the work. Joy and peace filled her desolate heart. Monsignor La Croix gave her the permission to establish the Third Order, to receive the candidates, to make the necessary repairs and to enter the enclosure of the Carmel at Pau.

Now Mother Elias received her with open arms. Mary of Jesus Crucified was passing through various trials. The worst was a forty-day diabolical possession. She had received the Holy Name of Jesus marked on her heart. On Fridays her heart bled and the letters were imprinted on the linen that was applied to the spot. Little prodigy of miracles that she was, she continued to live a life of sacrifice and suffering with utmost ardour.

7. THE LITTLE CARMEL AT BAYONNE

Bayonne has been described as "a bit of a city in a green nest", a town which was both a garrison and a busy harbor. The much - desired foundation of the Third Order was to be established on 16 July, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

On 14 July 1868 two postulants arrived at 10 p.m. from Nimes. On 16 July they went with Mother Veronica for the High Mass at the Carmel. Abbe Inchauspé was to be their Superior. With his timely help and support he was to prove a real father. Monsignor La Croix visited the house. After the repairs of the Chapel were over, he installed the Blessed Sacrament. Father Dominic, the General, too, paid them a visit and suggested some changes. Postulants came from Montpellier and Bordeaux. Father Marie Ephrem wished to receive the vows of the first novices. The poverty of the house was great. The Carmel of Pau, off and on, sent the community fruits and vegetables. At times the novices had to go to the neighbouring fields to collect roots to prepare some sort of soup for supper. But charity and union reigned in the little community and so they were exceedingly happy. Most of the novices burned with the desire to go to India. "A Carmel for the Missions" was their watchword. It fired them with zeal. When the General, Father Dominic paid them a visit in September 1868, he revised the Constitutions, which Mother Veronica had drafted, and approved them. He also approved the modified Carmelite habit. He promised:

— Now you have the Episcopal enclosure; later on we shall see about giving you Canonical enclosure.

This filled Mother Veronica with great joy.

Father Marie Ephrem was to visit Europe to attend the First Vatican Council. He had been consecrated Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Mangalore in place of Monsignor Michael Antony who had retired. On his return to India he wanted to take with him a group of Carmelites from the Great Carmel and a few of the Apostolic Carmel sisters at Bayonne. Sister Agnes, the first postulant from Nimes, had now completed her novitiate. Bishop Marie Ephrem wanted very much to receive her vows.

Father Lazare, his Vicar General, first came to the Little Carmel to give the news of Monsignor Marie Ephrem's visit to Bayonne. When Monsignor Ephrem arrived, he paid the debt of 7,000 Francs towards the expenses of its repairs. However, all was not well with his visit. There were changes regarding the enclosure, the habit, the diet, and such matters which he wanted to effect. Mother Veronica complied with his demands. All the same, the Bishop left Bayonne without informing the Foundress though she had always acted only under obedience.

— Obedience is my life, she would repeat.

He had directed her to obey Monsignor La Croix and Monsignor Inchauspé whose advice she had always followed. Now came another crisis. Bishop Marie Ephrem, through Monsignor Inchauspé had directed three sisters to be sent along with him to India. Sister Elias, who was an Irish Postulant from Bayonne, Sister Marie des Anges, sent by Father Athanasias from Bordeaux and the third, Sister Mary Joseph, a lay sister from Nimes. There were also a group of six sisters from the Great Carmel of Pau with Mother Elias, the Prioress. In this group was also Mary of Jesus Crucified. The last-minute directive from Bishop Marie Ephrem to send

Sister Agnes with the first batch did not reach Mother Veronica on time. There was a sad outburst of fierce anger on the part of the Bishop when she met him at Pau in the outer parlour. It went on even through the Great Silence till Mother Elias intervened, gently drawing Mother Veronica inside the enclosure. Both of them embraced each other mingling their tears of anguish. The Foundress' heart was broken. If the Bishop could change overnight so easily towards her, whom he called a "child of predilection," how would he treat her young, inexperienced sisters whom she sent out to India! All sorts of misgivings crowded her mind. The next morning she tried to explain the situation to him in the confessional and matters were settled for the time being. Letters of obedience were then read out for those who were leaving for India. Fathers Lazare and Gratian set out along with the sisters. Monsignor accompanied them up to Marseilles. It was 15 August 1870. The voyage was fraught with disaster. Two cloistered Carmelite Sisters, Euphrasia and Stephanie fell sick on the way and died. Mother Elias herself was so sick at Aden that the three Cloistered Carmelites and Father Gratian waited for the next ship. The three Apostolic Carmelites continued their voyage to India with Father Lazare. At Calicut they met with another tragedy. Mother Elias took a bad turn and she passed away at St. Joseph's Convent which Mother Veronica had founded.

The odour of her sanctity had spread through the town that people wanted her body to be taken along the streets though they had never seen her alive.

A few months later, Mother Veronica sent Sister Agnes of Jesus with Sister Cecile of Infant Jesus to Mangalore.

Monsignor Marie Ephrem immediately nominated Sister Agnes Prioress of the little community. Father Lazare was their Superior. Mother Agnes succeeded marvellously. Sister Elias was the Headmistress of the school and Sister Marie des Anges, the Novice Mistress. They began to teach in the school. There was peace and union among them and Monsignor himself wrote to Mother Veronica that he was very pleased with all her children.

She wrote back:

- God watches over them and gives them grace to make themselves useful.

She was full of solicitude for their natural welfare too:

- Make note of what you need most; what you lack... If only you knew, my poor children, all the pain and anxiety I go through because of you. One has to be a mother to understand it.

The sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition had been obliged to close down their school in Mangalore when the roof collapsed. They went to Cannanore where they opened a school, convent and orphanage. The school flourished within no time. Bishop Michael Antony had begun to form an active order of Carmelites from among the Anglo-Indian boarders left behind by the Sisters of St. Joseph. These Indian sisters looked forward to joining the Apostolic Carmelites from Bayonne. All of them were housed at first in the building called the Bungalow at St. Ann's and they lived in great peace and contentment for some time. Mother Veronica kept in touch with them encouraging and advising them. There was a deep sense of fraternal charity. The youth and inexperience

of the sisters was an important reason why she wanted to communicate with them. She would often send reminders:

- Be constant in prayer and humbly mistrust yourselves. Put your trust in God alone, not in men.

This state of affairs lasted till December 1871.

8. TROUBLED TIMES

Mary of Jesus Crucified was due for Profession. Father Lazare's doubt about her supernatural gifts was laid to rest while he observed her during the voyage to India. His final verdict was:

- The finger of God was there.

The Bishop examined her carefully for 22 days of the retreat he set her to make under Father Lazare. He was sure now; hers was a case of the supernatural.

The homily he preached on the day of Profession was full of his admiration:

- Yes, my dear child, you heard the voice of the Beloved from your earliest childhood, and you have come from the mountains of Lebanon. Oh! How this Divine Saviour, has overwhelmed you with His mercy!

Unfortunately, the very next day came a total reversal of attitudes.

- Tell everything to your confessor and to the Bishop if need be.

This was the voice of Christ to the newly-professed.

The Bishop had no objection:

- If Our Lord does not wish it, I forbid you to tell me anything...

However, the Prioress and the Novice Mistress of the Great Carmel took offence that they were not her confidants. A

campaign of calumny began that Mary was led by the devil. They succeeded in influencing the Bishop against her. The little sister was subjected to a great deal of persecution.

To add fuel to the fire was the disorderliness that crept in. The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition and the Tertiaries of Bishop Michael Antony were easily incorporated, without the benefits of a novitiate, into the A.C. fold by Bishop Marie Ephrem. He had earlier instructed Mother Veronica never to let this happen:

- Don't be in too much of a hurry, we should lay the foundations strong and deep.

He had reiterated his stand:

- You know that God's work begins small and goes on slowly.

Now, not only were the Sisters at Calicut and Cannanore amalgamated with the Apostolic Carmel, but they also continued to be Superiors and even to supervise the work of Mother Agnes. The spirit of the Apostolic Carmelites was different. This created trouble in the observance of the rule. Mother Agnes objected, pointed out to the Bishop that he was sapping the roots of the A.C. foundation. He turned a deaf ear. Mother Agnes, according to the advice of Father Lazare, handed him her resignation. Bishop Marie Ephrem accepted it, appointed Mother Marie des Anges as Superior and transferred Mother Agnes to Calicut and later sent her back to Bayonne. He also divested Father Lazare of his position as Vicar General, transferred him to Mahe and then sent him back to France, disgraced and humiliated.

The little one, as Mary of Jesus loved to be called, had warned the Bishop:

- Monsignor, you are planning to send back Father Lazare. Well, within six months you will die in anguish.

Bishop Marie Ephrem did not give heed to the prophecy. He broke off all connection with Mother Veronica and told Mother Marie des Anges to do the same:

- Leave Mother Veronica alone... Perhaps it would be better not to answer her letters. You are not answerable to her for anything. Neither should you let any letter go out concerning her no matter to whom it may be.

Even Mary of Jesus Crucified was not allowed to meet her confessor, Father Lazare, or to write to Mother Veronica. In 1872, she was sent back to Pau.

It was obvious that the Bishop wanted to wield full authority over the organization of the Apostolic Carmel. He had already forbidden Mother Veronica to return to India. Perhaps he understood she was a power to reckon with—the strong, English Protestant woman that she was—intelligent, learned, experienced, practical and courageous. Mother Veronica had been very eager to begin her work in the missions. She had begun making arrangements for a substitute for herself at the little Carmel—so eager was she to come to India with her Sisters, just after a year of starting the foundation at Bayonne. But Father Marie Ephrem would not agree:

- Well, I tell you this is not possible...You must wait for God's own time. Wait in silence and in hope.

When trouble began brewing in Mangalore, Mother Veronica had always exhorted her Sisters to accept suffering meekly in order to be more deeply united with the Passion of Our Lord:

- Always act with humility and a spirit characterized by politeness and decorum.

Her constant refrain was:

- May humility reign with charity among you.

At the same time she was strongly convinced that:

- Truth cannot be sacrificed for charity.

She also reminded them:

- Take a strong stand regarding good order and religious observance... You have promised to be Carmelites of the Third Order Regular and not of the Third Order Secular.

The most powerful safeguards she had to offer were prayer and humility. To Mother Agnes, Mother Veronica wrote to consider her suffering as a singular grace. She never missed an opportunity to exhort them, especially Sister Elias, to practise the virtue of humility:

- The only ambition of a Carmelite should be to surpass others in humility.

When Sister Agnes was in Calicut she wrote to her:

- Price this grace very much: of suffering, contempt, persecution. It is the grace of graces, if you can profit by it. It is an extra-ordinary honour to be able to suffer and to be despised for the love of Jesus. Be always humble and obedient but very firm in your duty and hold to the spirit of your Holy Order.

She already sensed there was trouble in Mangalore:

- My heart cries out for you my Sisters night and day, she lamented.

It was Maundy Thursday of the year 1873. All the priests of the parish were in the Church. For a few days now Bishop Marie Ephrem had been ill with malaria. Suddenly word came to Mother Marie des Anges that he was sinking. She rushed to the Presbytery to find that the Bishop was breathing his last. He was only 46 years old when he died. The prophecy of Mary of Jesus Crucified was fulfilled.

9. REPERCUSSIONS

At Bayonne

The situation at Bayonne was deteriorating. Candidates came and went. Some stayed and others returned home. They had no means to maintain themselves. In September 1871 Mother Veronica had made the acquaintance of a benefactress named Madame Pedro Gil Moreno. They took to each other at first sight. This Spanish lady, a wealthy widow with an only son, proved to be Mother Veronica's most faithful friend and most generous benefactress.

It was she who bought an adjoining field and a cow for providing milk, so that the dire poverty of the Little Carmel could, in some way, be alleviated a little. A hermitage at the end of the walk and the statue of the Sacred Heart to be placed therein, the stained- glass windows and candelabra, plenty of things for the sacristy and Church vestments had been her gifts to the Little Carmel. But how long could Mother Veronica depend on her generosity!

Mother Veronica as well as Father Lazare informed Bishop La Croix about the happenings at Mangalore, namely, the sending of Mary of Jesus Crucified and Father Lazare back to Pau.

His reaction was:

- Never again will I permit any religious, either from the Cloistered Carmel, or from the Apostolic Carmel to go out to this mission.

The Little Carmel had existed as a formation house for new recruits to be sent to India. Now there was no need for this house. She was advised by Bishop La Croix and Monsignor Manuadas to dissolve the little community. The Bishop released the professed sisters from their vows. All had turned against Mother Veronica, even the next door Carmelites of Bayonne. All her dreams, her hopes and her plans were shattered. Madame Gil alone remained to support her till the end. The heart-rending scene would always remain fresh in Mother Veronica's mind.

The novices pleading to continue their religious life:

- Mother, don't send me back, please.
- Oh! I came to stay and live as a religious.
- Don't send me back Mother. I want to remain with you. Don't send me to my home...
- I gave up all to become a religious and a missionary and go to India... Please Mother... Please...

Mother Veronica's heart broke each time she embraced the sisters of the little community. The climax came soon after.

The Mass was celebrated for the last time and the Sacred Species consumed by the priest who was Pedro's tutor. The Blessed Sacrament was no more there. The monastery ceased to exist. It was all, apparently, a total failure. However, she knew it was a participation in the passion of Christ. That night Madame Gil took Mother Veronica to her home and the next morning to the Carmel of Pau. The Little Apostolic Carmel had been "swept away" as Mary of Jesus Crucified had predicted long ago. It had existed five years three months less five days.

She would often recall:

— These last days at Bayonne were really agony for me and for the poor children who were left to me.... My heart suffered so much, that it seemed to become insensate. One had to have a special grace not to succumb under it, and God gave me the grace.

Mother Veronica, who had braved so many tribulations in the past and followed God's will meticulously in every directive of her Superiors, now had to face this adverse circumstance. Her faith however, never wavered. Her heart never questioned. For the answer was deep down in the recesses of her soul—the God of her life would have it so. God's ways are inscrutable! ***Obedience was her life and in obeying God's will was her peace.***

The massive door of the Carmel of Pau opened to receive Mother Veronica, cutting her off from the external world forever and, at the same time, entrenching it in her heart to live and die for its salvation. She was welcomed by the Sisters with open arms.

At Mangalore

There was an unexpected repercussion of this state of affairs in Mangalore. To all appearances the sudden demise of Bishop Marie Ephrem, the closure of the Little Carmel at Bayonne, the impossibility of getting more personnel from Europe and Mother Veronica's entry into Pau should have sounded the death knell of the little sprouting Apostolic Carmel at Mangalore. But mysterious are God's designs. Providence had yet other plans to effect before it would revive the dying shoot. The Apostolic Carmel Convents at



Bishop Marie Ephrem of the Sacred
Heart of Jesus O.C.D.
(Collaborator in the work of the foundation)



Mother Ignacie Leves (Mary Ann)



Fr. Lazare of the cross O.C.D.



Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified.



St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valetta, Malta.



Leeves Cottage as it was in former days



The Little Carmel, Bayonne



St. Ann's, Mangalore in 1870



Monte Dilly, India
where Mother Veronica landed, 1862



The Carmel of Pau



Infirmary, Carmel of Pau,
where Mother Veronica died.



Mother Veronica's grave, Pau, France



St. Joseph's Convent Calicut 1862
Where Mother Veronica worked as the Superior & Headmistress.



Mother House St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore

Mangalore, Cannanore, Calicut and Quilon (opened in 1875) were all independent of one another.

After the closing of the Little Carmel, all correspondence had ceased between Mother Veronica and the Sisters in India. In 1876 Mother Marie des Anges was appointed Superior over all the four houses of the mission. On 9 March, the following year, Sister Mary of St. Joseph died at Cannanore. It was the first death in the Apostolic Carmel. In 1878 Mother Marie des Anges was formally appointed Superior General of the Congregation by Father Victor of St. Antony, the Pro-administrator and Vicar General. On 29 September 1878, Mangalore and Malabar were separated from the Verapoly vicariate and handed over to the care of the Jesuits.

Mother Marie des Anges fell ill in the same year.

Mother Veronica wrote to her after a break of 8 years:

- I feel the need of writing to you for I came to know that you were ill and in pain. Nothing can break the tie between your dear soul and mine, for Jesus has led you to me and I have given you to Jesus to be his spouse and you know that the heart of a mother always draws nearer a child when she suffers and is in more pain than when she is in prosperity... I often feel sorry, my poor child, that my sins and my pride have been the cause of suffering for my children in India... You know what I had told you very often at the Little Carmel of Bayonne: "My dear children do what I tell you, but don't do as I do". If I had known how to form you better in the virtues of the religious

life, and, above all, to give you the example of holy humility, which is the foundation of all things, they would not be what they are now.

Monsignor Pagani, who had taken over as Pro-Vicar and Vicar General in 1879, confirmed the appointment of Mother Marie des Anges as Superior General for a term of 6 years of the three convents, St. Ann's Mangalore, St. Teresa's Cannanore and St. Joseph's Calicut. St. Ann's was declared the Mother House.

At this time the Sisters of the convents of Quilon, Tangacherry and Holy Angels, Trivandrum founded by Sister Elias in 1880, severed connection with St. Ann's as they wanted to continue under the Carmelite Vicariates of Verapoly and Quilon. They were later amalgamated as the Congregation of Carmelite Religious (C.C.R).

The Jesuits of the Mangalore vicariate contributed to the Apostolic Carmel Charism in the areas of spiritual direction and vivified and strengthened its apostolate of education.

10. THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The first time Mother Veronica was in Carmel, she had observed all the austerities and she progressed swiftly in the way of perfection. Now she was 50 years old. The result of physical and mental stress and hardship was telling on her. Her health was quite ruined after the humidity and poverty of the house at Bayonne which caused rheumatism in all her bones. The right side and knee were so painful that she could not even bend the knee without intolerable, shooting pains. The Prioress and the Sisters, however, could not show enough affection and sympathy to make up for her heart-breaking experiences at Bayonne. Often a cup of tea made in the English way, at the afternoon collation, would revive her.

For some time she noticed that Mary of Jesus Crucified was trying to avoid her. One day she accosted her:

- Well, my dear, why do you keep away from me?
- Our Lord told me that you should not take that cup of tea any more.
- Why didn't you tell me that earlier, little one?
- You are so sick Mother. I didn't want you to be deprived of that cup of tea.
- Oh! dear! If Our Lord had asked me to pluck my eyes out, I'd have done so.
- He also said that you should henceforth be called Sister Marie Therese. Be very little for there is always place for little ones.

The ordinary life of a Carmelite was impossible for Mother Veronica. She was now only a benefactress, engaged in humble service with all her gifts of soul, mind and heart hidden under a bushel. After two years of novitiate, she made her solemn profession on 21 November 1874. She had asked St. Teresa of Avila that if she wanted her as her daughter, she should be able to kneel while making her profession. After the ceremony she said:

— I went up to the choir and on my knees near the communion grill it seemed to me that I could see my dear and holy Mother Elias accompanied by Sister of the Holy Heart of Mary, Sister Euphrasia and Sister Stephanie. Mother Elias embraced me saying:

—Happy suffering which produces so much joy!

On that day onwards she would remain on her knees without trouble for a long time before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

Mother Veronica had brought some material from Bayonne, initially meant for India. She would now like to give it away to Mother Ignacie for her poor orphans, but Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified called her aside and said in ecstasy:

— (You) should not think of disposing of anything which you have brought. For all belongs to God and not to you. You should remain in complete indifference and poverty.

The same day the little one told her:

— Your mother is dead, but her faith has saved her. She has asked me to tell you not to do your own will, to

be very grateful for all that God has done for you. You are not grateful enough for being here. She has also asked pardon for not having left anything to you in her will.

It was around this time that Mrs. Leeves had passed away at Hastings, England.

After the death of Catherine the money was to go to a niece of Mrs. Leeves. There was nothing for Mother Veronica or for Mother Ignacie in her will. They had only the inheritance from their father.

11. CARMEL AT BETHLEHEM

"A Carmel at Bethlehem"- this was the pet project of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. As soon as Mother Veronica heard of it she offered her inheritance and all that she had, after disposing of the Little Carmel, for the new foundation. She was one of those chosen to go to Bethlehem to found this new little convent.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified wanted a sign from God regarding this inspiration. A simple leaf of pink geranium just thrust into an earthen flower pot—this must sprout as a sign that God wanted it. It did sprout giving out a shoot. She entrusted it to Mother Veronica, the better to look after it. A tall beautiful plant full of flowers was the result.

20 August 1875. Nine sisters including Mary of Jesus Crucified and a novice were chosen to go to Bethlehem. Accompanying them were Father Bordacher, Mademoiselle Dartigaux, who was to be the benefactress, and her director Father Estrate. At Montpellier they met Father Lazare. Mother Veronica, the little one and Father Lazare had gone through so much of anguish. Now they were going to begin a new phase of their life. Father Lazare had been reinstated in his Order and was the Prior at Montpellier.

The party arrived at Jaffar on 5 September 1875. The Franciscans gave them hospitality for some days. They were now in the Holy Land visiting all the sacred places therein. It was an unforgettable experience. The Way of the Cross touched Mother Veronica deeply. She was overcome with emotion by the word "HIC" (here) at the end of the prayer

at every station. At the last station came the words "Here he submitted to the torment of the cross." She was moved to the very core of her being. Unknown to her, it was a presage of what was to come.

They left for Bethlehem on 11 September 1875. After a fortnight their makeshift abode was ready. On 25 September, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the Patriarch celebrated the first Mass and reserved the Blessed Sacrament. He also demarcated the enclosure. Five days later Father Bordacher, Father Estrate and Madame Dartigaux left for France.

The whole venture was a series of miracles. Purchase of the appropriate piece of land, the construction of the building and every little detail connected with it, were dictated by Mary of Jesus Crucified. The Sisters had absolute confidence in her. There was no plan, no architect and no measurements. It was all the inner guidance that the little visionary revealed in ecstasy that they depended on. She could not, however, draw up a plan.

That responsibility fell on Mother Veronica. She had not even seen the site. Listening carefully to the instructions from the illiterate Arab Sister, she set to work, in obedience to the Prioress, Mother Ann. The Franciscan priest in charge of the construction now agreed to go ahead with this plan. Such are the marvels that faith works! The little one had marked the place for the chapel, with the altar at the spot where Mary and Joseph stopped during their flight into Egypt. The foundation stone was laid by the Patriarch on 24 March. The building was ready in seven months. On 21 November the Sisters solemnly entered. The occasion was well attended by several Sisters of St. Joseph of the

Apparition and distinguished guests. The stigmata re-appeared and Mary was in ecstasy. So she could not attend the ceremony.

Mother Veronica exclaims:

- How happy we were to find ourselves in a real monastery once again! The solitude and silence of our dear cells seems to be a real luxury, after having lived, as it were, in public for more than a year in the temporary house.

Great harmony and cordiality reigned between the Carmelites of Pau and Bayonne. They were of one heart and soul. In the Bethlehem community, too, fraternal charity and union of heart prevailed. If any Sister, including the Prioress, made another Sister suffer, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, under the influence of the Spirit, would take her to task severely and in a loud voice heard all over the monastery.

Being a native of Abellin, in Bethlehem, Mary of Jesus Crucified had seen to the supervision of the construction. The workers were very happy to obey her directives given in their native tongue.

It was at this time that Mother Veronica felt inspired to make a vow of humility.

- Only for a stipulated period, advised her confessor.

Humility, Mother Veronica confesses was:

- contrary to my character and so to say, to my whole being. For a long time I had tried to combat pride in me even from the beginning of my conversion. But I think I made very little progress in the virtue of humility.

Mother Veronica very often advised her Sisters to strive after humility. She also realized that humility grows best in the soil of humiliation:

- Our Lord seems to have taken charge of sending them [humiliations] to me until I was ground in such a way as to be a grain of dust, under the feet of all.

The consoling fact was, she adds:

- He gave me the grace of being able to thank Him for them with all my soul.

The cross was ever present in her life. One day as she was picking flowers on a mass of steep rock around the monastery, she slipped and fell and dislocated her right hand at the wrist. A bone-setter failed to set it right. Struggling with pain she spent sleepless nights. An Arab woman was brought who only added to the torture. She did nothing but made her suffer all the more. Mother Veronica remained crippled. The fingers turned stiff. She could not hold the breviary or help herself at table. One day when she asked Mary, who was in ecstasy, what Jesus wanted of her, the little one said:

- He wishes you to follow the community, that you, who are old, give good example to the young ones.

All this happened while Mother Veronica had been exempted from keeping the Rule in its entirety. From this day on, she was able to observe the Rule without any mitigation for six years, in spite of her age and infirmity.

About a year later, Mother Veronica's sister, Catherine visited her while on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She was now a widow but a confirmed and bigoted ritualist. Mother Veronica describes her as having too much pride. Even a long talk by Mary of Jesus Crucified did not touch her.

She could only tell Mother Veronica:

- When humility is lacking, God cannot force a soul, but you make the acts of humility and she will have the light.

A great wave of repentance and compunction was sweeping over the Sisters in Mangalore. They had come to realize their mistake of misjudging and calumniating the little seer. They now wanted to make amendment and began writing letter after letter asking her forgiveness.

Mary of the Crucified had predicted she would die in Bethlehem after three years. A short but painful illness would precede her death. One day while carrying a bucket of drinking water for the workers up a steep rock, she fell and fractured her left arm in several places. An Arab bone-setter was called. He claimed to have set the bones right. But the young Sister suffered terrible torture for two days. Gangrene set in. Her arm turned fully black. Mother Veronica knew her end was near.

She relates:

- In an instant I saw what it was..... She looked at me fixedly without saying a word. I too could say nothing. My heart was broken, and by a sign that she understood well, I pointed to heaven. That was all I could do, for I could see that in a few hours we would have her no more.

She was given the Viaticum and wanted only two Sisters near her, the Infirmarian and Mother Veronica. But the Prioress objected:

- No, Sister, you must go and rest a little.

Mother Veronica said softly in Mary's ear:

- My dear child, you will not leave unless your old mother, who brought you to Carmel, is with you.

The dying Sister assured her:

- No, I promise you. Go and rest. I will wait for you.

At 5 a.m. at the sound of the clapper, Mother Veronica entered the infirmary. Mary of Jesus Crucified was sinking and already in her last agony. Her look was fixed to the right at a spot above her for a while. Father Chirou gave her the last absolution.

He said:

- My God, mercy.

She responded:

- Oh, mercy.

These were her last words. She fell back dying in Mother Veronica's arms exactly as she had foretold. It was 26 August 1878. The wonders this prodigy of miracles worked in her life continued even after her death. Her arms remained flexible thrown out of the coffin in the form of the cross. However much they tried, no one could put them back.

At last Mother Veronica whispered to the Prioress:

- Mother, tell her in the name of obedience to place her arms in the coffin.

The Prioress whispered:

- In the name of obedience, child, put your arms back.

At once the arms were folded on the breast. Obedient to a miracle even after death! Two months later Father Estrate arrived with Mademoiselle Dartigeaux and arranged for the heart of the dead sister to be removed. He took it to Pau.

12. THE MYSTIC TOUCH

— Prepare yourself for suffering,
came the interior voice one day after communion.

The cross was never absent from Mother Veronica's life... Papa's sudden death; the family torn apart by Mary Ann's conversion and her own; their entry into the religious life; Emily's death; Henry and Harriet's assassination, the loss of their only son; Catherine turning out to be a bigoted ritualist; Mama's loneliness and death while still a Protestant, the closure of the Little Carmel—what more could be awaiting her... she could not fathom.

Still, the worst was yet to be.

— Prepare yourself for suffering,
the interior voice kept repeating. And then came the actual experience:

— It was as sudden as a flash of lightning. It seemed God had abandoned me...had left me entirely to myself... I was overwhelmed, annihilated under the weight of my sins and the anger of God! Pure suffering had taken up my whole being and I could see only my sins which were the cause of it. It seemed I was going to die. I could see a huge mountain of my sins which stood between me and God.

Bereavement, illness, poverty, disappointment, anxiety, frustration which constituted the night of the senses had not made her lose courage for, God alone suffices, was her motto. She possessed her God. She had peace and strength of soul.

But now she felt completely lost, deprived of a balanced judgment:

— My soul was in such a state that I believed all they said to me... In such a state of darkness and torture of soul that I believed I was guilty of all they accused me of.

Fear and the feeling of being dammed, with no sleep or trust in God's mercy... took hold of her.

Nothing but torture... and examining herself going from Sister to Sister asking if she had said anything against any one. She felt she was left alone and abandoned:

— I did not know what I was doing. My God, in what terrible distress my soul found itself... I did not know and did not understand that it was God who had put me in this pit and that it was He alone who could relieve me... no one understood me.

A cry rose from her heart again and again... an echo of that heart-searing cry of the Man-God on the cross:

— My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!

She went to confession to Father Chirou. He tried to calm her and told her not to repeat her unfounded self-accusations for, in all her sense of guilt, he did not find she was guilty of calumny. He told her to make her confession to the Patriarch and tell him everything about her suffering:

— He is your Superior. Therefore, the Patriarch has the grace of state for you. Besides, as Bishop, he has the plenitude of the Holy Spirit. You should submit all to him.

He also made it convenient for her to meet the Patriarch. She bared her soul to him:

- So long all my sufferings were bearable, for God was my anchor. He alone was sufficient. But now He is nowhere, totally absent...

The Patriarch enlightened her:

- This is the dark night of the soul. Everyone who wishes to ascend the Mountain of Carmel has to go through it. All that you suffered earlier was the dark night of the senses. You have transcended that state. This is the last stage of purification.
- The absence of God... It is the greatest of suffering. Where is He?

The Patriarch answered:

- Right within you.
- I can't sense his presence.
- You won't. You have to be stripped of yourself fully. Suffering, and in particular, false judgments are the greatest graces that God can give to a soul. They make the soul resemble Jesus in His Passion in which you gain the grace to endure all sorts of torments and calumnies... Suffering is the gift of God par excellence which He gives to those whom He loves most.

The Patriarch continued speaking of the work God was doing with her and within her and the blessings suffering would bring her. Mother Veronica was now entirely denuded, stripped naked to follow Christ naked. She surrendered totally, unconditionally. With that came a peace, a sweet peace, peace flowing like a river, the peace Christ had promised her on that blessed morn of Easter Tuesday when Papa's church at Athens was blessed:

- My peace I give to you; not like the world do I give it to you.

How often she recalled that most beautiful experience of 1840:

- It was very early in the morning, no one in the house had as yet risen, and even I was still in bed alone in my small room. Suddenly I was awakened by a sweet and clear voice that I heard with the ears of the soul as well as with those of the body. "Peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you not as the world giveth, give I unto you"I opened my eyes and remained motionless to listen to the celestial harmony of this voice which seemed to die away in the distance. I cannot express the effect that it had in my soul... I knew who it was who had uttered these words and I kept them to myself like a treasure that I never wished to communicate except after long years when I had entered the Church.

From the day she met the Patriarch, the state of her soul improved. The sad movement called the reform had been troubling her. She wanted the Carmelite Rule in all its pristine purity and simplicity just as Mother Teresa of Avila had begun her reform for the original Carmelite Rule. In 1887 Mother Veronica asked the Patriarch for permission to return to the Carmel of Pau. At the end of April 1887 she left Bethlehem. The terrible nights of purification which had lasted nearly nine years were over.

Mary of Jesus Crucified had said to her earlier:

- Now, people flatter you, later on it will be just the opposite. You will suffer both in soul and in body, but in the midst of all your trials, Jesus will never abandon you... The little birds will sing in the depths of your heart as in a grove.

13. REPOSE OF THE ABYSS

— We were welcomed and treated everywhere as if we were angels come down from heaven.

That was how Mother Veronica described the warmth and love with which she and her two companions, who had also asked to go to Pau, were welcomed and treated. It seemed as though God had inspired all those who met them to make up for all they suffered at Bethlehem. The birds had begun to sing in the grove of her heart.

At Montpellier Father Lazare was waiting for them. It was a happy reunion. At Pau great cordiality marked the reception given to them. Pau was her first Carmelite home. She was seeking the "true mould of Carmel". She wanted to live under the Rule of the Order as it had once been lived by Saint Teresa of Avila and the Carmelite saints.

The Carmel of Pau, fortunately, resisted the attempt of the Carmel of Bethlehem to impose some innovations. So she was content to remain at Pau.

She wrote to Father Lazare:

— Oh! How I render thanks to God for all the days of my life for having brought me back to the dear Carmel of Pau!

Some months later came the news that Mary Ann (Mother Ignacie) had passed away.

She exclaimed:

— My heart was broken in two, for we were spiritual twins, born in the Church through Baptism the same day.

The same agonies of conversion and of religious vocation and all the sorrows in the family had been shared by them. They had been inseparable as children and had kept in contact with each other from time to time. She readily obliged the Sisters of Tinos who wanted a biography of Mother Ignacie from her.

Mother Veronica could not indulge her grief too long for she had a mission to fulfil. She wanted to support the cause of their little saint Mary of Jesus Crucified, and keep her memory alive. She was happy to hear that the cause of the holy Sister had been taken up by the Superior General of the Carmelites.

In 1890 Bishop Pagani visited Mother Veronica and gave her news about the Apostolic Carmel in Mangalore. She was very happy about its progress. In 1892 Mother Marie des Anges called on her and apprised her of the development of the A.C. Convents in Mangalore.

To Mother Elias she writes after her visit to Pau:

— My tears flow with thankfulness and consolation. Our Rev. Mother says I look happy. And this is true. I feel it. Our dear Lord permitted such a grain of dust to do and suffer something for Him... Is this not something to rejoice at and to render Him thanks for?

The community looked on her as:

— A select soul endowed with moral and intellectual qualities of the highest order, profound piety and rare delicacy of heart. In her one could see asceticism and humility and also the family spirit made up of simplicity and humility that constitutes the happiness of religious life.

Gifted in many ways:

- She was a great help to the convent of Pau, particularly in the Sacristy.

The young sisters were struck by

- the benevolent disposition that made her religious life so sweet.

They said humility like a mantle of peace enveloped her. Self-abnegation and joy were constantly emanating from her vibrant and ardent faith, which flowed out of her constant obedience to God's will.

She was so full of faith that she could affirm:

- I cannot say that I have faith, for in order to have faith one must believe without seeing and in my life I have come in contact with things supernatural that for me it is seeing rather than believing.

Mother Veronica's heart was always filled with a spirit of gratitude to God, constantly pulsating with thanksgiving.

In the serene silence and solitude of Carmel she had plumbed the depths of her nothingness and in the abyss of that nothingness she found her repose. Day by day she sank deeper into this abyss. With joy she realized she was but a grain of sand. Better still, she was only a grain of dust to be ignored, set aside, and trampled down upon. It was then and only then that she could be identified with the Crucified Christ, be united with Him and participate in His Passion and reap its benefits.

Mary of Jesus Crucified had predicted that Mother Veronica would have no particular illness; she would die of

old age. That was exactly what happened. She grew feebler day by day and was bent almost double and confined to the infirmary towards the end of her life. Congestion of the lungs was a sign that she was nearing the end. Holy Communion had been taken to her every day. When Communion was brought for the last time she was not conscious enough to receive the Viaticum.

Sister Marie of Jesus said:

- Sister, Jesus has come, He is here; do you want to receive Him?

A very clear Yes was the answer. Gradually she slipped into that **unfathomable abyss of indescribable peace, love, bliss and eternal repose in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity**. It was 9.45 p.m. 16 November 1906. She was 83 years old. The community was at Matins intoning the Te Deum at the Commemoration of the Saints of Carmel.

Another saint of Carmel had joined the heavenly choir to ring out this great hymn of thanksgiving for all eternity at the throne of God.

14. RISE OF THE PHOENIX

From Vatican II came the clarion call for all Religious Congregations to return to their roots. Every religious Congregation was expected to search for its roots, study its origins, re-examine the nature of its foundational Charism, the first inspiration of its Founder, and the purpose and goal of its apostolate. After a minute exploration of every source material, Mother Veronica's autobiography and letters, the Apostolic Carmel came to realize what she meant to them and to recognize her as their Foundress and delve into the depths of her holiness. This process served as an inspiration to learn more about her life and family and work.

Today, Phoenix-like, she has risen from the ashes of obscurity and ignorance on the part of the twin Congregations - Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel (A.C) and the Congregation of Carmelite Sisters (C.C.R) to a high degree of appreciation of her life of sanctity and the suffering she went through. She was truly the grain of wheat that died and thereby brought forth abundant fruit.

Now her children from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Kenya, Tanzania, Genoa and Pau rise up and call her blessed!

